Parent Involvement with Their Children's Schools: Perceptions of Saudi Parents of Elementary School Students with Learning Disabilities

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This exploratory, qualitative study investigated the perceptions of Saudi Arabian parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities with regard to their involvement in their children's education. Guided by results of previous research conducted primarily with Western samples, and using a semistructured interview methodology followed by thematic phenomenological analyses, specific interview topics included parental perceptions of (a) the importance of parent–school partnerships, (b) the means of encouraging a parent–school relationship, and (c) how school practices may affect parental participation. The study involved 13 parents of children in elementary education (ages 7–12 years) diagnosed with learning disabilities. The results suggest several ways to overcome the involvement barriers reported by parents.

Parents are the primary caregivers of their children and typically have intimate knowledge about them. Parents, therefore, are in a good position to provide information that can assist educators in better assessing and understanding their pupils and facilitate connections between learning at home and learning in the classroom. Furthermore, when parents participate in school activities, they can connect with other families with children attending the same school. Additionally, parents can help a school improve its academic programs as well as its educational and social climate. Given the important role parents can play, maintaining successful parent–school relationships can increase the likelihood that that school successfully develops children's potential (Avnet et al., 2019; Epstein, 2010; Starr & Foy, 2012). This is important for all children but for children with special needs, in particular.

Parental Involvement in Education

The relationship between the school and parents is important, as evidenced by growing attention in the last few decades from researchers and practitioners in different fields, including psychology, sociology, and education (e.g., Harris & Goodall, 2008). Thus, a review of the literature reveals a broad range of studies, such as Hsiao (2016), focusing on parents' perceptions about their involvement in schools and home/school learning. However, a search for research in this domain specific to the Saudi Arabian context shows a severe lack of studies addressing parental perceptions about

their involvement in special education programs and schools (see Poon et al., 2013). This is a concerning observation for the Saudi educational context because schools on their own are not able to address the many challenges experienced by learners, especially learners with special needs.

Research has identified many benefits of collaboration between parents and the school. For instance, Kyriakides (2005) concluded that parental involvement strengthens children's learning. Furthermore, greater parental involvement with the school predicts reduced student absenteeism, increased student retention, and positive achievement in numeracy and literacy, together with improvements in classroom management of student behavior (Barger et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019). Based on the results of such research, educational departments are developing models that involve partnerships between schools and parents aimed at improving learning outcomes for all learners, but especially for students with disabilities (Porter, 2008).

Parental Involvement in Special Education

Developments over the last few decades reflect a move away from a medical model of learning disability to a social model (Barnes, 2019). This has resulted in greater appreciation of the needs of families of children with learning disabilities and increased efforts to facilitate an environment in which parents participate in planning, delivering, and assessing the programs available to students. This is in keeping with the views of Porter (2008), for example, who argued that the most effective way to meet the needs of children is to involve parents. Specifically, this approach to intervention services seeks to assist families in accessing and influencing

services instead of waiting passively for services to be delivered (Carpenter, 2007). Thus, the development and implementation of a family-centered approach to special education, especially with elementary school-aged students with disabilities, provides parents with strategies for becoming effectively involved in their children's education by learning how to gain access to information and use of available resources (Espe-Sherwindt, 2008; Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

Engagement by parents in early intervention programs affords benefits to all children but is especially important for children who have learning disabilities, including the development of healthy attitudes towards their children's abilities, and in the process promoting family well-being (Jinnah & Walters, 2008; Yotyodying & Wild, 2019). This is a view acknowledged by Wall (2003), who suggested that when the partnerships between teachers, parents, and learners are strong, the resulting positive outcomes benefit not just the children but also teachers and parents.

Although the literature documents benefits of collaboration between the school and home, it also identifies barriers to parental involvement in educating learners with disabilities in the school environment (Al-Dababneh, 2018). For example, based on a qualitative study of parental perceptions, Wehman and Gilkerson (1999) found that the leading barriers to parental involvement included the limited times during which teachers are available to parents and inefficient communication between teachers and parents. A similar study by Lamb-Parker et al. (2001) focused on barriers to participation for mothers with children in a Head Start program. The researchers concluded that mothers encountered many and varied challenges that made it difficult for them to participate. For instance, 50% of the participating mothers reported frequent feelings of depression and frustration with their child's educational experiences, particularly in the early stages of the Head Start program.

Parental Involvement in Saudi Arabian Education

Saudi Arabian families in recent history have implicitly granted schools authority in decision-making with regard to their children's education (Alobaid, 2018). This can be attributed, at least in part, to Saudi culture, which encouraged parents not to question school administrators' and teachers' decisions. And as a result, the school system's structure did not expect, facilitate, or support parental involvement or collaboration with teachers and administrators (Alobaid, 2018).

Fortunately, things are beginning to change, and parental participation in children's education is an emerging topic in Saudi Arabia. The need for programs to facilitate and support parental involvement arose after a series of recent educational policy changes that afforded parent–teacher collaboration and cooperation (Alobaid, 2018). As a result, Saudi statutes now require schools to provide parents with opportunities to serve as equal partners with teachers and staff in their children's education (Alquraini, 2010; Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia, 2002, 2008). Specifically, these statutes codify the importance of including parents as partners that can assist teachers in accomplishing goals in ser-

vice to the child's academic success, and this applies with equal force to children with learning disabilities.

Unfortunately, parent involvement programs remain uncommon in present-day Saudi Arabia. The majority of Saudi parents lack awareness of the parent involvement programs offered by schools, which has resulted in continued limitation and restriction of parents' access to the school community and to resources for assisting and monitoring their children's educational and developmental progress (Alobaid, 2018).

Challenges to Sustainable and Effective School–Parent Partnerships

In this section, we address challenges to sustainable and effective school–parent partnerships, with reference to research conducted with Western populations. Unless otherwise noted, there is remarkably little comparable research with Middle Eastern populations, in general, and with Saudi populations, in particular. Part of the impetus for the current study was to begin to address this dearth of research.

An important challenge to the sustainability and effectiveness of school–parent partnerships is the lack of a uniform definition of "parental involvement." From a traditional perspective, parental involvement includes assisting children with homework, being involved with or volunteering in school activities, attending school events when invited, and maintaining communication with teachers (Bower & Griffin, 2011). However, some researchers include parenting practices and behaviors in their definition of parental involvement with children's education such as the importance of setting rules in the household related to education and parental aspirations for their children's academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005).

Teacher and administrator preparation is another challenge impacting effective school–parent partnerships (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Many school leaders and teachers do not receive adequate training in educator preparation programs on organizing, conducting, and employing practical strategies to develop and maintain partnerships with parents (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Additionally, they are often not provided with guidance on how to meet school mandates and educational policies requiring them to facilitate parental involvement, and neither are they provided with a clear sense of the desired outcomes.

As a result, although administrators and teachers often report that they are willing to involve parents in the school community, misperceptions and lack of preparation remain about how this can be accomplished, leaving many school leaders and teachers with the feeling that despite their efforts, parents are not engaged (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

A third challenge relates to the need for collaborative and trusting relationships (Harpaz & Grinshtain, 2020). For school–parent partnerships to succeed, relevant policy must be translated into action. Action requires the development of the school's capacity to encourage parents to be involved in school activities, for example. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) identified strategies for developing a school's parental involvement capacity, including establishing an inviting and

welcoming atmosphere, being conscious of parents' goals for their children's education, appreciating parents' perspectives on their children's culture and learning style, providing sufficient involvement opportunities, and investing consistent and systematic attention to improving parent–school relationships. If these strategies and conditions are in place, the result is a setting that more effectively encourages partnerships that benefit students from varying backgrounds (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), "When schools build partnerships with families that respond to their concerns and honor their contributions, they are successful in sustaining connections that are aimed at improving student achievement" (p. 7).

Research Questions Guiding the Current Study

The current study aimed to expand an understanding of the relationship between schools and parents. Given the dearth of research concerning parents' perceptions of parental involvement and partnerships with schools, our focus is on Saudi Arabian parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities.

Specifically, we explored Saudi parents' perceptions of parental involvement to determine why some parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities are involved in their children's education whereas others are not. The following questions guided the study: (a) What are parents' views on the importance of parent–school partnerships? (b) What are parents' views on the means that can be used to encourage and support a relationship between parents and the school? And (c) What are parents' views on how school practices around parental participation might affect that participation?

Rationale and Significance of the Study

In the educational context, partnership generally denotes the collaboration of parents and teachers to successfully attain the goals of education for children. The Plowden Report (United Kingdom Department of Education & Science, 1967) describes a partnership between parents and teachers as integral to education development. Indeed, establishing partnerships in education is important for governments, countries, and families. For instance, when families work with the schools, children learn more effectively, leading to higher academic achievement. In addition, governments often discover that schools that work closely with families are better accountable to the communities that provide them with funding and assist them in meeting the demands of parents (Kelley-Laine, 1998).

In the current study, "parental involvement" refers to the level of a parent's interest and active participation in their child's academic progress. Furthermore, we distinguish between school-based and at-home parental involvement. The former refers to the interface between parents and the school regarding the child's education that occurs in the school, such as attending parent and teacher association meetings, volunteering to help during class field trips, at-

tending teacher–parent conferences, and active participation in other school activities. Parental involvement in the home context, on the other hand, refers to parental practices regarding the child's education outside the school. Examples include reading with the child, practicing academic skills with the child, talking to the child about issues related to the school, and assisting with homework (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005).

METHODS

Design

This study used a qualitative design in which data were collected using semistructured interviews with Saudi Arabian parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities. The qualitative design made it possible to explore and identify specific parental perceptions and to ask follow-up questions to provide clarity or to pursue specific elements about these parental perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

To uncover the lived experiences of individuals, various educational studies conducted in the last four decades have utilized phenomenography—a research strategy that explores phenomena perceived by others, uncovering and explaining the variation therein, particularly in an academic setting (Cohen et al., 2011). Rooted in qualitative methodology, phenomenography employs human interaction to investigate the study question using specific methods such as interviews and observation. It is recognized that qualitative researchers inevitably introduce their personal viewpoints, belief systems, and biases to their research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Therefore, this type of educational research must attend to the basic tenets of a research framework and the researcher's role in the study. Phenomenography is primarily concerned with describing conceptions, each depicting a unique experience of the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011). Consequently, the purpose of data analysis in phenomenographic research is to unearth variations in how the investigated phenomenon is encountered or experienced (Limberg, 2005).

Participants

Public elementary school directors throughout Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, were asked to encourage parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities to participate in the study. In addition, they provided information about socioeconomic class, demographic, and geographic diversity of the sample. Thirteen parents agreed to participate. The demographic information available for the participants is displayed in Table 1.

Procedure

The senior author received approval from the research ethics board of his university to conduct the study. The directors of

TABLE 1
Participant Demographics ($N = 13$)

Variable		Frequency
Gender of participant	Male	9
	Female	4
Age of participants (years)	30−40	5
	41−50	7
	51−60	1
Age of child (years)	7−8	3
	9−10	6
	11−12	4
Education qualification	Bachelor's	10
	Master's	3
Main student learning disability	Reading	9
	Writing	1
	Math	3

the participating schools assisted the researcher in identifying and enrolling participants. Parents expressing an interest in participating in the study were given an information letter describing the study and, subsequently, were encouraged to discuss the study with the researcher. Parents who agreed to participate signed a statement of informed consent prior to participating. Furthermore, before the interviews began, collaboration and permission were requested and obtained from the local education authorities for the schools that participated.

Semistructured interviews were chosen as they provide more flexibility to researchers than structured interviews. For example, they can be extended so that participants can include as much detail as they wish about their opinions and experiences. Semistructured interviews also incorporate some of the strengths of structured interviews, such as allowing for questions to be asked in an organized manner (Newby, 2014).

Interviews were conducted in person or by phone in a location convenient to the participant. Each interview lasted about 35 minutes and was guided by three questions: (a) As a parent, what is your view about the importance of school–parent partnerships? (b) What do you believe your responsibility is in the relationship between the school and home as a parent? And (c) What is your opinion about whether and how school practices encourage parental participation?

Reliability and Validity

In psychometric contexts, "reliability" refers to the applicability of the measured concept across participants. Thus, greater reliability is obtained if a similar study produces a similar pattern of results (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Weinberg, 2002). In the current study, the researcher first invested time in developing trust and rapport with the participants, which facilitates engagement between the researcher and participant, with the result that participant responses are more reliable (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). We note that, during the interviews, the interaction between the participant and the researcher was kept professional by ensuring that the conversation was limited to the focus of the current research. When the interviews were transcribed, the researcher focused on and considered each word of the participant's response, with the text reread and listened to several times to minimize interpretive error.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) proposed that validity (i.e., the degree to which one is accurately assessing the intended variable) can and should be assessed repeatedly during the course of a study. Validity can be achieved to varying extents by ensuring that procedures and materials are subjected to questioning and control. According to Kvale and Brinkman, when considering validity, the focus is not on the outcomes or results. In the semistructured, qualitative interview context, the focus instead is on careful planning, designing, interviewing, transcribing, and data handling. For the current research, a pilot study was conducted to investigate the clarity of the interview questions, after which the questions were revised accordingly. Furthermore, in the main study, participants' responses were probed in a way that allowed for clarification, control, and validation. Generally, the interviews were conducted to ensure that the perceptions and attitudes of participants were portrayed and captured with accuracy.

To ensure the reliability and integrity of the study, we adhered to Brantlinger et al.'s (2005) guidelines for qualitative research in special education. Specifically, participants included diverse representatives of the target population, and the semistructured scripts were carefully crafted to be clear, open-ended, and suitable for exploring particular questions about social validity with various facilitators. To further ensure trustworthiness, data sources, including informal and formal field notes documented by the researcher, were triangulated with audio recordings and transcripts. Lastly, interview transcriptions were reviewed by independent experts in special education who confirmed that our study inferences were reasonable, based on their diverse experience (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

Analysis

When the interview process was complete, audio recordings of the participants' responses were transcribed and categorized. Fundamental to the process of categorizing the responses was the use of phenomenography, which provides researchers with a means to capture the varying ways in which the participant perceives the world (Weinberg, 2002). Based on the suggestions of Weinberg (2002), to categorize responses efficiently, the lead researcher and senior author read a specific response from a participant several times. Focusing attention on the transcribed text allowed the researcher to identify the underlying perceptions. The researcher identified, interpreted, and labeled the resulting categories using specific names.

The categorization process was followed by a process of condensing meaning so that the meanings obtained from the participants could be summarized, as proposed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). Based on insights from Hennink et al. (2015), after presentation of the main findings below, we attempted to create a balance with regard to presenting interpretative commentary and direct quotations from the interviewees.

Following the categorizations, significant statements and phrases about the phenomena of interest to the study were extracted from each transcribed interview. Then, from these statements, meanings were derived and considered themes. The themes were grouped into clusters and classified. Furthermore, categories and themes were highlighted using a color-coding system to facilitate analysis and formulate a description of the participants' lived experiences and recognize similarities and differences among them. The methodology utilized in this study required the researcher to constantly compare the data and the developing analysis. The analysis and interpretations were considered in light of the Saudi context (i.e., Islamic teachings and distinct social aspects of Saudi culture).

RESULTS

In the following, we present the findings related to the responses to the three research questions underlying the study.

Parental Perceptions of the Importance of School–Parent Partnerships

All participants highlighted the significant role played by partnerships between parents and the school in supporting children with learning disabilities and their responsibility to be involved. For example, Parent 4 stated, "There is an essential and reciprocal relationship between the home and school to support both parties. Central to this relationship is an atmosphere where the parents believe that their views are listened to, including what occurs in the parents' councils, which is essential. However, this may be more suitable in schools with ordinary learners as opposed to schools for learners with disabilities."

Parent 8 highlighted the importance of the school–parent partnership, stating that it is important to strengthen this relationship as it leads to better results in supporting the children's learning. Parent 10 added, "For children, learning happens not only in the school setting but also at home and outside the home. For this reason, the partnership between the school and the home can play a significant role in ensuring that children learn inside and outside the school."

Parent 3 referred to the importance of developing and maintaining a partnership between the school and parents for enhancing the abilities and skills of children. The same parent noted that, "It is helpful to bring the views [of parents and teachers] closer in the suitable teaching and pedagogical methods to support the student and to overcome any challenges in that."

Parental Perceptions of the Means to Encourage Parent–School Relationships

Most parents reported receiving occasional invitations to participate in school activities, events, and functions. The parents noted that there is more than one method that a school can adopt to identify the needs of parents and to provide them with opportunities to participate. Their suggestions included (a) inviting parents to take part in celebrations, programs, and activities (13/13 parents acknowledged such invitations); (b) regularly inviting parents of students with learning disabilities to assist in monitoring and managing their children's achievement and behavior (13/13); (c) activating parent councils and holding meetings each semester periodically (12/13); (d) implementing a system of homework notes so that parents can write notes to the teachers (10/13); and (e) involving parents and accepting their constructive opinions and suggestions (13/13).

Parental Perceptions of Challenges to Effective Parent–School Relationships

Participating parents noted several challenges related to establishing and maintaining partnerships between the school and home, including (a) parents' existing commitments (13/13); (b) the dates or times selected by the schools for meeting with parents being inconvenient for parents (8/13); (c) parent councils' focus on secondary matters that parents do not care about, which reduces their level of attendance (11/13); (d) lack of school/teacher awareness of positive impact of parent participation (9/13); and (e) disagreement between teachers and parents (8/13).

The views of many parents are represented by Parent 3's statement: "I find it surprising that schools still rely on traditional means of communication even though the world has moved on with technology and the use of faster means of communication such as WhatsApp groups and emails. However, teachers are not keen to significantly interact with these methods of communication. Maybe they are too busy as the school also has a private life and teachers are preoccupied with the requirements imposed on them."

Participating parents identified several additional challenges to developing and maintaining a successful partnership between the school and home. For example, Parent 7 said: "The main challenge I have with the school is that I am only permitted to visit on specific days and times, and teachers are often busy in meetings. Even though I may want to participate, I find that I am not entirely welcome." Many parents (9/13) agreed with this assessment and noted that many challenges preventing partnerships led them to be dissatisfied with these partnerships. For example, Parent 5 mentioned that he is considering transferring his son to a private school from a public school because the former may be more interested in communicating, partnering, and recognizing parental participation. Most parents (11/13) agreed with Parent 11, who said: "I propose that it is essential to train teachers concerning managing partnerships with the home and how to get the buy-in of parents to the process of education and the interests of the parents and students."

DISCUSSION

This study explored parents' perceptions about their involvement in their children's education, with a focus on Saudi Arabian parents whose children attend public elementary school and have learning disabilities. Previous studies have concluded that parental participation is important for facilitating successful academic outcomes (Lynch et al., 2006). In environments in which parents perceive that they have an active role in helping their children succeed in school and that their efforts will have a positive impact, parents are more likely to become involved despite obstacles and challenges (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, 2010).

In what follows, we discuss the results of the current study and situate our findings within the relevant literature. As noted earlier, the vast majority of the literature on parental involvement consists of research conducted with Western populations. Unless we note otherwise, very little comparable research has been conducted with Middle Eastern populations, in general, and with Saudi populations, in particular.

Benefits of Parental Involvement in Education in General

Castro et al. (2004), Wilson-Jones (2003), and McBride et al. (2005) found that when parents are willing to participate in their children's education and their communication with the school comes from attending parent councils and following up with teachers, their involvement in attending school events, reviewing assignments, and monitoring their children's academic development increases. The same scholars note that greater parental school involvement increases children's motivation and encourages them to value academic performance.

In addition, numerous studies have demonstrated that positive communication between teachers and parents improves students' academic performance (Epstein, 2001, 2010; Leenders et al., 2019). This is based on the assump-

tion that for children to understand their world, their personality and needs, including behavior and challenges, should be considered. The purpose of an ongoing relationship between a child's parents and teachers is to integrate and coordinate functions between the school and parents to achieve desired educational objectives (Epstein, 2001, 2010; Neuenschwander, 2020). A healthy parent–teacher relationship is expected to facilitate effective education, pedagogy, and well-being. Establishing trust between parents and teachers affords teachers greater opportunity to understand the child's environment and how to interact with them most effectively. Also, establishing trust between parents and teachers ensures that the parent can understand and support the teacher's approach. The communication process should be bidirectional, in which the teacher provides information to the parent about the child's behavior or performance in the classroom, and the parent provides information to the teacher about the child's interests, inclinations, personality, and schoolwork performance at home (Boit, 2020; Epstein, 2001, 2010). Communication between parents and teachers can occur through school visits, open house, phone calls, letters, and notes.

Parental Involvement in Special Education

Some parents of children with learning disabilities worry about their children's well-being but fail to provide them with appropriate care and support (Salem, 2014). For example, parents who are overprotective may have unreasonable expectations of the child and teachers. In addition, parental overprotection can reduce the child's confidence, making learning more challenging. Parents' lack of interest in communicating with teachers, lack of participation in educational activities, and unwillingness to cooperate in the ongoing review of their children is cited by Salem (2014) as among the most significant problems that impede the educational process. We next discuss implications of parental involvement for student learning and educational achievement.

Learning and Educational Achievement

The educational achievement of children with learning disabilities is influenced by the attitudes and assistance they receive from educational institutions, teachers, specialists, and parents. Hornstra et al. (2010) noted that children with learning disabilities can be affected by parents, teachers, and fellow students with whom they interact. These interactions can either be negative or positive.

The presence of a child with learning difficulties in a family influences the attitudes of the parents and can place much stress on the parents and affect interactions between family members (Dyson, 1996). Educating parents about their child's learning disabilities may positively affect their attitudes. Previous research has demonstrated that if counseling programs are made available to parents and other family members regarding learning disabilities, support from these other family members often increases, as demonstrated in their communication with educational institutions caring for

children with disabilities. All of these factors may help to shift parents' attitudes toward their children with learning disabilities from negative to positive, improving these children's experiences in the school, in their family, and in society, with other children and adults.

Parental Responsibility and Expectations

Strong agreement was found among the parents participating in the current research that it is their responsibility to be involved in their children's education. Consistent with findings from previous studies such as Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), most parents agreed that it is their responsibility to know how their children are progressing in school. Such findings differ from previous and more dated literature reviews, such as that of Kay et al. (1994), which concluded that parents of children with learning disabilities were unsure of their responsibilities and indicated they needed more information from teachers about what was expected of them.

Parental Beliefs, Values, and Culture

Parental beliefs, values, and culture can affect the success of efforts to develop and maintain partnerships between home and school (Murray et al., 2014). This view is supported by responses of participants in the current study. From the participants' responses, it is clear that they have strong opinions that shape how they participate in partnerships with the schools. They share the belief that their role in the partnership between the home and school is to support at home the learning that occurs in the classroom. Such beliefs led parents to assist their children with their homework, for example, with the expectation that this would result in positive academic outcomes for their children.

Such responses are in keeping with conclusions of previous studies, including that parental participation led to better academic achievement, attendance, and behavior (Gordon & Louis, 2012; Kinkead-Clark, 2017). Being able to assist their children at home was an essential part of how parents experienced the partnership between the home and school as positive. This also highlights strong beliefs among parents regarding their ability to have a desirable impact on the educational achievement of their children. Referred to in the home-school partnership literature as "parental self-efficacy" (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, 2010), such beliefs constitute motivational elements in the decision by parents be involved in the activities of their children's schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Whitaker, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 1995).

Based on the findings of a qualitative study, John-Akinola and Gabhainn (2014) offered suggestions for how parents can effectively participate in the activities of their children's schools. For example, the researchers recommended that schools focus on developing partnerships with parents by making it easier for them to participate in daily school activities. Numerous motivational factors may impact a parent's decision to get involved in school or home activities related to learning (Sheldon, 2002). In addressing Research Question 2 of the current study, the aim was to investigate connections between parental perceptions regarding school communication and the degree to which parents were involved in their children's education. Participating parents indicated that if teachers attempted to invite them to participate in their children's schooling, such invitations were sometimes limited in scope.

Teacher and School Encouragement and Valuation of Parental Involvement

The parents were clear about their desire for the school to offer opportunities for parents to participate in an environment they perceived as nonjudgmental. This conclusion is in keeping with prior studies focusing on what motivates parental involvement. For example, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) and Hoover-Dempsey and Whitaker (2010) concluded that parents feel inspired to be engaged and involved when they perceive that the school and teachers are genuinely interested in their involvement and input.

In the current study, the limited invitations from teachers for parents to get involved in their children's education resulted had a negative effect on parental perceptions of the role played by the school in the development and maintenance of the partnership between the home and the school. Furthermore, Saudi parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities shared the view that their ideas were not consistently considered valuable or respected, noting that the schools often did not incorporate their suggestions for how their children could be successfully instructed. This may be attributed to the fact that teachers perceive themselves as experts in providing knowledge and that parents, therefore, are the beneficiaries of that knowledge. This is a relationship parents report they have no choice but to accept if they hope to continue securing services for their children with learning disabilities (Hess et al., 2006).

Parents also shared the perception that their comparative lack of participation in their children's education was, to a certain degree, a result of poor communication with teachers. Some parents indicated that they did not participate because the teachers had not invited them to participate. This is a conclusion in line with Hess et al. (2006), who reported that families were willing to participate in educating their children with learning disabilities but did not have established, communicative relationships with teachers.

Parental Work and Time Constraints

In keeping with conclusions from the literature, some parents in the current study reported that work and overall time constraints prevented them from participating in the partnership between the home and school (Baker et al., 2016). Indeed, work commitments were among the most important barriers preventing their involvement with their children's school (Murray et al., 2014). Several participants reported challenges when they attempt to obtain leave from work to

attend activities at their children's school. Their apprehension concerning failing to attend these activities brings to the fore the gap between what is said about allowing parents to participate and the practical situation concerning the partnership between the home and the school.

Beyond time and effort, parents also need to invest emotional energy to engage with teachers and the school. To that end, the results of the current study corroborate findings in the literature regarding the importance of school leaders displaying desirable attributes and attitudes (e.g., friendliness, welcoming, encouraging) that can facilitate a productive partnership between the home and school (Broomhead, 2018). The participants' responses made it clear that they appreciated welcoming gestures from the school leaders, such as greetings, sending a note of gratitude for the work they did for the school, or making time available to interact with them. Such gestures make the climate in the school warm and inviting for parents to participate. This is a finding in keeping with the conclusions of numerous scholars regarding the important role that school leadership plays in developing, supporting, and maintaining a school environment that invites parents to participate (Siegel et al., 2019).

Teacher Training and Perceptions about Parental Involvement

Teachers who have received training on the importance of developing and maintaining partnerships with parents are more likely to adopt a proactive approach to establishing these relationships (Curry & Adams, 2014). Such partnerships may produce benefits for both teachers and parents. For example, teachers report higher job satisfaction when they have a healthy relationship with the parents of the children they instruct and communication is open (Binns et al., 1998). Notwithstanding this observation, teacher preparation programs addressing partnerships with parents are usually restricted to courses in special education or early childhood education (Murray & Mereoiu, 2016). Not surprising, when asked to identify barriers that hinder teacher–family involvement, teachers often identify a lack of teacher preparation (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). That is, even though teachers are conscious of the important role of parental involvement, they often do not receive sufficient training in their preservice programs or continuing professional development for partnering with parents in a meaningful manner (Hiatt-Michael, 2006).

However, to create effective partnerships with parents, teachers need more than skills and knowledge. They also need to develop and maintain an openness to parental input (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). According to Ratcliff and Hunt (2009), approaches to family participation must be diverse, wide-ranging, and amalgamated across teacher preparation programs as a single instructional method may not be sufficient to prepare teachers to work effectively with parents. Such training should also include opportunities for interactive experiences between parents and teacher candidates.

As in previous studies (e.g., Crozier & Davies, 2007), parents in the current research reported a willingness to increase their communication with their child's teachers. In particular, participants expressed a positive outlook when there is authentic two-way communication, where they have an opportunity to provide information instead of just receiving it, and perceived any communication opportunity as empowering (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Such two-way communication must be based on mutual understanding and respect. Along those lines, Harris and Goodall (2008) argue that parents must be shown by teachers and by school leaders that they are important, for example, by ensuring that they are treated as a central part of the learning process, with schools providing support to those who wish to be involved.

We suggest that schools actively investigate ways to establish a sense of belonging for parents through developing positive relationships based on respect and understanding of parents' experiences and agency (see John-Akinola & Gabhainn, 2014). Sime and Sheridan (2014) concluded that positive relationships between the school and parents provide cultural capital because they afford parents access to knowledge; however, McKenna and Millen (2013) found that even when parents felt included and welcome, they still felt as if they were on the outside of the educational experiences of their children. Thus, while a sense of belonging is required to facilitate engagement by parents, it may not always be sufficient unless schools and teachers communicate that they trust and appreciate parents' ability to share responsibility for their children's learning.

Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations

No approach to parental engagement is suitable for every context (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Schools must be flexible when collaborating with parents. The barriers experienced when practitioners attempt to adopt family-centered practices have been identified in several previous studies. Chief among them are inefficiencies in training models made available to professionals, a lack of evidence-based research on the attitudes of professionals, and a dearth of awareness regarding the effectiveness of various approaches (Wade et al., 2007). Even though research supports implementing a family-centered model when teaching and caring for learners with disabilities, negative and noncollaborative relationships between professionals and parents sometimes exist (Dunst et al., 2007).

Based on the example set by Lumby (2007), who acknowledged that in academic research the voices of parents are often obscured by the expectations and doubts of researchers, policymakers, and professionals, the literature review for the current study focused specifically on research that included the directly transcribed responses of parents. This, in turn, formed the basis of the study's analysis in an effort to respect and appreciate parental perceptions as essential instead of treating them as just one among many alternative perspectives (McQueen & Hobbs, 2014). McKenna and Millen (2013) present parental presence and voice models, highlighting the role played by acknowledging, sharing, and respecting parental perceptions.

Parents of children with learning disabilities are under increased stress and need strategies that can assist them in coping and adapting to the requirements of daily life (e.g., Park

et al., 2002). As parents of children with learning disabilities become overwhelmed with meeting the needs of their children, they may lack the time or energy required to participate in the child's academic activities. Although the scope of the current study did not include consideration of the social networks of parents of learners with disabilities, future studies may address these issues. Studies involving parents' social networks may assist in improving opportunities for parental support to meet the demands of having a child with a learning disability.

The scale and size of a study can impose limitations on the extent to which findings may be generalized to a broader population (Lichtman, 2010). With regard to the current study, this challenge could be mitigated by using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to identify how collaborative learning partnerships influence students' learning outcomes. Specifically, a study assessing a wider population within and outside the Middle East may assist in evaluating the effect of improved operational processes on the partnerships between the home and school on students' learning outcomes, bringing to the fore insights into whether such processes helped resolve tensions between teachers and parents. Future studies also may attempt to answer questions linked to the models of partnerships that schools could use to improve outcomes. For example, such studies also might investigate how partnerships impact student learning outcomes over the long term and whether schools and teachers are cognizant of the value of parental perceptions of their children's learning styles. Finally, future research could profitably explore whether the school's efforts to support such partnerships is sustainable and equitable over the long term for both teachers and parents.

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RESEARCH REVIEW AND APPROVAL

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