



RESEARCH PAPER

Challenges of Parent-Teacher Collaboration in the Education of Deaf Students

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study investigates the challenges of parent-teacher collaboration in the education of deaf students across nine divisions of Punjab. With an aim to enhance the educational experience of deaf students, we conducted interviews with 30 parents and 30 teachers to gain insights into their experiences, perspectives and the dynamics of collaboration. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data. The findings revealed noteworthy disparities in the viewpoints of parents and teachers. Parents often grapple with feelings of undervaluation, language barriers, and unrealistic expectations, while teachers report varying parental commitment, irregular attendance, and communication challenges. So, it is recommended that school administrations should proactively create a welcoming and inclusive environment that encourages parent-teacher partnerships by initiating regular open houses, parent involvement committees, cultural events between home and school, create online groups for interaction and sharing concerns.

KEYWORDS Challenges, Deaf Students, Parents, Parent-Teacher Collaboration, Teachers

Introduction

Parent-teacher collaboration is recognized as a foundation for the academic and personal success of students (Epstein, 1995; Erdener, 2016; Jeynes, 2011; Lemmer, 2009; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013; Prew, 2009; Islam, 2019). Effective collaboration in education has been associated with reduced dropout rates, improved academic achievements, reduced absenteeism, and decreased disruptive behavior (Ma et al., 2014; Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Venter et al., 2014). It is teachers who interact most frequently with students in the classroom and the foundation of supporting students lies in constant communication and collaboration between parents and instructors. Parents, teachers, and students with disabilities all benefit from parent-teacher collaboration (Bezdak et al., 2010; Turnbull et al., 2007). It is strongly correlated with improvements in students' grades, participation in extracurricular activities, and friendships (Newman, 2005; Lemmer, 2013; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013; Daniel, 2015; Grant & Ray, 2018). Federal regulations emphasize parental involvement in personalized education programs (IEP), recognizing parents as knowledgeable decision-makers (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002).

Literature Review

Parent-teacher partnerships help children learn and build lifelong skills and connections, while also empowering parents to be involved in their child's educational journey but this is a challenging task too. Parents at times express frustration, with some feeling anger towards instructors, often attributed to the perceived resource and time demands made by teachers (Starr & Foy, 2012). Poor coordination and communication are also identified as significant problems, though others emphasize teamwork and effective communication (Rodriquez et al., 2014). Collaboration, especially during the Individualized

Education Program (IEP) process, can be constrained as parents often perceive limited interaction with school personnel, being under pressure to concur with predetermined agendas (Childre & Chambers, 2005). Research indicates that teachers generally do not view parents as equal partners, with some preferring limited parental involvement (Bezdek et al., 2010). Language difficulties and cultural differences can further hinder collaboration (Barclift, 2010; Lo, 2009). Despite the desire for collaboration, not all parents possess the knowledge or tools to engage effectively with schools, often requiring assistance from teachers (Schultz et al., 2016).

In contemporary education, parents and instructors often find themselves in two distinct worlds, facing barriers to collaboration. However, recognizing the importance of parent-teacher collaboration in achieving educational goals is paramount (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Parent-teacher interactions are further complicated by socio-economic factors, cultural differences, and traditional divisions of labor between parents and professionals (Brien & Stelmach, 2009; Botha, & Triegaardt, 2014; Matshe, 2014; Msila, 2012; Mncube, 2010). Parents acknowledge the necessity of their involvement but call for schools to invest in their empowerment, leverage contemporary communication methods, and communicate school goals and expectations clearly (Myende, 2022).

Inter-professional cooperation, including collaboration between parents of children with special needs, is recognized as crucial for maximizing student learning potential in a time- and cost-efficient manner (Griffin, 2014). Teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating this collaboration, as they are uniquely positioned to identify educational issues and seek cooperation (Aouad & Bento, 2020). However, challenges in implementing collaborative aspirations persist. Special education organizations have attempted to involve parents, teachers, and therapists in developing annual student goals, as inspired by the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). Still, a disconnect exists between aspirations and implementation (Aouad & Bento, 2020).

Effective parent-teacher relationships not only foster personal growth and educational opportunities but also mutual support for achieving goals at home and school (Miretzky, 2004). Educational interventions are more likely to succeed when these parties collaborate and communicate effectively (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). Parents who participate more in educational home-based activities tend to be more engaged in their children's educational environments, communicate with teachers more frequently, and rate educators higher in communication efficacy (Murray et al., 2015).

According to the revised Code of Practice prioritizing the "removal of barriers to participation," "promotion of a culture of cooperation," and "enabling children to achieve potential," early preventive action for children with special needs is emphasized (DfES, 2001). For effective collaboration, open communication centered on parents' strengths and needs is essential (Poon & Zaidman-Zait, 2014). Teachers must play a pivotal role in initiating and nurturing these collaborative partnerships (Harry & Kalyanpur, 1994). Overall, developing effective parent-teacher relationships is perceived as one of the most challenging aspects of teaching (Vickers & Minke, 1995).

In a complex educational environment, teachers in special education face unique challenges due to the intensity and demands of their roles. Building collaborative partnerships with parents, although challenging, is recognized as a crucial aspect of their profession (Hillel Lavian, 2015). To enhance collaboration, teachers and parents must work together, recognizing each other's unique but equal contributions to the educational system (Owen, 2016). Parental participation, school improvement plans, and effective methods for involving parents have been linked to improved outcomes for children with special needs (Al-Shammari & Yawkey, 2008).

Understanding and improving this collaboration is essential for optimizing the educational experience and outcomes of deaf students. To date, school and family collaboration has mainly been studied from the perspective of the school, this study focused on what parents think and want about school and family collaboration. So, the present research help to identify perceived challenges faced by parents and teachers in developing partnership among them.

Research Methodology

Participants

- **Parents:** A total of 30 parents of deaf students were purposively selected from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, representing various divisions of Punjab.
- **Teachers:** Additionally, 30 teachers working with deaf students were purposively selected to participate in this study, ensuring diversity in terms of teaching experience and school settings.

Data Collection

- **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both parents and teachers. These interviews were designed to explore their experiences and perceptions of parent-teacher collaboration in the context of deaf education. Open-ended questions were used to allow participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely.

Data Analysis

- **Thematic Analysis:** Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data. The process involved several stages, including data familiarization, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the final report. This approach allowed for a systematic and rigorous examination of the qualitative data, revealing common patterns and divergent viewpoints.

Ethical Considerations

- **Informed Consent:** Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with information about the study's purpose and procedures and were required to provide informed consent.
- **Anonymity:** All participants' identities were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used in reporting to protect their privacy.
- **Data Security:** Data collected through interviews were securely stored and accessible only to the research team.
- **Ethical Approval:** This study received ethical approval from school administration.

Results

- A. Based on the findings from the *parents' interviews*, several key themes can be identified, shedding light on their perspectives and experiences in parent-teacher collaboration in the education of deaf students. Below, these themes are summarized concisely:

- **Underestimation of Parental Role:** Parents often feel undervalued and underestimate their role in their deaf child's education, which can hinder effective collaboration.
 - **Low Confidence Due to Education:** Some parents, particularly those with lower educational levels, lack confidence in collaborating with teachers, potentially due to language barriers or perceived knowledge gaps.
 - **Challenging Teacher Language:** Parents report encountering difficult language and communication barriers when interacting with teachers, making collaboration more challenging.
 - **Lack of Regular Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs):** Schools' infrequent or nonexistent PTMs hinder opportunities for parents and teachers to engage in constructive dialogue.
 - **Teacher Blame for Child's Failures:** Parents express frustration with teachers who seem to place sole responsibility on them for their child's academic struggles or mistakes.
 - **Negative Meeting Dynamics:** Meetings are often perceived as platforms for criticism rather than opportunities for productive feedback and guidance, potentially discouraging collaboration.
 - **Teacher Reluctance to Take Responsibility:** Teachers may deny responsibility for issues related to deaf students, creating friction and impeding collaboration.
 - **Need for Mediation:** Uneducated parents often require a tutor or mediator when attending meetings or discussions in educational matters, highlighting communication challenges.
 - **Parental Marginalization:** Parents often feel like a third party when decisions about their deaf child's education are made, suggesting a lack of equal partnership.
 - **School Responsibility:** Many parents see the school as solely responsible for their child's education, leading to unrealistic expectations.
 - **Unrealistic Expectations:** Unrealistic expectations from parents regarding their deaf child's education can strain collaboration and cause dissatisfaction.
 - **Socio-Cultural Marginalization:** Parents perceive socio-cultural marginalization in the school setting, potentially due to communication barriers or a lack of inclusivity.
 - **Unequal Partnership:** Parents don't always see themselves as equal partners in their deaf child's academic journey, affecting their ability to collaborate effectively.
 - **Lack of Friendly School Environment:** School administrations are seen as not doing enough to establish a friendly environment that encourages parent-teacher partnership in the education of deaf students.
- B.** From the findings in the *teachers' interviews*, several pertinent themes emerge, offering insights into their perspectives and experiences concerning parent-teacher collaboration in the education of deaf students. Here are the concise elaborations on these themes:

- **Parental Lack of Serious Concern:** Teachers perceive that some parents do not express a strong commitment to parent-teacher collaboration, which can impact the academic success of deaf students.
- **Irregular Parent Attendance at Meetings:** Teachers note that parents frequently skip scheduled parent-teacher meetings, potentially hindering effective communication and collaboration.
- **Perception of Sole School Responsibility:** Many parents believe that the school bears sole responsibility for their deaf child's academic achievements, which can lead to unrealistic expectations.
- **Parental Reluctance to Accept Responsibility:** Some parents resist taking responsibility for their child's academic performance, potentially placing additional strain on teachers.
- **Unrealistic Parental Expectations:** Teachers encounter parents with idealistic but often unrealistic expectations about the education of their deaf child, which can be challenging to manage.
- **Neglected Communication:** Parents may not regularly check homework diaries or respond to teacher notes, leading to reduced opportunities for collaboration and support.
- **Limited Understanding of Child's Needs:** Teachers observe that some parents have a limited understanding of their deaf child's specific needs and strengths, which can hinder tailored support.
- **Financial Constraints on Parental Involvement:** Financial restrictions sometimes deter parents from actively engaging with the school, impacting their ability to collaborate effectively.
- **Motivation Tied to Incentives:** Parents are often motivated to participate in their child's education primarily when stipends, uniforms, and financial support are provided, potentially affecting the quality of collaboration.
- **School Administration's Role:** Teachers suggest that the school administration could do more to facilitate collaboration opportunities between parents and teachers.
- **Lack of Parental Knowledge:** Parents may lack essential information about their deaf child's class level, type, nature, and degree of hearing loss, potentially impeding collaboration due to communication gaps

Discussion

Since families and schools are two of the most important partners in promoting well-being and academic achievement among children and adolescents, a well-coordinated relationship between the two is essential. (Bateman, 2006; Welch & Sheridan, 1995). In collaborative settings, parents and teachers rely on each other in an equal and reciprocal way. Christenson (2002) argues that good educational outcomes in teacher-parents collaboration are dependent on shared responsibilities: Cramer (2006) argues that teachers play a critical role by supporting parents with resources both in and out of the classroom and as implementers of the educational plan. Parents, on the other hand, need to be encouraged to fulfill their role in their child's growth and academic achievement. Achieving successful student outcomes is easier when teachers and parents are aware of their

respective roles in the teacher-parents collaboration process. Collaboration between schools and families has been extensively discussed in the peer-reviewed literature around the world (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017).

The findings of present study revealed that parents often experience feelings of underappreciation, language difficulties, a lack of responsibility, a lack of regular meetings between parents and teachers, and unfriendly school environment. On the other hand, teachers report varying levels of parental involvement, inconsistent attendance, unrealistic expectations, and a lack of understanding of a child's needs. Minke (2014) emphasized the importance of communication too in her study and discussed that lack of communication was cited by teachers and parents as a key issue in teacher-parent relationships.

Deslandes et al., (2015) in their research identified a number of factors that cause hindrance in parent teacher partnership, including a lack of teacher training, and the fact that school-family collaboration is primarily the responsibility of teachers. Second, it appears that parents' perceptions of schools have shifted; research looking at teacher stress points to increased expectations from parents for kids' academic performance, which may motivate teachers to stay away from parents to preserve their professional independence. Hoover-Dempsey et. al. (2005) describes parental involvement in three dimensions; home-based behaviors, school-based activities and communication with the teacher. This framework has been used in many other research papers as well (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The empirical literature on school and family collaboration shows that school and family collaboration has undergone significant changes over the last few decades (Vasarik et al., 2018).

The results of this suggest that schools could be more welcoming to all parents. Parents wanted to work in partnership with teachers and had concrete suggestions on how schools could implement strategies to foster parental involvement that would support parents in supporting their children. Schools are encouraged to think creatively about how parents can be involved. Schools could partner with community groups to access unique skills and interests of parents and children outside of the school curriculum and c-counseling programs. Every parent has something to contribute. Schools must recognize and recognize the unique talents of the parents it serves in order to foster successful home-school partnerships.

Conclusions

This study explored into the challenges and perspectives of parent-teacher collaboration in the education of deaf students across nine divisions of Punjab. The findings revealed noteworthy disparities in the viewpoints of parents and teachers. Parents often grapple with feelings of undervaluation, language barriers, reluctance to take responsibility, lack of regular parent-teacher meetings and unfriendly school environment and while teachers report varying parental commitment, irregular attendance, unrealistic expectations and limited understanding of child's needs. The school's role in fostering collaboration emerged as significant. These disparities emphasize the multifaceted nature of parent-teacher collaboration in deaf education. Addressing these challenges and promoting effective collaboration is essential to provide optimal support for the academic success of deaf students.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the study are:

1. Schools should establish clear and accessible communication channels that accommodate the diverse needs of parents and teachers, including those with

limited language proficiency. This can include bilingual communication options and the use of interpreters or translated materials when necessary.

2. Schools should prioritize and schedule regular PTMs to facilitate face-to-face interactions between parents and teachers. These meetings should not only address concerns but also provide opportunities for constructive feedback, goal-setting, and joint decision-making regarding the education of deaf students.
3. Educational institutions should offer workshops or training sessions specifically designed for parents, aiming to improve their understanding of deaf education, communication strategies, and ways to support their child's unique needs. Such programs can boost parental confidence and engagement.
4. School administrations should proactively create a welcoming and inclusive environment that encourages parent-teacher partnerships. This includes initiatives like regular open houses, parent involvement committees, and efforts to promote parental participation beyond financial incentives.
5. Both schools and parents should engage in open dialogue to establish realistic expectations for the education of deaf students. This can involve setting achievable academic goals, outlining shared responsibilities, and acknowledging the importance of a collaborative effort in the child's educational journey.

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