



## TEACHER PERCEPTION OF PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LITERACY AND THEIR READING INSTRUCTIONS IN KUWAIT EFL PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

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### ABSTRACT

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There is an increasing awareness of the benefits that accrue from parental involvement in a student's academic learning and of the impact that teachers have on programs regarding such parental involvement. This study seeks to investigate the views of the teachers working in Kuwait's public schools regarding the effectiveness of parental involvement in their children's' learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) in primary school. Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of influence framework (2002), provides the conceptual framework to address the study questions. Data collection was driven by the case study methodology. The data were triangulated from: 1) face-to-face interviews with 33 English language teachers having at least 5 years' experience in teaching English in a primary school; 2) documental analysis of the teachers' backgrounds; and, 3) observing and tracking the reading activities included in the Kuwaiti curriculum that is used in the EFL classroom. Data collected from the documents and from the face-to-face interviews were analyzed using (Maxwell, 1996) strategies for analyzing qualitative data as that it helped prevent confusion. Three main themes emerged from the data. First, teachers believed that parental involvement in their children's preparatory learning of a foreign language was valuable, although the level of parental involvement varied, depending on the locality and the educational level of the parents. Second, teachers offered various suggestions to promote the parents' home reading activities with their children. Third, the teachers were fully aware of the deficiency in the reading skills of the student's in Kuwait's public schools. However, they did have insights and suggestions to overcome such challenges.

**Contribution/Originality:** Educating children in a foreign language is a challenging endeavor which intimidates some parents, but understanding how teachers influence parental involvement has the potential to create positive social change and awareness among educators and parents which will facilitate the improvement and support for students' literacy programs. Thus, we believe that this study can contribute in the existing literature by pinpointing the importance of understanding teachers' perceptions of parents' involvement, a thing that can help in providing valuable initial insights about the level of parental involvement that teachers believe in. In addition, this study can help in filling a current gap in prior research regarding teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in their children's literacy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the major concerns of educators, parents, and society has been students' academic learning and progress (Smith, 2008). Many educators in Kuwait have recently acknowledged the existence of low academic standards in high schools and have demanded solutions to address such problems from early schooling years (Al Darwish and Taqi, 2013; Aldaihani *et al.*, 2015; Al-Fadley *et al.*, 2017). Teachers have usually been blamed for a learner's low academic standard. While it is true that teachers spend more time with their students than do parents, they are not the only ones to be held responsible for this. In schools, the triangle of the learning process involves family and the curriculum, beside teachers. It is a reality that parents' involvement in their children's education, beside the teacher's efforts, makes a big difference in the student's academic outcomes (Epstein, 2001; Fan and Chen, 2001; Gilbert, 2017). On the contrary, the mismatch between home and school cultures often results in a misunderstanding between teachers and students, which leads to further educational problems in a child's academic progress (Au, 1993). The opinion of teachers as one of the facets of education has significant implications for parental involvement and is highly valued as the cornerstone in the education system (Kim, 2002; Galindo and Sheldon, 2012; Hakyemez, 2015). Therefore the main purpose of this study is to investigate and understand the teachers' perspectives of the parental involvement in Kuwait, and in the reading activities that are practiced EFL in classrooms in Kuwait's government-run primary schools.

English has become an international language as a "lingua franca", the major language of business, science, media, technology, diplomacy... etc. (Seidlhofer, 2005; Crystal, 2008). "The younger the better" principle in learning English as a foreign language, supported by studies which were added, ensure that the younger students are more enthusiastic about learning a new language (Birdsong and Molis, 2001; Wang and Chang, 2011; Hosseinpour *et al.*, 2015). This prompted the Kuwaiti Ministry of Education in 1993 to include the English language in the academic curriculum from the very first grade all the way to high school (Unesco Publication, 2011). Often parents ask teachers, "how can I help at home" Spiegel *et al.* (1993); Coleman (2000) stated that "family and school represent the primary environments in which young children grow and develop" (p.3). Building a bridge between schools and communities is not a simple task, but it is one that educators are beginning to recognize as necessary. McCaleb (1994) raised an important reality about school children that is:

*"Children live their lives in two worlds: that of the home and community and that of the school. When these two worlds fail to know, respect, and celebrate each other, children are placed in a difficult position" (p. 26).*

Recent studies show that parents' participation in their children's early learning can lead to better reading, understanding, and language skills (Waterman and Harry, 2008; Clark and Hawkins, 2010; Hosseinpour *et al.*, 2015; Gilbert, 2017) Parents' involvement has "great effect on their children's success in learning the language" (Hosseinpour *et al.*, 2015) children need their parents to be "their reading role models with daily practice in order to navigate successfully through beginning literacy skills" (Burton, 2013). Moreover, Close (2001) stresses that parental involvement, were adult and child share learning and loving relationship, assures the child's development in literacy and in all areas of education. However, he recommends training, such as paired reading, to ensure effective parental involvement. A recent study (2018) undertaken in Singapore sought to understand the views of preschool teachers school readiness with regard to primary preparation, in order to provide a common understanding on how to best prepare children for primary school. The study revealed that domains of social and emotional development and aesthetics and creative Expression were rated by the participants as the most and least important aspects of development respectively while preparing children for primary school. They recommended that children's transition to school reflects current research that supports the continuity between preschool and primary school with all stakeholders, parents, teachers, and the community involved (Costales and Anderson, 2018).

The current study believes that the best way to define parents' involvement in a child's learning of a foreign language is through both parent/child engaging in reading activities together, and through parent's involvement with the students' language learning and academic progress.

## 2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A major concern of educators, parents, and the society has been student's academic progress and achievement. Teachers have been unfairly targeted for the student's failure and a learners' low standard (Allen and Cosby, 2000; Boyd, 2015). Although it is true that some teachers spend more time with the learners than the parents do, teachers have also noted that the lack of parental involvement is a major factor in the decline in a students' academic achievement learning (Epstein, 2001; Smith, 2008). A growing body of scholarly literature examines the parental involvement in education and tends to emphasize home-school activities that are designed to close the academic achievement gap between student groups (Crozier and Davies, 2007; Al-Fadley *et al.*, 2017). However, many cultural and linguistically diverse groups are also interested in more open communication styles to resolve the differences of opinions, especially if the young learners are learning English as a foreign language, as in the case of Kuwait.

Therefore, it is necessary to increase the trust between teachers, school personnel, and parents, which will foster positive school-home relationship (Farah, 2015). However, it is not yet clear as to how the teachers and parents approach each other to communicate effectively about mutually agreed upon support for enhancing a student's reading skills in English as a foreign language in Kuwait's elementary schools. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the extant literature on teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in reading routines in English and the learners' academic success provides valuable initial insights into the level of involvement and helps fill a current gap in prior research on how teachers perceive parental involvement as a factor for aiding the students' learning process and enhancing the academic performance.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework within which the researchers chose to frame this study included the teachers' view of parental involvement in the reading routine of English as a foreign language in the public elementary schools in Kuwait. The Epstein's Model & The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parental Involvement were also adopted as a guide, to gauge whether new concepts would emerge from the participants' experiences (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997); (Epstein, 1995). According to Epstein's Model, six different models of parental involvement should be evident in the relationship amongst parents, school teachers, and community stakeholders (Epstein, 1990). The researchers of the current study had conducted a previous study on the role of Kuwaiti parents' involvement in developing their children's interest in reading English stories. They concluded that Kuwaiti parents are highly motivated to share reading with their children in English, but they lack the tools to do so because of numerous constraints like social commitment, work duties, and mostly, the parent's low proficiency level in English (Al-Fadley *et al.*, 2017).

Because the concept in both the Epstein and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model overlapped and provided reference for understanding the dynamics and importance of family, school teachers, curriculum application, and community relationship, the researchers believed that in this study, by exploring the teachers' point of view of the instructions applied to aid reading, and of parental involvement in guiding their children in reading, they would succeed in providing a logical and substantive basis for analyzing and improving such parental involvement in improving a student's reading skills in English in elementary schools in Kuwait. Meanwhile, qualitative methods focused on gathering and interpreting numeric data, including the words of the participants (Johnson and Christensen, 2008).

Acquiring the viewpoint of teachers through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews provided the researchers opportunities to interact with, and gather interviews and perceptions of participants in the study (Gilbert, 2017). The researchers believe that factoring in the teachers' points of view in this study is critical to understanding the phenomenon of continued parental involvement in reading of English as a foreign language in Kuwait.

#### 4. TEACHING READING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Studies find that learning a foreign language in elementary school increases the academic achievements of K 12 students (Black, 2000; Taylor-Ward, 2003). Teaching foreign language to elementary students requires a series of acts with which teachers' aim to present knowledge about language (Freeman, 1996). Studies claim that the most effective foreign language learning results are obtained through clear instructions on goals, and through communicative pedagogy and the classroom literacy environment (Law and Eckes, 1990; Riggenbach and Lazaraton, 1991; Wu, 2003). Indeed "language is socially constructed and cannot be separated from the culture of that society in which it is used" (Wu, 2010). However, in the Kuwaiti elementary school classroom, teachers are required to teach English as a foreign language through grammatical knowledge and vocabulary memorizing exercises (Almutawa, 1997). Thus, there is no room for communicating or comprehending English in a student's daily conversation and daily events in the classroom (Bozorgian and Pillay, 2013). In his research, Tai (2000) finds that all teachers believe that English is "a language for communication" and English as a foreign language should be learned in sentence patterns. To recognize a teacher's understanding of the importance of involving parents, along with the teacher's own pedagogical practices in the classroom, while teaching students to communicate in English as a foreign language, we conducted this descriptive study. It was designed over a period of one year and was intended to reveal teachers' awareness of the importance of the parents' role in their children's learning process to read in a foreign language and their own teaching practices that promote or help their students in this endeavor. The study also probed how these practices vary, depending on age, experience, education, governorate backgrounds.

#### 5. RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative study tried to answer the following Research Questions:

- 1) How do teachers perceive parents' involvement in their children's education?
- 2) How do teachers actually involve parents in the foreign language curriculum for their students', especially regarding reading instructions?
- 3) What reading instructions do elementary teachers implement?

A qualitative method design using a face-to-face interview protocol as the primary data collection medium was appropriate for this research because it is much harder to capture how the participants of the study structure their own social and meaning system using a survey instrument (Miller and Glassner, 2011). To gather data, 33 English language teachers in elementary schools participated in face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews, mainly about their perceptions of parents' involvement and their own practices and strategies to teach elementary school students reading skills in English. According to Seidman (1991) "the purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to 'evaluate' as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience".

#### 6. THE PARTICIPANTS

The researchers conducted interviews with 33 teachers from all the six local government educational districts in Kuwait. In Kuwait, there are six educational government districts: Al-Asimmah (The Capital), Hawalli, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Al-Jahr, Farwaniya, and Al- Ahmadi. The researchers also collected demographic information from all

participants in every educational government district. The number of teacher participants from each district, with whom interviews were conducted were: two from Al-Asimmah, 13 from Hawalli, 10 from Mubarak Al-Kabeer, three from Al-Jahr, two from Farwaniya, and three from Al-Ahmadi.

The participants' interviews were conducted in the school conference rooms for nine to twelve hours. The researchers provided a set of questions which were drafted, based on the concerns and recommendations from the Ministry of Education's Elementary English workshop that was conducted in 2015. Accordingly, the researchers began the interviews by obtaining the demographic information of the participants, with a checklist for the participants' perceptions of the daily reading routines in school and how parents were involved in them. The researchers adopted Maxwell (1996) strategies for analyzing the data because it was useful for managing the data and for avoiding any confusion. Following Maxwell's suggestions, the researchers listened carefully to the mobile recorded interviews prior to transcription. Each participant began the interview by filling in the teacher's checklist and memo documents which were to be included in the participants' general profile. During the listening or reading stages, researchers were directed to take "notes and memos ...and develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships" (Maxwell, 1996).

The participants' age ranged from 22 years to over 37 years. One third of the teacher-participants were less than 27 years old with experience of less than 5 years, while a fourth (24.2%) of the teacher-participants were over 37 years, something that also represented their years of experience.

Table-1. Sample Background

Variable	Type	Frequencies	%
Age	22- 27	11	33.3
	28-32	8	24.2
	33-37	6	18.1
	Over 37	8	24.2
	Total	33	100
Years of Experience	1-5	10	30.3
	6-11	10	30.3
	11-15	9	27.3
	Over 16	4	12.1
	Total	33	100.0
Education Background	College of Basic Education	11	33.3
	Kuwait University	12	36.4
	OTHERS	10	30.3
	Total	33	100.0
Local Educational District	Al-Asimmah	2	6
	Hawalli	13	39.3
	Mubarak Alkabeer	10	30.3
	Jahra	3	9
	Farwanyia	2	6
	Al-Ahmadi	3	9
	Total	33	100.0
Availability of Pre-service Training Courses	YES	19	61.3
	NO	12	38.7
	Total	31	100.0

Due to the implementation of Feminizing the Primary School Law in Kuwait and based on this demographic information, all the participants in this study were females who had a Bachelor of Arts degree in English education. As for other demographics, it was concluded that the teachers in this study were fairly equal with regards to their age and number of years of experience in the teaching profession. This indicates that there are just as many teachers with a few years of experience as there are teachers with many years of experience. The majority of the participants

have experience ranging from 6-15 years in teaching (57.6%). While more than two thirds (69.7%) of the participants sampled in this study graduated from higher educational institutes like Kuwait University and the College of Basic Education in Kuwait, 12 (22%) reported that they had graduated from other universities: three from the USA, one from London, four from Egypt, and one from Syria. One staff (2%) did not answer the alma mater question. Meanwhile, 61.3 % reported obtaining e-service training in teaching English at elementary school. Thus, a total of less than five were not enrolled in courses or training.

When the participants were questioned about the kind of professional in-service courses they had enrolled in, 61.3% participants indicated they had taken TEFL/TESOL/CELTA courses, four of the participants indicated they had taken reading courses, while ten of the teachers indicated that they had done courses in teaching English to elementary students; the rest of the teachers indicated that they had undergone various courses on developing and planning a curriculum, using technology in teaching, class management, and linguistics. (See Table, 1).

## 7. THE STUDY FINDINGS

Based upon the study questions, results were divided into three sections. The first section reported on teachers' perceptions about the importance of parental involvement, culled from their responses to the first study question. The second section included responses to the second study question that dealt with the role that parents play in promoting their children's reading skills. The final section includes responses to the third study question that dealt with the strategies that English language teachers in elementary schools use in class to teach reading skills in a foreign language.

### Answer to Q1: How Do Teachers Perceive Parents' Involvement in Literacy Education?

The findings of the interviews which were conducted with most of the teachers' of elementary English revealed that the teachers believed that involving parents in their children's learning of English as a foreign language is critical within both the school and home settings. The teachers indicated that literacy is not merely a school agenda. The parent-teacher partnership can positively contribute and influence the academic progress of young students in school and contribute to a better prediction of their success, something that was stressed by many studies (Fan and Chen, 2001; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Shumow and Lomax, 2002; Epstein *et al.*, 2009). Besides, the majority of teachers believed that parents have an effective role in helping their children develop early literacy and reading skills. They insisted that parents can set a perfect example for their children by reading and enriching their home libraries with books and magazines that are age appropriate and of interest to their children because "parents are always in the center of their children's education and training" (Hosseinpour *et al.*, 2015). As one teacher stated "parents are partners in their children's education". Some believed that "children learn to read at school, but the love of reading is shaped at home".

However, nine teachers indicated that they did not believe that parents played an effective role in their children's reading abilities because some of them were uneducated (Close, 2001; Burton, 2013) and were unable to read or speak the English language. This coincides with the assertion of Walde and Baker (1990). In addition, teachers claimed that parents were showing huge interest in their children's education in general, based on their daily interaction with them. However, teachers in Jahra and Farwaniya revealed that sometimes years passed by in their school without any meetings or interactions with any of the children's parents, nor any visits by the latter. This was true for both English classes as well as those of other subjects.

These teachers appreciated parents' involvement in their children's' learning process but unfortunately this was not applicable to their schools and they held the school management responsible for not formalizing parents-teachers conferences at the beginning of the school year; because the school district officials required these kind of conferences, they gave the schools the freedom to try to use any approach necessary to have parents attend them. Some of the teachers interviewed provided lists of things that they had prepared for parents. Such lists included

suggestions for parents, like buying the child interesting books, taking the child to the library, reading to the child, helping him/her with homework, encouraging him/her to read, and reading to him/her on a daily basis, following a routine bedtime reading, and allowing the child time to read every day.

All the teachers participating in the survey from Hawalli, Ahmadi, and Alasimah gave surprising answers when questioned about the level of English of their students' when they first arrived in the first grade. All of them claimed that the most prominent characteristics of some students with a background of English education appeared to be their self-confidence and willingness to interact with the teacher and help other students in class; they were also usually very eager to read. These students read better, understood events, retold their stories, and asked and answered questions, could distinguish sounds, blend, and segment them. The parents of most of these students showed up in the classroom at the end of the school day to try and learn about their children's academic progress and interactions in the classroom, reflecting interest and care for the latter. Most of these parents were highly educated and believed that English was an international language that their children must learn "very well" to do better, later in school. Most of those students had experienced private preschools and/or English tutoring (Black, 2000; Tai, 2000; Taylor-Ward, 2003).

### **Answer to Question 2. How Do Teachers Actually Involve Parents in Foreign Language Curriculum, Especially in the Reading Instruction?**

The majority of teachers insisted that parents should focus on language materials that build basic phonic skills, decoding, and comprehension. Over half of the teachers felt that setting an example at home through reading by the parents themselves would help build a reading atmosphere around the child, which was of utmost importance. The other half believed that the presence of books, computers, and Ipads at home, in order to expose the children to nursery rhymes, videos and stories, would enhance the child's abilities and exposure to English language. They felt that reading comprehension is related to provision of simple and suitable English books at home. However, 30 of the teachers were concerned with the child's self-confidence through encouragement as well as by allowing the expression of one's feelings. The teachers indicated that it is crucial to have conversations between parents and children about the content of books and articles they have read, and a high degree of parental support and expectation was a prerequisite for academic achievement. They reported that when mothers commented on the stories that they read to their children and related it to the child's experience, they were helping to improve the child's communicative interaction and literacy skills.

Most teachers wanted the parents to implement "paired reading". They felt that children who were read to at an early age tended to display greater interest in reading at a later age, and parents who listened to their children read contributed to their child's success in school. Therefore, they wanted the parents to read to their children and have the children read to them as well. Story reading in English at home enhanced the child's language comprehension and expressive language skills. In addition, there was a group of teachers who believed that pointing out letters and words from street signs to a child daily helped develop his/her reading abilities in a foreign language.

All teachers listed various factors that they believed contributed to deficiencies in their students' reading abilities. As indicated by Walde and Baker (1990) parents lacking basic literacy skills cannot be expected to be involved effectively to help in their children learn those very skills. In this study, the most common responses to the factors that contributed to students' reading readiness listed a lack of parental support and encouragement at home, parents do not read or do not know how to read, parents do not know English language, unavailability of libraries or suitable stories, parents' lack of time and unavailability of classes provided for reading, and students' lack of self-confidence and desire to read, which were again related to insufficient parental involvement and cultural aspects that did not value learning a foreign language, something that was indicated by Wu (2010). However, a group of teachers indicated that they were not being directed by the school principal to make any communication

with the parents of their students. There were no organized meetings with the parents and those teachers were not being trained at the Faculty of Education on how to interact and communicate with the students' parents.

It is worth noting that none of the teachers related the students' absence of reading readiness to teachers themselves. Most of the teachers either blamed the parents of the students for their reading problems or complained that the school administration did not facilitate meetings with the parents. However, many teachers have admitted earlier in the interview that they do not read to their students, neither do they encourage them to read and nor do they teach them how to read.

**Table-2. Teachers' Reading Instruction Practice**

Variable	Type	Frequencies	%
Read a Story to Students	At least Once a Day	5	15.2
	Every Day	5	15.2
	Once a Week	15	45.5
	NEVER	8	24.2
	Total	33	100.0
Student Reading Story	At least Once a Day	13	40.6
	Every Day	12	37.5
	Once a Week	6	18.8
	NEVER	1	3.1
	Total	32	100.0
Teach Students Reading Skills	At least Once a Day	15	45.5
	EVERY DAY	14	42.4
	ONCE A WEEK	3	9.1
	NEVER	1	3.0
	Total	33	100.0
Generate Conversations of Any Topic	At least Once a Day	21	63.6
	EVERY DAY	10	30.3
	ONCE A WEEK	1	3.0
	NEVER	1	3.0
	Total	33	100.0
Using Educational Tools	At least Once a Day	20	60.6
	EVERY DAY	11	33.3
	ONCE A WEEK	1	3.0
	NEVER	1	3.0
	Total	33	100.0
Take Your Students to Library	At least Once a Week	6	18.2
	Every Week	2	6.1
	Once a Month	10	30.3
	NEVER	15	45.5
	Total	33	100.0
Encourage Students to Read at Home	At least Once a Day	17	51.5
	Every Day	8	24.2
	Once a Week	7	21.2
	NEVER	1	3.0
	Total	33	100.0
Teach Students How to Read	At least Once a Day	18	54.5
	Every Day	11	33.3
	Once a Week	3	9.1
	NEVER	1	3.0
	Total	33	100.0

### Answer to Q3: What Reading Instruction Do Elementary Teachers Implement?

In order to understand the reading instructions that teachers had to follow in the classroom, together with the semi-structured interview, teachers were given a sheet scale to validate their answers with the overall responses to the interviews. Table (2) shows, for example, that almost 45 % of the teacher-participants indicated that they read



a story once a week, while, 78.1% let students read at least once a day. In addition, almost 88% of the teacher-participants teach their students reading skills. The results indicated that almost 94% generate a general conversation with their students. On the other hand, 60.6 % of the participants use educational tools once a day. The only negative results from the checklist found that 75 % of the teacher-participants have never taken their students to the library even once a month. Still 75 % of the teacher-participants replaced library reading with reading at home. Interestingly, 87.8% of the teacher-participants reported that they teach the students how to read once or every day, this indicated that reading is a basic skill routine in Kuwait's English language curriculum as seen in Table (2), but they lack the effective methods to facilitate the continuation of the students' self-reading.

During the interview, teachers complained about the deficit in the curriculum for teaching English as a foreign language in the Kuwaiti education system. This included lack of books, support material, and technology to enrich the teaching of English as a foreign language. They also complained that “no one told them anything they were supposed to cover” Most teachers in the study said they either had no curriculum or were left with only a list of topics and skills and mostly depended on senior teachers in the schools to give them guidance. Some teachers reported that they utilized self-made diagnostic tests for their students to help them know them better and to be able to prepare gradation and material to reach out to all students with their different levels of knowledge of English. In their classroom teachers claimed that they used the following teaching methods and activities: teaching basic reading skills “not phonics ... somehow phonics”. When asked how, they explained that they combined phonics with the elements of whole language that focused on reading comprehension, generating conversations with the students in order to comply with the ministry's curriculum and needs of the students. A majority of teachers enriched their teaching by using language puzzles, blocks, word games, educational DVD, reading short story books, and by visiting once or twice a year the school library as “it's simply not required”.

## 8. DISCUSSION

The findings of our research reveal that the majority of the 33 teacher-participants of our survey indicated that Kuwaiti parents remained concerned about their children's academic achievements and reading skills. Based on the teachers' daily interaction with the students' parents in most of Kuwait's educational districts, they believed, as one teacher stated that “parents are partners in their children's education”. Some said that “children learn to read at school, but the love of reading is shaped at home.” Although teachers claimed that parents are showing great interest in their children's education and they are supportive in general, still some of the parents lacked knowledge of the English language. Others were confused as to how to cope with the continuous alterations in the English curriculum and stressed on ways to review daily learning routines with their children. In other words, parents' involvement be logistical involvement rather than strategic involvement in terms of improving their children's low achievement levels.

Other participants claimed that some of the parents do not care about their children's studies - especially in some of the suburban districts - due to socio-economic reasons like having to support large families, their own low educational background, or due to dysfunctional families (Aladwani and Shaye, 2012; Al-Fadley *et al.*, 2017). This result is consistent with Epstein (2001) who argued that teachers have noted that the lack of parental involvement is a major factor in the decline in students' academic progress. Walde and Baker (1990) found in their study that parents lacking basic literacy skills cannot be expected to be involved effectively in their children's learning of these skills. According to the teachers in this study, the most common response to the factors that contributed to an absence of reading readiness in students included lack of parental support and encouragement at home. Other factors contributing to this result were: parents who do not read or do not know how to read, parents who do not know English language, a parent's lack of time and their poor literacy and educational levels, which were inadequate to review their children's daily school routines. Meanwhile, some teachers related insufficient parental involvement to cultural aspects: that some parents do not value learning a foreign language. Additionally, other

factors related to the learners, like the unavailability of libraries or suitable stories for the students, lack of classes that provide free or leisure reading, lack of self-confidence and desire to continue reading. All the previous were again factors that contributed to insufficient parental involvement (Wu, 2003; Costales and Anderson, 2018).

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the process involved in this study and on the analysis of the data that emerged from it, the following are the recommendations that the study would like to make.

It would be highly advisable to interview the parents themselves and investigate their perception about the importance of their involvement in their children's learning of a foreign language. It is advisable to conduct a study on the methods that can be used for involving parents with low literacy skills in the learning process of their children, who are learning how to read in a foreign language. The researchers wish to investigate the most effective methods for supporting parents so that they have the confidence, motivation, and skills to develop their children's reading skills.

Teachers need to be ready and able to implement strategies to get parents involved. Curriculum coordinators, directors, and advisors within educational programs along with college and university professors, must take a step forward and enlist in more training and courses to target this aspect of the education major. Training undergraduate students in the importance of parents' involvement as well as in methods of effective parents' involvement will prepare them for the reality that awaits them once they graduate out. Gaffuri (1992) mentioned that teachers feel that they are not trained to have skills proficient enough to work alongside with parents. Dixon (1992) agreed that there is not enough preparation at the college level for teachers in training to know how to effectively enter the job force with a solid understanding of how to successfully implement and, in some cases, advertise for parents' involvement. There is a necessity to better prepare teachers who are undergoing college training for leadership roles that foster parental involvement. The survey results indicated that teachers lack seeking help from parents but perhaps a deficit in training is the origin of this limitation.

Parents need support from the school. Therefore, schools need also to consider how adults with poor literacy skills can help their children, and receive help with their own literacy. Allowing parents to share their thoughts, ideas, and behavior plans for their child with the teacher is a way for parents to let the teacher become cognizant of what they are implementing at home for the child. Teachers need to make an effort to converse when possible *with* parents rather than *to* parents. Teachers will be able to share information regarding the student's strengths and weaknesses that are seen in the classroom setting; however, parents can also provide feedback on what they see within the home setting which may be a possible problem area or even an area of interest for the child. This two-way verbal exchange about the child in both the home and the school setting may offer new insights to both teacher and parents as they observe the child in two distinct environments.

Having additional open house opportunities for parents to come visit their children's classrooms and to have the opportunity to speak with the teachers as well as other parents within the classroom may aid in improving parental involvement and participation. Epstein and Jansorn (2004) indicated that most parents have a desire to be involved with their child's school but they need assistance from the school staff on how to offer that support. Gaffuri (1992) mentioned that teachers feel that they are not trained to have skills proficient enough to work alongside of parents. Mansbach (1993) concurred that the lack of pre-service education for teachers is a major cause for the decline in parental involvement once graduates enter the actual classroom setting. Parental involvement, however, is not only important for "laying the foundation for learning to read", but for maintaining that foundation as well. This foundation can be strengthened when parents are involved in systematic ways. Students undoubtedly achieve at higher levels when their parents are involved in the reading process at home (Becher, 1985). The participants of the study believed that parents' involvement may become even more effective if there is coordinated communication between the school and home about a student's reading progress.

Another recommendation is to try to apply this study to more advanced grades when a child's literacy skills have developed further. This will pave the way for further studies on the students' perception of how parental involvement enhances their reading skills. Nevertheless, the researchers of the study have noticed some serious grammatical and spelling errors in some written answers of some teachers. The concerned teachers were mostly the ones who had admitted that they do not read to their students, neither do they ask their students to read nor have they ever interacted with the parents at all. Hence, this might be another issue that may be taken up for further studies. Finally, it must be taken into consideration that teachers within an elementary education setting are primarily females and, therefore, gender may be a factor when interacting with parents, especially when interacting with parents of the opposite gender. Perhaps mothers are more comfortable speaking with female teachers while fathers shy away from them.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The current study targets all six Kuwaiti governorates in general. The qualitative data obtained by the researchers from the teachers indicates that most teachers agreed that parental involvement in the learning process of students in the first grade is significantly important. Parental involvement, where adult and child share learning and loving relationship, ensures support for children beyond reading and in all areas of educational development. Further, it can be concluded that the participants in this study are fairly equal when we factor in their age and number of years of experience in the teaching profession.

Most teachers believe that parents play a vital role in their children's readiness to read in a foreign language. Most of the teachers have considerable and creative suggestions on how to enhance a student's reading abilities through various ideas and advices (such as parents reading to their children, keeping books in the home, library attendance and parent-child relationship). They stated that parents should provide a home environment that encourages reading and learning. They must be involved in their child's academic learning. Although teachers expressed dissatisfaction about the deficiency in the students' reading skills, they seemed to have insights about the reasons for this and how to solve it. If educators, parents, and school leaders have a desire for students to succeed and aim for higher achievement rates, then parents, school leaders, and teachers need to work together in a more collaborative manner. This is an effort to encourage parents' involvement, which in turn, will support a student's academic prowess.

There is an array of questions that future researchers who are interested in this subject may want to inquire with regards to parental involvement. Such inquiries may include the following: (1) what are the different types of college pre-service teachers' programs and coursework preparations that can be offered for effective interaction with parents; (2) what opportunities can administrators make available for teachers during the school year, in an effort to strengthen their understanding of effective parental involvement techniques; and (3) what types of mentoring programs and in-service training workshops would lend themselves to improving the experience of a teacher, who is new to the profession, with regards to his/her ability to distinguish effective techniques and ways of communication that will promote parental involvement. These questions, if investigated, will broaden the understanding of measures that can be adopted and implemented in schools today in an effort to prepare teachers to successfully and confidently work with parents. Teachers want and need parents to become involved (Becker and Epstein, 1982). It is imperative that schools and parents continue to collaborate so that the educational potential of our children can be realized.

Educating children in a foreign language is a challenging endeavor, which may intimidate some parents. Literacy is a complex skill that requires a supportive environment and takes one years to master. The researchers wish to investigate the most effective methods for supporting parents so that they have the confidence, motivation, and skills to encourage and develop their children's reading skills in a foreign language.

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