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**Saudi Parents' Perceptions of Parental Involvement with
Elementary School Students with Learning Disabilities**

Mohaned G. Abed¹ and Todd K. Shackelford^{2*}

¹King Abdulaziz University

²Oakland University

*Correspondence: shackelf@oakland.edu.

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Abstract

This exploratory, qualitative study used a semi-structured interview methodology followed by thematic phenomenological analyses to investigate the perceptions of Saudi Arabian parents with 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, specific interview topics included parental perceptions of the importance of parent-school partnerships, parental perceptions of the means of encouraging a parent-school relationship, and parental perceptions of 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 positive changes for overcoming the involvement barriers reported by parents.

Keywords: Parental involvement, barriers to involvement, Saudi parents, children with learning disabilities

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Introduction

Parents are the primary caregivers to their children and typically have intimate knowledge about these children. Parents therefore are in a good position to provide information that can assist educators to better assess and understand particular children. Parents also are typically in a good position to facilitate connections between learning at home and learning in the classroom. 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 programs and the educational and social climate of the school. Thus, parents have an important role to play in the school and, therefore, maintaining relationships with parents can increase the likelihood that that school successfully develops children's potential (Avnet et al. 2019; Epstein, 2010; Starr & Foy, 2012).

Parental Involvement in Education

A review of the literature brings to the fore 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 reveals a dearth of literature 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. The relationship between the school and parents is important, attracting attention from researchers and practitioners in the last few decades in different fields, including psychology, sociology, and education (e.g., Harris & Goodall, 2008).

Research has identified many benefits of collaboration between parents and the school. For instance, Kyriakides (2005) concludes that parental involvement strengthens children's

learning. Greater parental involvement with the school predicts reduced student absenteeism, increased student retention, and positive achievement in numeracy and literacy, together with improvements in the management of student behavior in the classroom (Barger et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019). Based on the results of this 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). However, tensions between teachers and parents can sometimes limit successful collaboration between the school and home.

Parental Involvement in Special Education

The last few decades reflect a move away from a medical model of learning disability to a social model of learning disability. This has resulted in greater appreciation of the needs of families of children with learning disabilities and efforts to facilitate an environment in which parents participate in planning, delivering, and assessing the programs available to students. 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). This is in keeping with the views of Porter (2008), who argues that the most effective way to meet the needs of children is to involve parents. This has resulted in the development and implementation of a family-centered approach to special education, especially with elementary school-aged students with disabilities, providing parents with opportunities to manage situations through access to information, skill development, and use of available resources (Espe-Sherwindt, 2008; Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

Engagement by parents in early intervention programs could afford benefits to all children, but especially those with learning disabilities, including the development of healthy attitudes towards their abilities, and in the process promoting family well-being (Jinnah & Walters, 2008; Yotyodying & Wild, 2019). This is a view acknowledged by Wall (2003), who

suggests 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). Wehman and Gilkerson (1999) conducted a qualitative study of parental perceptions identifying that the leading barriers include the limited times during which services are delivered 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 experienced many and varied challenges, which made it difficult for them to participate. For instance, 50% of the participating mothers indicated that they experienced 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

Parental participation in children's education is an emerging topic in Saudi Arabia. The need for programs to facilitate and support parental involvement in Saudi Arabia arose after a series of recent educational policy changes that afforded parent-teacher collaboration and cooperation (Alobaid, 2018). 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). These statutes codify the importance of including parents as partners that can assist teachers in accomplishing goals in service to the child's academic success, and this applies with equal force to children with learning disabilities.

Unfortunately, parenting involvement programs remain uncommon in present-day Saudi Arabia. The majority of Saudi parents lack awareness of parenting involvement programs offered by schools and this has resulted in continued limitation and restriction of parents' access

to the school community and to resources available for assisting and monitoring their children's educational and developmental progress (Alobaid, 2018). 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 until recently encouraged parents not to question school administrators' and teachers' decisions. In Saudi Arabia, at least until recently, the school system's structure has not expected, facilitated, or supported parental involvement or collaboration with teachers and administrators (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 is to begin to address this dearth of research.

An important challenge to the sustainability and effectiveness of school-parent partnerships is that parental involvement is not uniformly defined. For instance, 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). On the other hand, some researchers include parenting practices and behaviors in their definition of parental involvement with children's education. Examples of such practices and behaviors include 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 partnerships. Although school administrators and teachers often report that they are willing to involve parents in the school community, some misperceptions remain about how this can be

accomplished. This leads to many school leaders and teachers reporting that parents are not engaged despite the school leaders' and teachers' efforts (Mapp & Kutter, 2013). Many school leaders and teachers are often left with the challenges of meeting school mandates and educational policies requiring them to facilitate parental involvement. However, such school leaders and teachers are often not provided with guidance to accomplish this, and neither are they provided with a clear sense of the desired outcomes. Additionally, many school leaders and teachers do not receive adequate training from educator preparation programs on organizing, conducting, and employing practical strategies to develop and maintain partnerships with parents (Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

For school-parent partnerships to succeed, it is important to have collaborative and trusting relationships (Harpaz & Grinshtain, 2020). However, the challenge comes when 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. This was the focus of a study by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), which identified strategies for developing a school's parental involvement capacity. Examples of such strategies include 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. This is a view acknowledged by Henderson and Mapp (2002, p. 7): "When schools build partnerships with families that respond to their concerns and honour their contributions, they are successful in sustaining connections that are aimed at improving student achievement."

Research Questions Guiding the Current Study

In this study, we explore Saudi parents' perceptions to identify 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 this study: (1) What are parents' views on the importance of parent-school partnerships? (2) What are parents' views on the means that can be used to encourage and support a relationship between parents and the school? (3) What are parents' views on how school practices around parental participation might affect that participation?

Rationale and Significance of the Current Study

A partnership denotes a relationship involving two entities collaborating and sharing rights and responsibilities (Collins, 2017). The idea of partnerships is common in the business and education sectors. In education, establishing partnerships 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).

The Plowden Report (1967) describes a partnership between parents and teachers as integral to education development. A review of the literature reveals no consensus definition of "partnership." In the educational context, partnership denotes the collaboration of parents and teachers to successfully attain the goals of education for children. The current study aims to expand the understanding of the relationship between schools and parents. In the current study, parental involvement refers to the level of a parent's interest and active participation in their child's academic progress. The current study focuses on the most prevalent distinction 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. Examples of such parental involvement include attending parents' and teachers' association meetings,

volunteering to help during class field trips, teacher-parent conferences, and active participation in other school activities. Parental involvement in the home context refers to parental practices regarding the child's education outside the school. Examples include reading with the child, practising scholastic skills with the child, talking to the child about issues related to the school, and assisting with homework (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Specifically, the current study addresses the dearth of research concerning parents' perceptions of parental involvement and partnerships with schools, with a focus on Saudi Arabian parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities (Elbaum, 2012).

Methods

Design

This study followed a qualitative design in which data are collected using semi-structured interviews with Saudi Arabian parents of elementary school-aged learners 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).

Various educational studies conducted in the last four decades have utilized phenomenography to uncover the lived experiences of individuals. Phenomenography is a research strategy that explores phenomena perceived by others, uncovering and explaining the variation therein, particularly in an academic setting (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Phenomenography is rooted in qualitative methodology. Consequently, it employs human interaction to investigate the study question through specific methods such as interviews and observation. It is recognized that qualitative researchers introduce their 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, Manion & Morrison, 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

Socioeconomic class, demographic, and geographic diversity of the sample was pursued by alerting public elementary school directors throughout Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to the study. These school directors were asked to encourage parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities to participate. Thirteen parents agreed to participate. The demographic information available for the participants is displayed in Table 1.

[insert Table 1 about here]

Procedure

The current study received approval from the research ethics board of the university that housed the senior author. Participating parents were given an information letter describing the study. After they read the letter, parents were encouraged to discuss the study with the researcher. Parents then signed a statement of informed consent prior to participating. The directors of schools assisted the researcher in identifying and enrolling participants. Before the interviews began, collaboration and permission were requested and obtained from the local education authorities for the schools that participated.

Relative to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews provide more flexibility to researchers. For example, interviews can be extended so that participants can include as much detail as they wish about their opinions and experiences. Semi-structured interviews also incorporate some of the strengths of structured interviews, including that they allow 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: (1) As a parent, what is your view about the importance of school-parent partnerships? (2) What do you believe your responsibility is in the

relationship between the school and home as a parent? (3) 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. This implies that 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 to develop trust and rapport with the participant, 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) propose 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. Following Kvale and Brinkman, when considering validity, the focus is not on the outcomes or results. In the semi-structured, 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 to improve clarity. In the main study, the responses of the participants 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 this study, we adhered to Brantlinger et al.'s (2005) guidelines for qualitative research in special education. Participants included diverse representatives of the target population. The semi-structured 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 Plan

When the interview process was complete, audio recordings of the participant's responses were transcribed and categorized. Fundamental to the process of categorizing the responses was phenomenography, which provides researchers with a means to capture the varying ways 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 labelled 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 this, significant statements and phrases about the phenomena of interest to the present study were extracted from each transcribed interview. Then, from the significant statements, meanings were derived, and these were considered themes. The themes were

grouped into clusters and then classified. In order to perform a preliminary analysis, specific categories and themes were highlighted using a colour-coding system. Consequently, the researchers were able to 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

Parental Perceptions of the Importance of School-Parent Partnerships

All participants in the study 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 and stated 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 occasional invitations to participate in school activities, events, and functions. The parents indicated that there is more than a single method that a school can adopt to identify the needs of parents and to provide them with opportunities to participate. These included: Inviting parents to take part in numerous celebrations, programs, and activities” (13/13 parents acknowledged such invitations); Regularly inviting parents of students with learning disabilities to assist in monitoring and managing their children’s achievement and behavior (13/13); Activating parents’ councils and holding meetings each semester periodically (12/13); Implementing homework notes so that parents can write notes to the teachers (10/13); 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: Parents’ preoccupations and existing commitments (13/13); The dates or times selected by the schools for meeting with parents were inconvenient for parents (8/13); Parents’ councils focus on secondary matters that parents do not care about, which reduces their attendance (11/13); Lack of school/teacher awareness of positive impact of parent participation (9/13); 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. 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 lead 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) agree 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 parental 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 concluded that parental participation is important to facilitating successful academic outcomes (Lynch, 2006). In environments in which parents perceive 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). A prominent feature of both student self-efficacy and role development is that both are socially constructed and subject to the influences of important role players such as family members (especially parents), school leaders, and teachers (Hoover-Dempsey & Whitaker, 2010).

In what follows, we discuss the results of the current study and situate these results within the relevant previous literature. As we noted in the Introduction, the vast majority of this literature addresses 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. Part of the motivation for the present research was to begin to rectify this gap in the literature.

Benefits of Parental Involvement in Education

Castro et al. (2004), Wilson-Jones (2003), McBride et al. (2005), and Cennet (2009) found that when parents are willing to participate in their children's education and their communication with the school comes from attending parents' councils and following up with teachers, their involvement in attending school events, reviewing assignments, and monitoring academic development increases. The same scholars note that greater parental school involvement increases children's motivation and encourages them to value academic performance. Numerous studies have demonstrated that positive communication between teachers and parents improves students' academic performance (Epstein, 2001; Epstein, 2010; Leenders, De Jong, Monfrance, & Haelermans, 2019). This is based on the assumption that for a child to understand their world, their personality and needs should be considered. Moreover, there should also be attempts to anticipate such a child's behaviour and challenges. The significance of an ongoing relationship between a child's parents and the school is founded on parental involvement in the child's education and the development of their culture and personality. The function of the relationship is to integrate and coordinate functions between the school and parents to achieve desired educational objectives (Epstein, 2001; Epstein, 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. Communication between parents and teachers can occur through school visits, open house, phone calls, letters, and notes. The communication process should be bidirectional, in which the teacher provides information to the parent about the child's behaviour 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; Epstein, 2010).

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 adequate care (Salem, 2014). 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 are cited by Salem (2014) as among the most significant problems that impede the educational process.

Learning and Educational Achievement

The educational achievement of children with learning disabilities is influenced by the attitudes and assistance they receive from both teachers and parents. Khris (2002) notes that children with learning disabilities can be affected by children and adults with whom they interact. These interactions can either be negative or positive, on balance. Examples of individuals with this type of influence include parents, teachers, and fellow students. Learning is influenced by the support and assistance they receive from educational institutions, teachers, specialists, and parents. In addition, the presense of a child with learning difficulties in the 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. In contrast, previous research has demonstrated that if counselling 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

We identified strong agreement among 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 the home and the school (Murray et al., 2014). This view is supported by responses of participants in the current study. From the participants' perceptions, 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 in the home the learning that occurs in the classroom. This 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 conclusions 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. The home-school partnership literature refers to such beliefs as parental self-efficacy (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sander, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, 2010). The beliefs constitute motivational elements in the decision by parents be involved in the activities of their children's schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, 2010).

John-Akinola and Gabhainn (2014) conducted a qualitative study and offered suggestions as to how parents can effectively participate in the activities of their children's schools. The researchers concluded that schools should focus on developing partnerships with parents by making it easier for parents to participate in daily school activities, for example. 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. In the present study, 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 limited invitations from teachers for parents to get involved in their children's education resulted in changes in parental perceptions of the role played by the school in the development and maintenance of the partnership between the home and the school. The parents were clear about their desire for the school to offer opportunities for parents to participate in an environment they perceived as non-judgemental. This is a conclusion in keeping with prior studies focusing on the reasons motivating 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 parental involvement and input.

From the results of this study, Saudi parents of elementary school-aged children with learning disabilities shared the view that their ideas were not consistently considered valuable or respected. They support this view by noting that the schools often did not incorporate their suggestions for how their children could be successfully instructed. This could be attributed to the fact that teachers perceive themselves as experts in providing knowledge. Such a view perceives parents as 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, 2006).

In the present study, parents 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 reported that work constraints and time constraints prevented them from participating in the partnership between the home and school (Baker, 2016). The results of the present study suggest that other than the time and effort, parents also need to invest the emotional energy to engage with teachers and with the school. The results of the current study also 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 gestures are varied and include acts such as greetings, sending a note of gratitude for the work they did for the school, or making time available to interact with them. These gestures resulted in parents perceiving they were genuinely welcome in the school community. 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 (Siegal et al., 2019).

The current study participants indicated that work commitments were among the most important barriers preventing their involvement with their children's school (Murray et al., 2014). Several participants reported challenges confronted by working parents when they attempt to obtain leave work to attend activities at the schools where their children learn. 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.

Teacher training and perceptions about parental involvement

According to Curry and Adams (2014), 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. Such partnerships may produce benefits for both teachers and parents. For example, teachers report higher job satisfaction when the relationship with the parents of the children they instruct is healthy and communication is open (Binns et al., 1998). Notwithstanding this observation, teacher preparation programs addressing partnerships with parents are usually restricted to special education courses or early childhood education (Murray & Mereoiu, 2016). Ratcliff and Hunt (2009) contend that these challenges could be solved by ensuring that approaches to family participation are diverse, wide-ranging, and amalgamated across teacher preparation programs because just a single instructional method may not successfully prepare teachers to work with parents effectively.

When asked to identify barriers that hinder teacher/family involvement, teachers often identify lack of teacher preparation (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). Even though teachers are conscious of the important role of parental involvement, they often do not receive sufficient training in their pre-service programs or continuing professional development for partnering with parents in a meaningful manner (Hiatt-Michael, 2006). Nonetheless, to create effective partnerships with parents, teachers acquire more than skills and knowledge. This is a view supported by Ratcliff and Hunt (2009), who contend that potential teachers also need to develop and maintain an

openness to parental input. Instructors training such teachers may assist in nurturing an inclination among potential teachers to establish partnerships with parents by ensuring that the program has opportunities for interactive experiences between parents and teacher candidates.

Parents in the current and previous studies reported a willingness to increase their communication with teachers. They expressed a positive outlook when there is authentic two-way communication, where parents are provided with the opportunity to provide information instead of just receiving it. Such two-way communication must be based on mutual understanding and respect. Parents also indicated their willingness to be available for communication as they perceived any communication opportunity as empowering (Crozier & Davies, 2007). 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 (and see John-Akinola & Gabhainn, 2014).

Harris and Goodall (2008) argue that parents must be shown by teachers and by school leaders that they are important. This can be achieved by ensuring that parents are treated as a central part of the learning process, with schools providing support to those who wish to be involved. Although a recent study (Sime & Sheridan, 2014) concluded that positive relationships between the school and parents provide cultural capital because they afford parents access to knowledge, another study concluded 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 (McKenna & Millen, 2013). This suggests that a sense of belonging is required to facilitate engagement by parents but may not always be adequate unless schools and teachers communicate that they trust and appreciate parents' ability to share responsibility for their children's learning.

Limitations, Implications, and Recommendations

Regarding parental engagement, no approach will be 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 these barriers are inefficiencies in training models made available to professionals, a lack of evidence-based research addressing the attitudes of professionals, and a dearth of awareness regarding an approach's effectiveness (Wade et al., 2007). Even though research supports implementing a family-centered model when teaching and caring for learners with disabilities, negative and non-collaborative 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 expectations and doubts of researchers, policymakers, and professionals, the literature review for this study focused specifically on research that included the directly transcribed responses of parents. This formed the basis of the current 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). Quintanar and Warren (2008) generated valuable, actionable insights from interviews with parent volunteers. These insights were germane to developing a robust program involving parents. In the same vein, McKenna and Millen (2013) present parental presence and voice models, highlighting the role played by acknowledging, sharing, and respecting parental perceptions.

Previous studies have concluded that parents of children with learning disabilities are under increased stress and need mechanisms that can assist them in coping and adapting to the requirements of daily life (Park et al., 2002). As parents of children with learning disabilities become overwhelmed with having such children, they may lack the time or energy required to participate in the child's academic activities. Also, compared to parents of typically growing children, parents of children with learning disabilities shy away from attempts to find social support (Honig & Keller, 2004). Although the scope of the current study does 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.

Lichtman (2010) notes that the scale and size of a study can impose limitations on the extent to which findings may be generalized to a broader population. 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. 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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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	Bachelors	10
	Masters	3
Main student learning disability	Reading	9
	Writing	1
	Math	3