



Research Paper

The Parental Involvement in Enhancing the Quality of Virtual Education and an Examination of Its Challenges



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Abstract

Following recent developments and the exceptional circumstances that led to widespread school closures, many countries shifted their educational systems from traditional in-person classrooms to virtual learning environments. This transition not only transformed the educational process but also significantly altered family lifestyles, as parents and other family members assumed new roles and responsibilities in supporting students' learning. The present study aims to examine the role and extent of parental involvement in their children's virtual education, as well as to identify the challenges parents faced during school closures. This research is a systematic review that analyzes scholarly articles published between 2015 and 2021, using credible academic sources.

Findings indicate that the success of virtual education is largely dependent on the degree of parental engagement and management in facilitating children's interaction with educational content, teachers, and peers. The role of parents encompasses a wide range of dimensions, including organizing and managing the learning process, providing guidance and instruction, motivating learners, supplying necessary resources, monitoring learning activities and schedules, identifying learning difficulties, and actively accompanying the child through the educational journey. However, parents encountered several challenges, such as difficulties in balancing personal and educational responsibilities, decreased student motivation, disruptions to family routines, and issues related to technology and organizing appropriate learning environments. Finally, based on the literature review, the study emphasizes the critical role of schools and teachers in mitigating the barriers and challenges experienced by parents in the context of virtual education.

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Introduction

A significant proportion of students worldwide have experienced temporary school closures and the replacement of face-to-face instruction with virtual learning due to emergency situations and widespread changes in educational systems. Nearly 200 countries implemented school shutdowns, resulting in disruptions to the education of over 90% of students at all levels from primary to higher education (UNESCO, 2020). These widespread and abrupt closures had unprecedented and far-reaching effects on the daily lives of millions of students, families, and teachers across the globe. remarkably, more than half a billion children around the world were compelled to continue their learning in quarantine conditions through virtual education platforms (Cohen & Kupferschmidt, 2020).

virtual learning at home has increasingly replaced traditional school attendance, leading to a significant transformation in conventional educational structures. Teachers are no longer the sole providers of direct instruction; instead, parents have emerged as key contributors to their children's learning processes, taking on new and expanded responsibilities.

This sudden and widespread shift in roles necessitates a redefinition of the relationship between families and schools, a restructuring of parental roles, and an enhancement of parents' communication, instructional, and technological competencies. In response to these circumstances, parents are now expected to serve as active educational partners, playing a vital role in supporting their children's learning at home.

research has demonstrated that parental support plays a significant role in the success of learners within virtual learning environments (Borup, West, Graham, & Davies, 2014; Lee & Figueroa, 2012; Liu & Cavanaugh, 2011; Makrooni, 2019; Woofter, 2019). In fact, in the absence of the teacher's

physical presence in the classroom, parental involvement can function as a compensatory factor, helping students maintain the continuity and coherence necessary for ongoing learning.

Within this context, parents, siblings, and other family members have assumed new roles as facilitators of learning, quasi-teachers, and mentors roles that, in many cases, have been thrust upon them without prior preparation or adequate training. however, many teachers, families, and students were unprepared for this sudden shift and encountered various challenges in supporting children's learning at different levels of virtual education. Parents' perspectives on distance learning vary significantly. Some feel more connected to their children's schoolwork, while others perceive the process as an added burden (Selwyn, Banaji, Hadjithoma-Garstka, & Clark, 2011).

This diversity of views and experiences reflects differences in family circumstances, digital literacy levels, educational capabilities, and the supportive capacity of households. Sorensen (2012) study also identified two main factors as both the most challenging and the most significant aspects of virtual learning for parents: first, guiding their children's learning in alignment with classroom schedules while completing educational activities; and second, engaging with their children's virtual teachers. while existing research has predominantly focused on teachers' perspectives regarding children's virtual learning (Korkmaz & Toraman, 2020; Mulenga & Marbán, 2020) and students' experiences during remote education (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2020), significantly less attention has been paid to identifying the role and involvement of parents in their children's learning. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic has positioned parents as central actors in the educational process

actors without whom many aspects of virtual learning would not have been feasible. the rapid transition to virtual learning, particularly during the pandemic, has introduced both new opportunities and challenges for children and their parents. On one hand, this shift created a chance for parents to become more actively engaged in their children's educational journey. On the other hand, psychological stress, time constraints, lack of adequate knowledge and instructional skills, as well as insufficient digital infrastructure, have emerged as major barriers to fulfilling this new role effectively. Therefore, the quality and extent of parental support are critical factors that warrant careful consideration. The central question is: how, to what extent, and through what means can parents effectively contribute to their children's learning process? This issue becomes increasingly complex when examined through the lens of cultural, economic, and social differences, as well as educational and digital inequalities. Given the potential variation in parental roles, this study aims to explore the nature and extent of parental involvement in their children's virtual learning environments, along with the challenges they encounter throughout this process. By focusing on parents' lived experiences, the study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers, needs, and supportive strategies relevant to online education, ultimately contributing to more informed and effective policy development in this domain.

Research methodology

Research Questions

1. What is the role of parents in their children's virtual learning process?
2. What are the main challenges and concerns faced by parents when participating in their children's online education?

3. What is the role of school and teacher support in reducing the barriers experienced by parents during their children's virtual learning?

Research Methodology

This study is a review-analytical type, and it was conducted using internet searches with search engines. The content for review was selected from articles and documents sourced from reputable databases such as ERIC, EBSCO, ProQuest, Springer, Science Direct, and Google Scholar. The selection was based on the title, credibility of the article, and relevance to the research topic. The rationale behind choosing these databases is their accessibility and reliability. A purposive sampling method was used to select relevant articles related to the topic from available sources in the aforementioned databases, covering the period from 2015 to 2021. After reviewing the available materials, approximately 40 sources were identified, but due to a high degree of overlap among these sources, 20 primary sources were eventually chosen and subjected to thematic analysis.

Data collection was performed using a library-based method, which involved reviewing articles and documents related to the research components. For this purpose, key terms and titles such as "Distance Education," "Virtual Learning," "Online Education," "Role of Parents," "Parental Involvement," "COVID-19," "School Closures," and "Challenges in Virtual Learning" were identified and used to search the specified databases.

Research Finding

Question 1: What is the role of parents in the process of their children's virtual learning?

The results from the review of existing articles and documents indicate that parental support and management of educational activities are essential factors in maximizing the virtual learning opportunities for children. Research has shown that parental support has a significant impact on students' academic progress in virtual learning environments (Kim, 2020; Novianti & Garzia, 2020). In this process, parents take on new and unfamiliar responsibilities, effectively assuming the role of monitoring and guiding their children's learning in online environments (Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, & Cook, 2020). Particularly when children participate in virtual learning, parents can assist by structuring learning programs and scheduling them (Bhamani et al., 2020; Zhang, 2021).

On the other hand, virtual learning assigns responsibilities similar to those of teachers to parents, allowing them to help children adjust their time in educational programs based on their needs and preferences (Borup et al., 2014). Parental supervision of students and assisting with technical issues that arise during virtual learning is crucial, as children are not able to independently manage their learning (Borup, Chambers, & Stimson, 2019). According to Piaget's cognitive development theory, young children, especially in the first and second grades, are in the concrete operational stage and require guidance to learn abstract concepts (Simatwa, 2010). Therefore, these children need parental assistance to complete assignments and learn at home. Without this guidance, children are more likely to use technology for playing rather than for learning. Given the significant role of play in cognitive development (Goldschmidt, 2020), parents' attitudes toward technology and its use in education to facilitate learning are of great importance. Families, as the primary agents for promoting the use of technology for learning, can influence the virtual learning process (Zhu, Yang, MacLeod, Shi, & Wu, 2018).

Considering the rapid development of new communication technologies, virtual learning can offer new opportunities for enhancing collaboration and interdependence among students (Aldhafeeri & Khan, 2016). In this environment, children can improve their social skills and cognitive abilities through collaboration with peers (Immordino-Yang, Darling-Hammond, & Krone, 2018; Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Parents can also play a significant role in creating a supportive and social environment for children, helping them understand the limitations and complexities of the educational environment, thereby boosting motivation and facilitating learning (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron, & Osher, 2020).

Other studies indicate that parental support plays a crucial role in maintaining children's mental health and academic motivation during virtual learning. Children may experience feelings of isolation and lose motivation in such environments due to the lack of social interaction typically present in in-person classes. Therefore, parents can assist in reducing anxiety and stress by encouraging greater participation in learning activities and creating a joyful and engaging environment (Garton & Copland, 2019). Research has also shown that children need compassionate support from parents, teachers, and peers for success in virtual learning (Keaton & Gilbert, 2020). Accordingly, parental involvement in the virtual learning process, especially in creating a rich learning environment filled with learning resources, is of paramount importance.

Overall, the role of parents in monitoring and supporting their children's virtual learning is reinforced by their involvement in completing assignments and promoting self-regulation skills for virtual learning (Kong, 2020). Specifically, parental involvement can be observed in both quantitative forms (such as completing assignments or answering

questions) and qualitative forms (such as organizing assignments and creating a distraction-free environment) (Dettmers, Yotyodying, & Jonkmann, 2019). According to Goodall (2013), several indicators of parental involvement can contribute to children's learning, including providing educational resources, supervising learning activities at home, monitoring study time, recognizing learning difficulties, and supporting the learning process.

Question 2: What are the main challenges and concerns parents face when participating in their children's virtual learning?

The data analysis revealed that parents faced a range of structural, psychological, and technical challenges when engaging with their children's virtual learning. These challenges can be categorized into five main areas: the fundamental differences between in-person and virtual education, difficulties in assuming educational roles, inefficiency in virtual assessment systems, technological and infrastructural limitations, and concerns about the physical and mental health of children.

One of the key challenges identified was the dissatisfaction of parents with the quality of virtual education compared to in-person learning. Many parents believed that virtual education lacked the richness of social interactions, which are essential for the development of children's communication and social skills. This concern is also supported by the research literature, where scholars emphasize the difficulty of creating an active learning community in a virtual environment (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Additionally, some parents argued that virtual education is ineffective in promoting independent learning, especially for elementary school children, who require continuous guidance from adults. However, parents often lacked the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively fulfill an educational role in the virtual learning environment (Khurana, 2016). Assessment issues were

also highlighted as a major concern. Parents expressed doubts about the accuracy and reliability of virtual assessment tools, believing that assessments were sometimes delayed or lacked clear performance criteria (Jimenez, 2020). This led to a sense of distrust in the effectiveness of teaching-learning processes in the virtual space.

From a psychological and motivational perspective, parents noted a significant decline in children's motivation to learn. The sudden shift in educational structure, uncertainty about the future, the elimination of social interactions at school, and changes in grading systems were all factors directly related to the loss of student motivation (Daniel, 2020). This issue was particularly pronounced in families with working parents or limited time availability, especially those with labor-intensive jobs or heavy household responsibilities, who faced additional challenges in supporting their children's motivational needs. Studies also confirm that high levels of anxiety and distress were observed in both parents and children during the pandemic (Patrick et al., 2020).

From a technological and infrastructural standpoint, data indicated that a lack of digital tools, unstable internet connections, and low digital literacy among some parents were significant barriers to effective support for virtual learning. These challenges were more pronounced in families with multiple children or those living in rural or underprivileged areas (Dolan, 2016; Hale, Cotten, Drentea, & Goldner, 2010). Furthermore, parents of children with special needs faced inadequate educational services and were forced to assume a support-teacher role, despite lacking both the time and training required for this task (Hawkins, 2020; Wong et al., 2014). Additionally, technical challenges such as internet outages, inefficiencies in educational platforms, and the absence of real-time technical support disrupted the learning

process (Abuhammad, 2020; Bacher-Hicks, Goodman, & Mulhern, 2021).

Parental concerns regarding the physical and social consequences of prolonged technology use were also part of the findings. Some parents expressed concerns about the negative impact of extended screen time on their children's vision and overall physical health (Mertala, 2019). Additionally, parents worried about the reduced quality of social interactions and the negative effects of technology on the development of their children's social skills (Bhamani et al., 2020; Reid Chassiakos et al., 2016). Moreover, balancing work, household, and educational responsibilities was a primary concern for parents. Many parents, unprepared for this new responsibility, found themselves juggling multiple roles simultaneously, leading to increased stress, fatigue, and decreased effectiveness. In this context, issues such as children's inability to concentrate at home, lack of a structured schedule, and reluctance to accept the educational role of parents further complicated the learning process.

Finally, concerns about the quality of the final learning outcomes emerged as another recurring theme in parental experiences. The mismatch between the volume of assignments and the capacity and time available for families, the lack of continuity in content delivery, and the absence of opportunities for live and play-based interactions particularly in the early grades diminished the cognitive, social, and emotional growth of students. Parents believed that virtual education could not fully replace the in-person school experience, as many interpersonal skills are only developed through face-to-face interactions.

Question 3: What is the role of school and teacher support in reducing the barriers experienced by parents in the process of their children's virtual education?

The findings from the literature review and educational experiences indicate that the success of virtual education implementation depends on teachers and schools understanding the biological, psychological, and social conditions of parents and striving to address the diverse family needs. The diversity of family situations requires differentiated approaches by teachers in their interactions with families, as some families face significant challenges while others do not. At the regional level, it is essential to provide supportive resources tailored to each family's circumstances (Kim, 2020). In this regard, teachers must play a role beyond teaching and become facilitators of communication, creating virtual learning communities. These communities should be interactive, flexible, and supportive to prevent social isolation and strengthen students' social presence (Borup et al., 2014). Maintaining continuous communication with students and parents in these environments helps to establish effective educational bonds. Moreover, virtual education requires a review and adaptation of the curriculum that ensures its feasibility and effectiveness. Given the shift to distance learning, educational regions must devise strategies to implement these programs in alternative formats (Keaton & Gilbert, 2020). This is especially important in preventing academic setbacks.

Access to technology and the presence of guides in virtual learning spaces are common challenges. Providing training to parents about learning platforms and tools, employing home learning coaches or support staff, and enhancing the content knowledge of parents can significantly reduce these challenges (Zhu et al., 2018). Additionally, reorganizing the teaching staff so that some teachers focus on content design while others provide learning support to students is also recommended (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In the context of distance learning, students' attitudes toward learning and

assessments have changed; they are more concerned about passing grades than acquiring actual learning. Therefore, providing education and psychological support to shift this mindset and emphasize learning as the main goal is crucial (Garton & Copland, 2019). When teaching young children, particularly those at an early age, socialization and interpersonal interactions should be prioritized. At this age, children learn important skills such as cooperation, turn-taking, and forming positive relationships through play, which requires interaction with peers (Immordino-Yang et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl, 2019).

From a family perspective, parents need emotional and technical support from teachers. Understanding the efforts and limitations of parents by schools can help maintain family mental health and create a positive learning environment for children (Garbe et al., 2020). Regular contact between schools and parents to identify the specific needs of each family is recommended as a key action. Practically, it is essential to educate parents on learning systems, key educational concepts, and how to communicate with teachers. Parents are advised to maintain a regular sleep schedule and a routine similar to school days for their children, pay attention to personal hygiene, and create a quiet, distraction-free learning environment. Emphasizing healthy nutrition, exposure to natural light, virtual social interaction with peers, and spending family time are other effective ways to support children's virtual learning. Parents should discuss returning to school positively with their children and use visual tools such as class or teacher photos to strengthen emotional bonds. Activities like handwashing as a game or participating in household chores can also boost the child's morale.

Discussion & Conclusions

The findings of this study emphasize that the role of parents in the educational process, especially during the global crisis of COVID-19, has become even more crucial. As previously mentioned, parents play a fundamental role in all stages of children's growth and education. The absence of care, guidance, and effective participation can have serious consequences for both the learning process and the mental-emotional health of children. In this context, parent participation, also known as parental engagement, involves a set of supportive actions that both at home and in interaction with the school, contribute to enhancing the quality of student learning (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Given the forced transition of the education system to a virtual format during the pandemic, parents' involvement in the teaching-learning process, especially at home in supervising homework, expanded significantly (Kong, 2020). The data from this study showed that parents have been active in four main aspects of the virtual education process: a) organizing and managing the learning environment at home, b) guiding and teaching educational content, c) facilitating the communication between students and teachers, and d) providing motivation and emotional support. These results underscore the importance of parents' roles in creating structure and discipline for their children in a home learning environment, especially since many children struggled with time management, concentration, and self-regulation.

The analyses also revealed that parent participation in virtual education decreases as the age of the students' increases. This finding aligns with previous studies that have shown

that parents play a more prominent role in the elementary education phase and their involvement significantly decreases in the secondary school years, particularly in high school (Eccles & Harold, 2013). This trend is partly due to the general perception that older students need more independence and have the necessary skills to manage their own learning. Furthermore, differences were observed between public and private schools regarding the level and type of parent involvement. Parents of students in public schools dedicated more time to providing educational support, while in private schools, teachers played a more active role in guiding students' academic work, even remotely. These findings reflect differences in educational policies, available resources, and home-school interactions between the two types of schools.

On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic placed numerous pressures on families, including anxieties related to school, lack of financial and technical resources, and challenges related to time management. These conditions highlight the need for increased psychological, technical, and educational

support for parents, particularly during remote learning periods. Even parents who were actively engaged reported experiencing burnout due to the psychological burden and additional responsibilities. In this regard, teachers and the education system need to adopt an empathetic and holistic perspective, identifying the diverse needs of students and families and utilizing learner-centered approaches to create safe, flexible, and collaborative spaces for virtual learning. Developing effective communication among teachers, parents, and students for the efficient use of educational technologies is also a key requirement in enhancing the quality of home learning.

Ultimately, the results of this study emphasize the necessity of designing and implementing educational programs for parents. Educational policymakers should, based on the identified challenges, prepare courses to enhance digital literacy and empower parents in distance learning. Such interventions can help reduce gaps in access, support, and participation, ultimately contributing to meaningful and sustainable learning for children.

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