

Parental Involvement in Primary School Students' English Language Education in Kazakhstan

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To improve the quality of education, it is important that parents participate in the education of children. The primary objective of this study is to examine the different forms of parental involvement in the English language learning process of children in Kazakhstan and to identify the challenges parents encounter in offering support, utilizing a qualitative research methodology. To collect relevant information, a semi-structured interview was conducted with seven parents living in Astana. Questions were asked and analyzed in relation to Epstein's Typology of Parental Involvement. According to the results, all parents noted the importance of children's learning English for their children's future lives. In addition, the findings demonstrated that the study sample's parental participatory action types were mainly in line with Epstein's Typology. To be specific, Epstein identifies six types of parental involvement. This research found that parents engaged in four types similar to those in Epstein's theory: home-based support, such as providing English books and educational apps; school communication, including regular engagement with teachers; community engagement, like utilizing libraries and language centers; and learning facilitation, which involves encouraging independent study habits and a positive attitude toward English learning. However, two types from Epstein's model were not observed among parents. Interestingly, the study also identified two additional forms of parental involvement that go beyond Epstein's Typology. Based on the findings, it is suggested that the school should help parents with resources for home learning and involve them in school activities, while teachers should communicate regularly with parents and create fun English learning events. Parents should connect with community groups for extra learning opportunities.

Keywords: Parents, parental involvement, English language, involvement difficulties

Introduction

The implementation of trilingual education in Kazakhstan, which integrates Kazakh, Russian, and English into the curriculum, marks a significant milestone in the country's educational reforms. Since independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has transitioned from Soviet-era practices to a modern, globally competitive education system. Trilingual education is a cornerstone of these reforms, with the 2019 State Program for Language Policy aiming for 30% of the population to be proficient in Kazakh, Russian, and English by 2025 (Kambatyrova et al., 2022). English, in particular, is seen as essential for accessing global resources and enhancing Kazakhstan's integration into the global economy (Nazarbayev, 2007). To support this vision, English language instruction was introduced in primary schools starting in grade three (MoES, 2015). However, the successful implementation of such educational policies requires active involvement from key stakeholders, including headteachers, teachers, and parents (Viennet & Pont, 2017). Parental involvement, in particular, has been widely recognized as a critical factor in children's academic success, especially in foreign language acquisition (Goodall, 2018; HurtaoTorres, 2016; Dewi, 2017).

Despite its importance, limited research has focused on how parents in Kazakhstan engage with and support their children's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning.

This study addresses a significant gap by examining the perspectives and practices of parents in Kazakhstan regarding their children's EFL education. While the government's efforts to promote English instruction are commendable, many parents face challenges such as limited English proficiency or reliance on their own insufficient language-learning experiences (Kuspan, 2020). These obstacles, coupled with the lack of widespread use of English in daily life, underscore the need to understand and enhance parental involvement in EFL learning.

The purpose of this study is to explore how parents support their children's English language education, focusing on their perceptions, engagement strategies, and challenges. Specifically, the research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do parents in Kazakhstan perceive parental involvement in education?
2. What are their views on English education?
3. What forms of parental involvement are most common in supporting English learning?
4. What challenges do parents face in engaging with their children's English education?

The findings of this research will offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and parents, emphasizing the importance of parental involvement in English education. The study seeks to inform the development of effective parental engagement programs and contribute to the broader discourse on parental involvement in education, both within and beyond Kazakhstan.

Literature Review

This review synthesizes existing literature on parental involvement and its significance in fostering successful English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning among children. It explores contemporary definitions of parental involvement, emphasizing the importance of early EFL introduction and its correlation with academic success. Key strategies to enhance parental engagement, alongside the challenges parents often face in supporting their children's language acquisition, are discussed. Anchored in Epstein's parental involvement typology, this framework is utilized to examine prior research and illuminate effective practices, providing a theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding the role of parents in EFL learning.

The Role of Parental Involvement and Early Introduction in EFL Success

Parental involvement, often termed parental engagement, encompasses parents' active participation in their children's education, a topic extensively studied in academic research (Dewi, 2017; Kalaycı & Öz, 2018; Sara, 2021). Despite varied definitions, Robinson et al. (2014) conceptualized it as both collaboration with educators and educational institutions, and parent-child communication focused on improving academic outcomes. Epstein's (2018) framework extends this to include home learning, school-home communication, school/community involvement, and decision-making roles. Regarding English as a Foreign Language (EFL), early introduction is supported by the critical period hypothesis (Singleton & Lengyel, 1995; Birdsong, 1999) and evidence suggesting that delayed learning reduces mastery potential (Banfi, 2015). Studies (Jeynes, 2012; Hurtado et al., 2016) indicate that factors like professional teachers, parental awareness, and early literacy activities, such as reading stories, significantly influence children's EFL acquisition and academic success. This underscores the critical role of parents in fostering their children's language development.

Parental Involvement Strategies for Enhancing Language Learning and Academic Success

Parental involvement activities play a vital role in improving children's academic performance, with behaviors such as valuing education, establishing routines, promoting reading, and engaging in family activities contributing significantly to success (Bronck & Dauksas, 2012; Clark, 1983). While general parental involvement is beneficial, subject-specific activities, such as collaborative reading, have shown particular promise in enhancing literacy skills and academic progress (Sénéchal et al., 2008; Bus et al., 1995). Strategies to strengthen parental involvement in English language learning include using multimedia resources, encouraging reading and conversations, and fostering supportive communication (Anggraini et al., 2022; Steiner, 2014; Sad & Gürbüzürk, 2013). Research suggests that parental guidance in reading practices and communicative approaches, such as questioning and thought-sharing, motivates children and improves their cognitive and language abilities (Hindin & Paratore, 2016). Additionally, inquiry-based and technology-enabled methods enhance critical thinking and autonomy, though parents must carefully monitor online resources to ensure their educational value (Stepanechko & Kozub, 2022). Overall, active and tailored parental involvement is crucial in fostering children's language development and academic achievements.

Challenges Parents Face in Assisting Their Children's EFL

It's clear that parents want to help their kids with their education, but there are a number of barriers in the way. Numerous obstacles to parental involvement have been identified by earlier research (Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Kuspan, 2020; Liu & Chen, 2018; Miller & Goodliffe, 2013; Nikolov & Djigunović, 2006; Öztürk, 2013; Sara, 2021). The language barrier that parents, who do not speak English well, must overcome is a major obstacle (Nikolov et al., 2006). Parental support in their children's acquisition of the English language can also be impacted by issues like a lack of appropriate learning resources, trouble keeping kids

motivated and engaged, inconsistent practice outside of the classroom, low parental income and inadequate schooling (Griffiths & Campbell, 2009; Liu & Chen, 2018; Miller & Goodliffe, 2013). For instance, Kuspan (2020) found that parents in Kazakhstan may find it difficult to adequately assist their kids in learning English because of their own insufficient language learning background, which could result in a decline in parent-child communication. Overall, the research points to insufficient English competence as the main reason why non-native speaking parents may find it difficult to support their children's English language learning.

Epstein's Typology of Parental Involvement

This study employs Epstein's typology to examine parental involvement in Kazakhstan's English education. Epstein's model, widely recognized in education systems (Kuspan, 2020), emphasizes overlapping spheres of influence—home, school, and community—and their impact on children (Epstein et al., 2018). The framework outlines six types of involvement: parenting (creating a supportive home), communication (maintaining school-home dialogue), volunteering (supporting school activities), learning at home (aiding with homework), decision-making (participating in school governance), and community collaboration (leveraging local resources). These modes collectively enhance educational experiences, enabling parents to act as pivotal partners in children's learning. While this typology has been applied globally, its implementation in Kazakhstan remains underexplored. This study investigates how parents engage with their children's English language learning and examines barriers to effective involvement.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing semi-structured interviews to explore patterns of parental involvement in children's English language learning and identify barriers to effective engagement. Qualitative methods are well-suited for capturing the depth of participants' lived experiences within specific contexts (Busetto et al., 2020; Polkinghorne, 2005), offering nuanced insights that complement the broader patterns typically uncovered by quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2012; Reissner & Whittle, 2022). The research focuses on parental involvement in English education at BINOM schools in Astana, specifically targeting parents of Grade 3 and 4 Kazakh-medium students. This school was selected for its modern instructional strategies and diverse parental demographics. A purposive sampling method, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018), was used to recruit seven participants aged 25–40 who were fluent in Kazakh or English and held at least a bachelor's degree. Interviews were conducted with four participants in per-

Participant	Parent	Education	Age	English Language skills
Aidana	Mother	Higher Education	35	University course
Aizere	Mother	Higher Education	30	Professional course

Yernar	Father	College	37	Beginner
Sana	Mother	Higher	38	University course
Dana	Mother	Higher	37	University course
Zhanar	Mother	Higher	35	University course
Gulnar	Mother	Graduate	37	Professional level

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

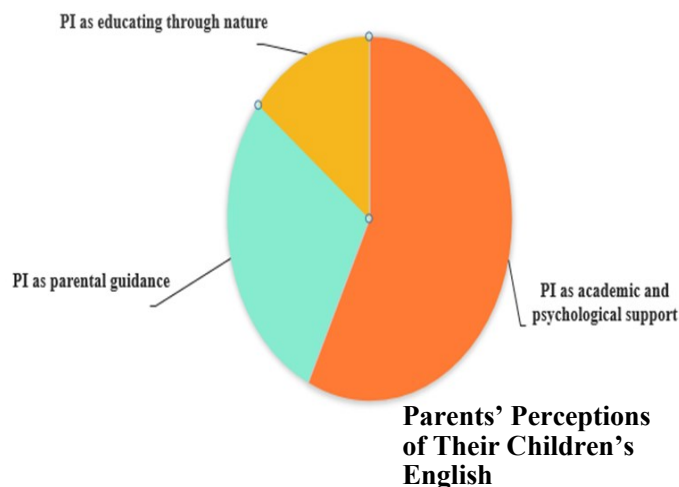
The study utilized semi-structured interviews to gather data, offering flexibility for participants to share their experiences while ensuring a structured approach (Magaldi & Berler, 2018; Adams, 2015). Interviews included 14 questions, exploring participant backgrounds and parental involvement based on Epstein et al.'s (2018) framework. After receiving ethical approval from Nazarbayev University, invitation letters and consent forms were disseminated through class teachers to parents via WhatsApp groups. Eligible parents participated in 40-minute interviews conducted in Kazakh or English, either in person, online, or through audio recording. Data was securely stored on password-protected devices and cloud storage. NVivo software facilitated thematic analysis, organizing findings into nodes for structured and reliable insights Limna (2023). Ethical safeguards included pseudonymization, secure data handling, and participant rights to withdraw. Efforts were made to minimize discomfort by conducting interviews respectfully and accommodating participants' schedules and language preferences.

Findings and Discussion

Parents' Understandings of Parental Involvement

The data analysis identified that there are different understandings of parental involvement. These understandings included academic and psychological support, parental guidance, and educating children through nature (see Figure 1 for the distribution of parents' understandings of parental involvement). Most parents emphasized the importance of their supportive role, highlighting that active parental engagement enhances children's academic success and emotional well-being. For example, one mother noted the value of assisting children both academically and personally. Others saw parental involvement as providing guidance, such as monitoring behavior and teaching life skills, reflecting a focus on nurturing well-rounded development. One father uniquely identified the importance of instilling interest in nature and foreign cultures, suggesting that outdoor activities and exposure to Western culture enrich children's global perspective and language acquisition. Collectively, these insights underscore the multifaceted ways parents in Kazakhstan conceptualize their involvement in their children's education.

Figure 1 Distribution of Parents' Understandings of Parental Involvement



Language Learning

Parents expressed overwhelmingly positive views about their children's English language learning, emphasizing its significance for academic success and future opportunities. Some parents prioritized English because it is part of the summative assessment (БЖБ) in schools, closely monitoring their children's performance. For instance, Aizere shared, "My daughter scored 4 out of 5 on her БЖБ, which made me concerned. I plan to meet her teacher to address her weaknesses in English." Similarly, Sana stated, "I check my daughter's English scores on the Kundelik platform and contact her teacher if her performance declines." Other parents highlighted the long-term benefits of English proficiency, citing its importance for studying abroad and securing better education and career prospects. As Dana remarked, "English is vital for my child to access quality education and job opportunities." Overall, parents recognized English as a critical tool for their children's academic and professional success. Parental involvement in children's English language learning plays a critical role in shaping their academic success. Various forms of engagement can be categorized into distinct types, each impacting a child's educational development in unique ways. Parenting, for instance, focuses on creating an environment conducive to learning at home. Parents in this category provide resources such as English-language books, songs, and videos to enhance their child's language exposure. As one father, Yernar, noted, "I play English songs in the car and let my kids watch English cartoons to immerse them in the language." Learning at home refers to the direct involvement of parents in their children's educational activities, such as assisting with homework or engaging in reading sessions. Dana, for example, shared, "I encourage my child to read English books aloud, check his homework, and review grammar points regularly." Communication between parents and schools also significantly affects students' learning. By maintaining a relationship with teachers, parents ensure they are aware of their child's progress and can offer necessary support. Sana, a parent, explained, "I often contact the teacher to understand how I can support my child's English learning at home."

Another form of involvement, collaborating with the community, involves parents leveraging external resources like libraries, language centers, and educational workshops. Dana highlighted, “I take my children to community libraries and language centers to help them improve their English skills.” Although less common, volunteering is also an avenue through which parents can contribute to their child’s learning experience, typically through school events or classroom assistance. Gulanar admitted, “I haven’t been involved in school volunteering yet, but I’d be interested when my child gets older.” Similarly, decision-making involves parents in school-related decisions, but opportunities for such involvement were relatively limited in the study. Zhanar, a parent, remarked, “I haven’t had the chance to influence decisions, but I’d like to contribute to curriculum choices in the future.” No-force parenting, in which parents avoid pressuring their children, emphasizes a non-coercive approach to learning. Aidana explained, “I don’t force my child to learn English if he’s not interested; I believe it’s better when he learns at his own pace.” Lastly, cultivating good habits pertains to fostering independent learning and consistency. Sana emphasized, “I encourage regular reading, educational apps, and journaling to help my daughter develop independent learning habits.” These forms of involvement demonstrate how parents’ strategies in shaping their children’s language learning environments and attitudes can significantly impact their academic outcomes.

In sum, parental involvement in education is multifaceted, with each type providing different kinds of support that ultimately shape children’s learning experiences. From creating a rich linguistic environment at home to collaborating with educational institutions and the community, these efforts collectively contribute to a child’s academic progress, especially in English language acquisition.

Challenges of Parental Involvement in Children’s Learning English

Parents face several challenges in supporting their children’s English language learning. A significant issue is children’s lack of interest, as many show little enthusiasm for engaging with English. For example, Zhanar shared: “When I wanted to read English storybooks for him several times, he just listened without any reaction. When I asked him what he understood from this story, he just replied, ‘Nothing.’” Another challenge is the lack of teachers’ attention to English in schools that prioritize STEM subjects, forcing parents to intervene unpleasantly.

Sana remarked: “When I do not keep in touch with English-language teachers consciously, they just seem to ignore my child.” Additionally, the absence of an English-speaking environment limits children’s motivation and opportunities to practice, as Aizere explained: “I really hope there are some free extra English-speaking corners at school. If, in the coming future, there will be such opportunities, I will let my child attend these kinds of practical learning centers without any hesitation.” Finally, financial constraints make it difficult for many parents to afford private tutors or additional resources. Aidana expressed: “It is very difficult to find an English-native teacher for my kids because it costs more for foreign teachers to teach English to our kids.”

These challenges highlight the need for more engaging school programs, better teacher involvement, and accessible language-learning resources.

Summary of Major Findings

This study explores parental involvement in Kazakhstan through Epstein’s framework of six types of involvement and identifies two additional novel types: *no-force parenting* and *cultivating good habits*. Key findings include:

Parenting: Parents provide a supportive home environment, ensuring basic needs are met and fostering English language exposure, such as through books and storytelling.

Learning at Home: Parents actively support their children’s English learning by assisting with homework, speaking English, and using language resources.

Communication: Parents maintain contact with teachers to monitor progress and address learning needs.

Community Collaboration: While limited, parents seek community resources like libraries and language centers to supplement education.

Challenges in Volunteering and Decision-Making: Opportunities for parents to volunteer or participate in school decisions are notably lacking.

The two new involvement types introduced are:

No-Force Parenting: Encouraging autonomy and intrinsic motivation in a positive learning environment.

Cultivating Good Habits: Developing skills like self-regulation and persistence to support lifelong learning.

Despite these efforts, challenges such as children’s lack of interest, limited English instruction, absence of English-speaking environments, and financial constraints hinder effective parental involvement. Addressing these requires collaborative efforts from educators, policymakers, and communities.

In conclusion, this study highlights the multifaceted roles parents play in their children’s English language education, offering actionable insights for enhancing parental involvement to support academic success.

Discussion

In examining parental involvement in Kazakhstan, this study sheds light on the multifaceted ways parents contribute to their children’s English learning, highlighting both the challenges they face and the strategies they adopt. The parents in this study consider parental involvement not only essential for academic success but also for fostering emotional growth through active guidance, monitoring, and the encouragement of diverse learning experiences, such as exposure to nature and foreign cultures (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001; Dewi, 2017; Hornby, 2000; Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). English is viewed by these parents as vital for success in school assessments like БЖБ, as well as a critical global language that opens up future educational and career opportunities (Renandya & Widodo, 2016). The parents believe that early exposure to English offers long-term benefits, and they strongly emphasize the need for collaborative efforts between schools, families, and communities to support their children’s language acquisition.

The study aligns with Epstein et al.'s (2018) typology of parental involvement, identifying strategies such as creating supportive home environments, engaging in communication with teachers, and providing learning resources like educational apps and books. This reflects research emphasizing the positive influence of home-based parenting on children's language skills (Pretorius & Machet, 2003; Linse, 2005). While parents reported occasional involvement in volunteering and decision-making, these forms of participation were less prominent, echoing findings in other contexts where parents lack opportunities to contribute (Kimu, 2012; Wei & Ni, 2023). Interestingly, the study also uncovered two additional types of parental involvement not captured by Epstein's model: "no-force parenting" and cultivating good learning habits. "No-force parenting," which promotes autonomy, open communication, and confidence, is in line with research showing that providing children with autonomy supports their academic growth and overall well-being (Grijalva-Quiñonez et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2019; Valdés-Cuervo et al., 2022). On the other hand, the cultivation of good habits—such as regular practice, self-learning, and using educational tools—is another vital approach, aligning with the findings of Karzhan and Bauyrzhanov (2023) and emphasizing the importance of self-directed learning. This resonates with Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985), which stresses the role of intrinsic motivation and autonomy in fostering optimal academic outcomes.

However, the study also reveals several challenges that hinder parental involvement in children's English learning. One of the most significant barriers is children's lack of interest in the subject, which leads to disengagement and highlights the importance of creating enjoyable and motivating learning environments (Choi et al., 2019). Another concern raised by parents is the insufficient attention given to English language lessons by teachers, often due to the prioritization of other subjects like mathematics and Kazakh. This not only limits students' exposure to English but also underscores the need for qualified and engaged English teachers (Dincer et al., 2013). Additionally, the absence of an English-speaking environment, which is crucial for language acquisition, further hinders children's development (Saminathan et al., 2020). Financial constraints also play a significant role, as many parents are unable to afford private tutoring, leading to inequalities in educational opportunities (Kobakhidze & Šastný, 2023; Hajar, 2024). The study, therefore, calls for concerted efforts from educators, policymakers, and communities to address these challenges by creating supportive and resource-rich environments, enhancing teacher involvement, and ensuring equitable access to educational resources for all families. Ultimately, by acknowledging these barriers and working collaboratively to overcome them, we can better support children in their English learning journey and promote a more inclusive and effective educational system in Kazakhstan.

Recommendations

This study offers actionable suggestions for enhancing parental involvement in English language education at the primary level in Kazakhstan. Key recommendations for stakeholders, organized by themes, include:

Parenting and Learning at Home

1. **Provide Resources and Guidance:** Equip parents with tools like English children's books, language
2. **Support Parents with Limited English Proficiency:** Offer tailored resources and guidance to help these parents engage effectively in their children's education.
3. **Promote Engagement:** Host workshops and sessions that emphasize the importance of parental involvement and provide practical strategies for supporting learning at home.

Volunteering and Decision-Making Opportunities

1. **Introduce Opportunities:** Schools should actively involve parents in volunteering roles and decision-making processes related to children's education.
2. **Representation in Committees:** Encourage diverse parental participation in school committees and educational planning.
3. **Clear Communication:** Establish communication channels to inform parents about opportunities to contribute and actively invite their participation.
4. **Training and Resources:** Provide parents and schools with training programs to facilitate effective collaboration in school decision-making and events.

Communication between Teachers and Parents

1. **Establish Regular Channels:** Use meetings, email updates, apps, or online portals for consistent updates on student progress and needs.
2. **Encourage Proactive Communication:** Foster open dialogue between parents and teachers to address concerns, share successes, and strategize for student support.
3. **Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Train stakeholders in effective and culturally sensitive communication practices.
4. **Leverage Technology:** Explore tools like WhatsApp, apps, or online platforms to enhance real-time communication and collaboration.

Community Involvement and Implication

1. **Partner with Community Organizations:** Schools should collaborate with community agencies to offer additional resources, such as funding and extracurricular learning opportunities.
2. **Expand Learning Beyond School:** Promote community-led initiatives like libraries, clubs, or workshops to enrich students' language exposure.

English Language Teaching Environment

1. **Create a Positive Atmosphere:** Foster environments that motivate students to practice English both inside and outside the classroom.
2. **Incorporate Educational Games and Interaction:** Utilize games, peer interaction, and hands-on experiences to engage children in meaningful language practice.
3. **Encourage Practice Beyond Home:** Provide opportunities for students to use English in real-world settings to boost fluency and confidence.

By implementing these recommendations, educators, policymakers, and communities can strengthen parental involvement and create a robust support system for children's English language education in Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

This study explored parental involvement in English language education in Kazakhstan, applying Epstein's framework of six types of involvement while identifying two new dimensions: no-force parenting and cultivating good habits. The findings reveal that parents provide a supportive home environment, assist with homework, communicate with teachers, and seek community resources, although challenges such as limited English exposure and financial barriers hinder their effectiveness. Additionally, there is a lack of opportunities for parents to engage in volunteering and decision-making at schools, which further limits their involvement in the educational process.

The study also highlights two novel types of parental involvement: no-force parenting, which promotes autonomy and intrinsic motivation, and cultivating good habits, which focuses on developing essential skills like self-regulation and persistence in children's learning.

To enhance parental involvement in English education at the primary level, the study recommends several strategies for key stakeholders, including providing resources to support home learning, introducing volunteering and decision-making opportunities for parents, improving communication between parents and teachers, fostering community involvement, and creating a positive English language learning environment. These actions can help overcome the challenges faced by parents and provide a more collaborative and supportive approach to children's language education.

This research underscores the multifaceted role parents play in supporting their children's English language development and offers actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and communities. By strengthening parental involvement, it is possible to improve students' academic success and language proficiency. Future research should further explore the effectiveness of these strategies and investigate parental involvement across diverse demographics and regions of Kazakhstan.

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