



The Influence of Parent-Teacher Meetings on Early Childhood Students' Academic Performance: Prospective Teachers' Perceptions

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Parent-teacher meetings (PTM) play an integral role in a Abstract child's education. The importance of PTM is even more critical for Early childhood Education (ECE). ECE is not a novice concept in Pakistan; however, parents have only realized now that learning during early childhood goes beyond the walls of the classrooms and can only realize its full potential if parents are actively participating in their children's education. Therefore, PTM is the time when parents and teachers can collaborate to work for the education of the children. The current study explores the prospective teachers' perceptions of PTMs and their influence on ECE students' performance. The data were gathered from seven participants through an open-ended, semi-structured interview guide. The analysis concluded that prospective teachers had a good understanding of PTMs processes and generally had a positive attitude toward them. Prospective teachers also believed that PTMs positively influence students' academic performance.

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Introduction

The most sacred responsibility humanity has been accomplishing since its existence is to pass the knowledge on and teaching life skills to future generations. Inducting the younger generation in the process of doing, knowing, and teaching is indistinguishable from each other and is usually done through informal means of education. However, it is only recently; educational institutions have emerged as distinctive places to serve the purpose. Teaching "how to teach" is yet another critical task carried by those who understand. Despite teaching being the very nature of human beings, prospective teachers often find teaching an arduous task owing to the gaps in their induction courses and the ground realities of an actual classroom (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009).

With an increased focus on preschool education and its role in supporting the children's readiness for school, governments,

even in low and middle-income countries, have been lavishly spending on making early childhood education (ECE) more accessible for children (Lu, Black, & Richter, 2016; Maldonado-Carreño et al., 2021). The role of parents' involvement in ECE is equally essential and has lasting effects (Wolf, 2020). Through PTM, parents have first-hand knowledge of a child's behavior at home, whereas teachers would reflect on his class dealings. If work in unison, parents' concerns and teachers' feedback could benefit a child's overall development (Lekli & Kaloti, 2015).

Much of the strength and consistency of the parent-teacher relationship is determined by the student's academic success (Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000). Yet, how a teacher engages the parent and communicates with them can make or break the whole process (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004; Lu et al., 2016; Minke & Anderson, 2003). Therefore, a teacher should

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have developed a nuanced awareness of the analogy of an engaging teacher and parents' involvement before their induction in the classroom (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Wolf, 2020). Muscott (2002) explains that building an effective relationship with parents requires teachers to have developed skills like listening, patience, and creating emotional connections with families. To empathize not with the students only but with the families in times of distress and should be apt at minimizing the barriers hindering the progress of the preschool children, such as disparities in socio-economic groups, broken families, financial instability, and skilful handling of indifferent parents (Tsotetsi, van Wyk, & Lemmer, 2008).

There is sufficient literature available on the perception of parents on school engagements, benefits of parent involvement, strategies of how to engage parents effectively, barriers to effective engagement of preschool parents (Ashraf, 2019; Brown, Harris, Jacobson, & Trotti, 2014; Faize & Dahar, 2011; Nasir, Farooq, & Ali, 2013; Pedro, Miller, & Bray, 2012; Rafiq, Fatima, Sohail, Saleem, & Khan, 2013). The current study sought to understand prospective teachers' perceptions on parent-teacher meetings and their influence on the academic performance of ECE students.

Literature Review

Parent-teacher meetings are a protocol observed in all schools regularly for all the students and are usually the most frequently used communication tool between parents and teachers. Routine PTMs are always necessarily arranged by the administrators, teachers are the participants, and with parents addressed are the students' mental. physical and socio-emotional challenges that might have hindered their progress in their studies (Swap, 1993). Plenty of literature is available in the current domain and promote parents as enemies to teachers and so is based on tips and suggestion for teachers on how to handle troublesome and tricky parents (Enoch, 1995; Studer, 1993; Swap, 1993). On the contrary, ample evidence advocates the collaborative approach that promotes establishing trustworthy relationship between parents and teachers and fostering respect for each other's expertise (Minke & Anderson, 2003; Swap, 1993). However, some of the studies suggested having students as the potential contributor in parentteacher meetings as it may lead to increased parents' attendance in PTMs (<u>Bjorklund & Burger</u>, 1987).

PTMs are considered an effective communication tool between parents and teachers (Lekli & Kaloti, 2015; Lu et al., 2016; Maldonado-Carreño et al., 2021: Minke & Anderson, 2003). Collective efforts by teachers and school administration have yielded positive results in improving the quality of learners and maintaining relations between parents and teachers (Muhammad, Shah, Muhammad, & Shah, 2017). Parents' relation and their emotional classroom security. and help. motivation positively affect parents' involvement school activities, improving students' performance significantly (Parveen, Hussain, & Reba, 2016). Parents' qualification is also considered a factor in determining parents' participation. Parents who are actively involved in children's education activities have generally improved parental attitudes, have a nuanced understanding of their children's psychology, and are capable of successfully communicating with their children. Another study conducted on preschool parents concluded that both parent involvement and more active type of involvement are linked to proficient basic early school skills such as improved social, motor, and skills language and greater adaptive 1999). development (Marcon. Α conducted in Pakistan endorsed the study under discussion with their conclusion that parents' active involvement was found to have positively affected students' holistic development (Rafig et al., 2013). Financially sound parents who have provided better moral support inevitably have children performing better than their class fellows (Ghazi, Ali, Shahzad, & Khan, 2010; Shahazad, Abdullah, Fatima, Raiz, & Mehmood, 2015). In general, parent participation in school is associated with higher academic performance both grades and standardized performance (Brown et al., 2014).

Parents' participation is crucial for their children's studies and is an equally contributing factor in improving the quality of school processes and teachers' performance (Nasir et al., 2013). Schools acknowledge parents' involvement and consider their opinion significant for better school processes. Contrary to that, a study conducted on teachers and parents concluded that parents have strongly linked their low participation to the unwelcome

school environment. Also, during regular school days, hard-to-reach administrations have lessened parents' trust in administrations, leading to low parental engagement.

Besides, some factors have adversely affected the success of PTMs. Studies have revealed that parents are aware that their attendance in PTMs provides them with a deeper insight into the school's process and positively affects their children's academic progress. Yet, they are reluctant to attend the PTMs regularly due to confusion on the purpose of PTMs, lack of trust in teachers and school management, conflict, and language as a communication barrier (Ashraf, 2019). Gender is also said to have adversely affected parental involvement. Parents of male students are more inclined to attend PTMs (Batool & Aziz, 2018).

It is evident that much of the parental engagement in academics, school processes, and in PTMs is dependent upon the trust the schools have developed during a school year and the way a teacher communicate with parents (Austin, 1994; Marcon, 1999; Roskos & Neuman, 1993; Studer, 1993). Effective communication is not solely dependent on teachers' ability to convey the message but involves their professional training. A study that evaluated a web-based teaching curriculum embedded with skills and strategies to ensure active involvement of parents in schools concluded: There is a need for high-quality teacher education to reflect the impact of a structured curriculum that addresses parental involvement teacher practices that can be flexible across the curriculum as a whole (Brown et al., 2014). Flanigan (2007) emphasized that teachers training program directly affects parents' involvement by concluding that educators are not sufficiently trained to collaborate with parents and neighborhoods since the standard teacher training curriculum would not efficiently include pre-existing teachers with ample knowledge in parental and community participation. Evans (2013) reviewed peer-reviewed papers written over the past 20 years (1992-2012) in journals to analyze the impact of higher education efforts to resolve preschool teacher family involvement. These therefore, findings. offer insights into instructional policies that enhance the trust and self-awareness of teachers. enhance knowledge of teachers of different families, and increase the capacity of teachers to use knowledge about families and populations to

improve the scholarly output of students. The study concluded that teachers find it difficult to maintain positive relations with families due to the lack of training in this regard. A study concluded that pre-service educators' expertise with respect to collaboration with parents and families would reach its potential if their curriculum promotes awareness and ideas to collaborate with parents and families (Pedro et al., 2012). Antithetical to the previous study. another study concluded that teachers with some professional teachers' training programs profound in establishing beneficial are connections with parents families and (Sukhbaatar, 2014).

Alaçam (2015) investigated the self-efficacy views of pre-service teachers in Parent-Teacher Meeting about parental intervention. purpose of this research was to examine parental self-efficacy beliefs held by pre-service Parent-Teacher Meeting teachers and their self-reported skills in implementing parental involvement strategies. Another aim was to explore the effect on the values of parental self-efficacy through taking a course on strategies for parental participation and by self-reported expertise in applying techniques for parental involvement. Data were obtained from 601 third-year young educators using a customized variant of the Parent Invitation Efficiency Scale Evaluation. Detailed and evaluation data, like the two-way ANOVA, were applied between groups to address study questions. The results showed that the scale was valid and suitable for use in Turkish culture, and in Parent-Teacher Meeting teachers, firm parental self-efficacy beliefs were found. In comparison, the findings found that taking a course on parental engagement did not substantially affect expectations in parental selfefficacy. Self-reporting abilities in the execution of parental participation methods, on the other hand, have been described as an important element in parental self-efficacy attitudes in favor of parental participation classes, which are 'moderately successful' and 'moderately effective in the implementation of skills and strategies for parental participation.

The literature review identifies the gap in the literature regarding the prospective teachers' perception of the influence of parent-teacher meetings on ECE students' academic performance in the context of Pakistan. This study is therefore aimed at filling the gap and

contributing to the knowledge body in this regard.

Methods and Materials

Multiple case study was used as the primary research design because it helped the researcher develop a complex understanding of the interaction of participants with the phenomenon being studied.

The data was collected from a private university. Purposeful sampling (Campbell et al., 2020; Denieffe, 2020) yielded five information-rich cases using the criterion sampling technique, consequently leading to the development of an in-depth understanding of prospective teachers' perspectives. All the participants were enrolled in the BS-Early Childhood Education (ECE). Following criteria were used to decide the inclusion of participants in this study:

- 1. The participant was a student at the selected private university.
- The participant was enrolled in BS in Early Childhood Education
- The participant was voluntarily willing to share their perceptions of parent-teacher meetings.

In the current study, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. A semi-structured in-depth interview is usually one in which the interviewer has a checklist of topic areas or questions. The intention is to get the participants to talk on their terms. Hence, questions tend not to be too specific, allowing for a range of possible responses. The reason to choose this method is to ask probing and follow-up questions to have rich data from all participants.

A number of possible questions for the interview guide were developed based on the areas identified in the literature (<u>Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, 2018</u>).

The initial draft of the interview guide was discussed with the supervisor, and after discussion, the interview guide's questions were finalized (Seidman, 2019). A few questions were vague. They were removed, whereas a few questions were ambiguous. Therefore, the language of these questions was amended to increase the clarity of the questions. In addition, interview questions were rearranged so that the sequence could be made logical.

The interview guide was further improved by piloting it with a critical friend (Berg & Lune. 2017). As a result of this piloting, the interview guide was further revised. Few questions were removed/added. The language of some questions was also amended.

The researcher contacted the students enrolled in the Early Childhood Education Program through WhatsApp and discussed the next steps in the research process. Interviews were semi-structured in format, and participants were individually interviewed on the phone at the scheduled time and day. An audio recording application was used to record the interviews. In addition, the printed interview protocol was used to take notes whenever it was deemed necessary. All interview recordings were transcribed and translated into the English language.

The analysis of data used inductive procedures of within-case analysis. We used open and pattern coding in order to move from codes to categories and eventually themes (Saldaña, 2015).

Findings

This section provides a within-case analysis revealing unique insight into prospective teachers' nuanced perceptions regarding the influence of PTMs on ECE students' academic performance in the context of Pakistan.

Participant 1 Demographic Information

The 23-year-old student at a private university's ECE program, who has no teaching experience but has attended parent-teacher meetings as an elder brother of his brother at his school, shares his perceptions of parent-teacher meetings and their influences on ECE students' academic performance.

Thematic Findings

He thinks PTM is crucial as it helps in maximizing the potential of the students during their early ages. Early years education is not only responsible for the holistic development of a child but also sets the foundation for his successful academic career. PTMs are also helpful in providing the school administrations with a reality check for the quality they are providing to their students. He thinks that PTMs

should be held as frequently as monthly because the hiatus in the PTMs may cause nonrepairable and relatively lasting impacts on a child's academic progress. Since arranging one-on-one sessions regularly has its limitations, as a prospective teacher, he is determined to use non-traditional methods for holding PTMs, such as video conferencing software, to stay in touch with parents.

Having attended his younger brothers' PTMs, he identified non-cooperative parents, language barrier, time limitations, privacy issues, and organizational pressures as significant challenges while conducting a successful PTM. While expressing his privacy concerns, he reported that the presence of other students and their parents hinders an open discussion. Also, teachers having personal biases against their students tend to negatively affect the parent-teacher relation, thus affecting the progress of a child; however, fewer in number. He suggested mutual understanding, honesty, proper planning, and appropriate arrangements for conducting meetings, and a little patience can pose solutions to all the challenges.

He thinks that lack of time has negatively affected parents' attendance in PTMs. He believes that school management should have flexible timings and schedules for PTMs to be used as their promotional tool. Also, students perform better and feel motivated when they receive appreciation from their teachers and are consequently encouraged by their parents to perform with all their might. Quoting his own example as a child, he reported that having a father being associated with the police force, he has consistently underperformed himself, not because he was incapable but because he did not feel motivated. He also thinks that teachers by no means should be dependent on parents' feedback from PTM's. They are supposed to perform their duties with honesty and dedication.

Participant 2

Demographic Information

The 23-year-old female student of Early Childhood Education enrolled at the selected private university shared her perceptions of PTMs and her individualized experience of home tutoring and attended a meeting for her cousin at a school.

Thematic Findings

She is indifferent about the PTM's significance. She, however, agreed that parents should be informed about the monthly progress of their child so that parents are well informed of their children's activities. She also thinks that parents should also be called, given their child has misbehaved in any circumstance. As per the frequency of the PTM, she opines that it should be held as per need and not as per the schedule and after a defined interval. She believes that parents of ECE and primary school students are more excited to attend PTM than the parents of secondary school.

She firmly believes that parents and students should instead be engaged in activities than waiting for their turn to meet the teacher. Describing her own opinion of attending a PTM. she appreciated the overall environment as welcoming to parents and students. There were engaging activities, especially the coloring activity for ECE students and their parents, which she found satisfactory. Though she found the school's overall environment encouraging for the parents, she seemed dissatisfied with the class She described her as an untrained teacher. teacher who kept ranting about her cousin's son's illegible handwriting but could not suggest a single solution. She also believes that students' portfolios are to be presented and discussed at PTMs. Additionally, students' success is also discussed, of course, pertaining to the condition as to whether it is positive or not.

In her opinion, the success of PTMs is solely dependent on how seriously the parents take them. Though most parents are working and find it tedious to attend PTMs and think that a WhatsApp call with the teacher would suffice, the purpose is mistaken. A WhatsApp call can never replace a face-to-face conversation with the teacher regularly. She also opines that parents should understand that children are bound to commit mistakes. As their parents, it is their responsibility to encourage the students to overcome their shortcomings rather than discouraging them in front of their teachers, let alone beat them in school. She also shared that teachers and parents often insult the child in front of everyone, which demotivates the child in every aspect and shatters his confidence. PTMs are most important for the parents themselves to cooperate for their child's sake. Henceforth, everyone should be treated equally.

She thinks PTMs help to keep students on track and identify children's preferences. Parents and teachers need to help him succeed in his interest so that he can do well in his present and, ultimately, in his future life. The teacher can be relieved by discussing with parents, which enables her to teach more effectively. Parents can share their home experiences with teachers. and teachers can also share classroom activities with parents to better understand things and make good choices eventually for the students. She believes PTMs play a crucial role in students' performance. As far as standard PTMs are concerned, they significantly augment children given the teachers make parents understand a child's needs positively.

As per her suggestion, teachers of the class and subject heads should be available at the same place and at the same time to deal with the parents. She feels that the shortcomings of PTMs can be resolved with friendly behavior, the persuasive power of a teacher, punctuality, neutrality, and acceptance of inadequacies for their children and by understanding the importance of the relationship between parent and teacher because it impacts the performance of the child.

Participant 3

Demographic Information

The 23-year-old female student enrolled in her third semester of the Early Childhood Education course at the selected private university. She shared her personal experience of attending a PTM at her younger sister's school.

Thematic Findings

According to her, PTMs are conducive while addressing personal differences and their effective learning. Pertaining to the rapid growth and individualized experiences, contact between parents and teachers is paramount. She believes that given the student is his childhood, he is eager to learn new things, curious about almost everything, and finds it interesting to meet new people and explore new avenues; he requires proper attention and guidance not just from the parents or teachers but both of them, together.

In her expectation, successful PTM brings positive social, emotional and cognitive changes and help them evolve as a talented and accomplished individual in every aspect.

According to her, parent-teacher collaboration hones positive behaviors in children. She thinks PTMs should be held every two weeks so that parents can keep a track record of their child's ever-evolving interests, their holistic development, and could encourage them for the new skills they have learned to promote a sense of trust among the students that significantly affect the performance of students in class.

She defines her experience of attending a PTM at her sister's school as an overall satisfactory experience. She was disquieted by a teacher being extremely critical of her sister's performance.

She thinks that a well-communicated purpose of holding a PTM defines the success of PTM. She expresses that several factors can act as a hindrance to the success of PTM. She thinks that tyrannizing, submissive, and indifferent parents are less likely to attend the PTMs and compromise their child's development. Then some teachers think of themselves as infallible and do not welcome suggestions from the parents. She thinks to overcome these problems, it is essentials for both of them to sit in the meeting with neutral minds and welcoming attitudes both to criticism and appreciation.

Participant 4

Demographic Information

The 27-year-old female student of the ECE Program at a private university in Lahore shared her experiences of PTMs and her two-year teaching experience and observations of PTMs at school with her niece.

Thematic Findings

She firmly believes that PTM for ECE students is crucial as their characters are being developed during these years based on how their whole future is shaped. If they work in cohesion, parents and teachers can bring positive changes in children. She thinks that a PTM should not be held more than twice a year; teachers should call parents individually if deemed essential. Should parents receive such a call from the school, they are to acknowledge and listen to the concerns with an open mind. Parents should also keep enquiring about their child's progress regularly alongside PTMs.

Her experience of attending her niece's PTM was very gratifying. From the school's aesthetically pleasing environment to the

teachers' positive attitude, everything was on point. She thinks a well-organized, well-articulated PTM is bound to achieve the targets given that parents show favorable and cooperative attitudes towards teachers' suggestions. She believes parents should only be engaged in positive criticism and should not be caught in the rat race of scoring more marks.

Speaking of the importance of the PTM, she believes that the appreciation a child gets at PTMs from his parents and teachers boosts a child's confidence, improves his self-efficacy concept, and builds his self-image. Positive criticism also gives children a direction to work on their shortcomings.

Participant 5

Demographic Information

The 22-year-old female student enrolled in the 3rd-semester ECE program at the selected university shared her perceptions and observation of PTMs she attended for her younger siblings. She has been tutoring school children and has also narrated her personal experiences.

Thematic Findings

She believes PTM is inevitable for students' academic progress in the early years because it bridges the gaps found in routine communication, identifies the weak areas to improve, appreciates the students for his strengths, and provides parents with a road map towards enhanced academic progress providing him with a strong foundation. She thinks that the success of early year students is dependent on the synchronize efforts of parents and teachers. Parents are usually unaware of pedagogical knowledge, and help from teachers might come in handy. On the other hand, teachers can benefit from valuable insight into a child's behavior and habits for better academic results. Her idea of a successful parent-teacher meeting is a satisfied parent and improved class results as the reflection of the meeting. She thinks a meeting is held twice a year, which can suffice the purpose well.

Narrating her personal experiences of attending PTM at his younger brother's school, she said that she found the staff cooperative and full of appreciation. Teachers acknowledged their students' work by displaying their work in the classroom with their names tagged.

However, she thinks that teachers have not been provided with sufficient time. They either can listen to the parents or can explain their own experiences. In the hustle of getting done with the task, teachers usually end up messing with the parents. Non-cooperative parents are generally ignorant of their child's learning styles and thus are negligent of their weaknesses. Speaking of the parents' expectations of a PTM is the detailed insight into their child's development at school, not just about his studies but also his social dealings at school.

She thinks that PTMs can be crucial while finding the solutions to a child's academic shortcomings, harnessing appropriate behaviors, and cultivating positive attitudes that act as the foundation for transforming a child into a successful and charismatic individual.

Discussion and Conclusion

Prospective teachers held different perceptions on PTMs; however, they all agreed that PTMs enable teachers to critically reflect on their performance and provide parents with a chance to learn from the experiences of other parents and teachers. The problems highlighted in the study hindering the successful organization of PTMs are equally significant for teachers, parents, and school administration. All the prospective teachers agreed that PTMs, as in parent-teacher collaboration, could be favorable to the holistic development of ECE students.

All participants of the study agreed that during these early years, students reach their maximum potential. They maintain their social image by thriving the conflict resolution and developing soft skills. Their cognition development. guided by the combined reflections of parents and teachers, help them gain language acquisition, build problem-solving abilities, learn about their environment and the relation between cause and effect. One of them (participant 4) thinks that PTMs are responsible for making or breaking the student's whole personality. Only one of them (participant 1) opines that PTMs are also vital for school administration to help improve the school's quality. They all agreed that PTMs are likely to positively affect students if parents and teachers cultivate encouraging and motivating techniques to overcome their shortcomings.

Having participants agree on the regularity of PTMs, two of them suggested having alternate

ways and flexible timings to accommodate working parents. Four cases think that PTMs should be held every month, while one advocated that PTMs should be held weekly. However, one of the participants also suggested that neither of the two, i.e., parent or teacher, should wait for a PTM; they would rather communicate serious concerns either on the phone or in-person with each other.

None of them except one seemed truly satisfied with PTMs. They either declared the school's environment as unwelcome and discouraging due to language barriers and time constraints or have found teachers very discouraging and demotivating who lack proper training.

This qualitative study reinforces existing research that has found that PTMs improve ECE students' performance. The interviewed prospective teachers had a good understanding of PTMs processes and generally had a positive attitude toward them. Interview data also revealed that the prospective teachers believed

that PTMs positively influenced students' academic performance. ECE students require more attention and adequate support from parents and teachers working in liaison with each other to maximize their cognitive and social development compared to senior students. PTMs facilitate the retention of a child's development while mostly involving parents with teachers and the child's learning. PTMs are hampered by parents who do not respect and collaborate with teachers. The contact distance also makes it impossible for a parent to discuss something with the teacher. Similarly, unsupportive teachers hinder parents' desire to have successful PTMs. PTMs positively affect student performance, but they may also negatively impact due to uncooperative parent conduct.

It is hoped that the participants' detailed descriptions in this study will guide teachers and parents to understand the importance of PTMs for Early Childhood students' performance. This study will enhance awareness to understand the sensitivity of young age students.

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