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# **Communication Strategies Between Teachers**

# and Parents on Students' English Proficiency

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## Abstract

This study examines how teachers and parents use communication strategies to help middle school students improve their English language skills. A qualitative approach involving semi-structured interviews with five parents and five English teachers was employed, based on Epstein's framework of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. The findings reveal that teachers and parents generally communicate effectively using WhatsApp and phone calls, but there are areas that need improvement. Parents participation in volunteering and decision-making activities is infrequent, and the school lacks collaboration with external communities. Despite these limitations, both teachers and parents recognize the importance of their communication in supporting students' English language proficiency. The study highlights the need for more comprehensive parental involvement strategies to enhance students' academic achievement.

**Keywords**: parent-teacher; communication strategies; English language learning; proficiency; parental involvement

#### Introduction

The interaction between parents and teachers fosters a collaborative educational environment and enhances students' learning development. Akhter (2016) defines parent-teacher interaction as a form of communication that involves parents in the development of relationships between the family, school, and community. The intention of this interaction is designed to raise parents' awareness of the benefits of their involvement in their child's education. This interaction occurs through various channels, such as written reports, school events, extracurricular activities, teacher-parent meetings, and letters or emails (Lekli & Kaloti, 2015; Popovska et al., 2021).

Such communication enables parents to recognize their importance in supporting their children's academic and social development (Jiang et al., 2012). However, certain parents only interact with teachers during parent-teacher meetings, indicating a lower level of engagement in parent-teacher communication (Akhter, 2016; Jiang et al., 2012). Therefore, effective interactions between parents and teachers are essential to increase parental involvement in children's education, although challenges remain in achieving broader participation.

Ekayani et al. (2016) showed that collaboration improves student engagement. Teachers may remind parents to assist with homework, while parents encourage children to focus in class. In this context, parents are considered partners in the educational process with daily interactions reflecting a keen interest in their children's educational development, particularly in English language learning (Al-Fadley et al., 2018; Ebuta & Ekpo-Eloma, 2018). Providing parental support to children in completing their schoolwork at home can improve their academic performance.

Consequently, it is recommended that parents regularly engage in their children's learning activities at home to support their success in academics. Activities such as helping with homework, consulting teachers about learning problems, and engaging children in English-language activities at home significantly contribute to children's mastery of English (Indriati, 2016). For instance, Çalışkan & Ulaş (2022) demonstrate that parental involvement in reading activities can enhance students' reading abilities, increase their motivation, and improve their positive attitudes toward language. These studies highlight the critical role of parental involvement in shaping academic success by fostering collaboration between home and school.

Collaboration between parents and teachers has a demonstrably positive impact on students' English language learning. conversely, several parents don't know how to start a relationship and under what circumstances they should meet with English teacher (Burhan et al., 2021). Sianturi et al. (2023) conceptualize parent-teacher collaboration as a partnership combining expertise to support children's success. For instance, Javier & Jubay Jr (2019) explore the significant positive impact of parent-teacher collaboration on enhancing students' vocabulary skills.

This suggests that when parents and teachers actively engage with each other, it can effectively contribute to the development of students' vocabulary skills. Similarly, a study by Tizard et al. (2013) showed a significant positive impact of collaboration between parents and teachers on students' reading ability. The study highlighted that such collaboration resulted in increased enthusiasm for learning among students, better behaviour in school, and a high level of satisfaction among 2555

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parents. Furthermore, Cruz et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents in boosting academic achievement, particularly in primary school literacy development. Consequently, collaboration between teachers and parents can be an effective strategy for improving students' academic achievements.

The present study intends to gain a deeper understanding by focusing on the multifaceted dimensions of communication between parents and teachers, with particular emphasis on the forms and practices employed in their interactions. While previous research has predominantly highlighted the advantages of parental involvement and parent-teacher collaboration, this study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by examining the specific communication strategies utilized to support students' English proficiency.

# **Literature Review**

## **Strategies for Parent-Teacher Communication**

Epstein's framework (1995) identifies six categories of parental involvement in their children's education, communication represents one of the most crucial forms of engagement. Communication between school and home is a two-way process that involves the exchange of information, including details about school programs, classes, and the child's progress. Effective communication between teachers and families provides the two parties with a deeper understanding of mutual expectations and children's needs (Leenders et al., 2019).

Various channels may be employed in parent-teacher communication, including meetings, school newspapers, text messages, emails, online platforms, and conferences. Parents and teachers typically engage in discussions pertaining students' academic progress, including behavioural challenges and social relationships among students, as well as identifying areas of developmental needs or weaknesses (Burhan et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2012). Effective parent-teacher communication is essential for both the teacher's success and the student's progress (Lekli & Kaloti, 2015).

Establishing and maintaining open lines of communication between parents and teachers is essential for building positive partnerships that significantly contribute to the educational success of children (Gelfer, 1991). The establishment of open and trusting communication between parents and teachers can facilitate the creation of a supportive environment, thereby ensuring that children receive the optimal educational experience. Therefore, it is crucial to foster effective communication between teachers and parents in order to foster stronger schoolhome partnerships and to improve children's academic achievement. Effective parent-teacher communication is essential for both the teacher's success and the student's progress (Lekli & Kaloti, 2015). Nandal (2014) pointed out the necessity for teachers to actively engage with parents using a variety of communication techniques and strategies to foster strong school-home partnerships. Teachers used active listening in communication with parents by being attentive and observant, accepting parents' words, maintaining a neutral position, and showing empathy to share reflections and feelings (Chatzinikola, 2021). Effective communication between parents and teachers regarding child development and early education opportunities depends on several key elements such as trust, two-way communication and strategic use of technology (Chase & Valorose, 2019).

In academic contexts, two-way communication happens when teachers and parents discuss together. Effective dialogue stems from mutual trust, a common concern, and an understanding of different viewpoints (Popovska et al., 2021). Two-way communication channels such as parent-teacher conferences, telephone calls, text messages, and emails play a vital role in establishing and maintaining this partnership (Kuusimäki et al., 2019). The involvement of parents in parent-teacher meetings has been demonstrated to be positively correlated with their children's academic performance (Fu et al., 2022). In addition, progress reports and geographical proximity are strategies in facilitating communication between parents and teachers (Burhan et al., 2021).

## Method

The present study employs a qualitative research design to explore the dynamics of interaction between parents and English teachers in Middle School. It focuses particularly on communication strategies used to support students' English language proficiency. According to Li (2021), qualitative research is used to investigate complex educational issues, explore perspectives, and generate deep insights. The data were collected through the interview with middle school parents and teachers. Interviews offer a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of individuals on a specific topic (Turner, 2010). The use of semi-structured interviews has been observed to be an effective method for fostering reciprocity between interviewers and participants, thereby facilitating a dynamic interaction that can lead to insightful findings (Kallio et al., 2016).

In order to achieve this objective, the respondents for this study were selected through purposive sampling with five parents and five English teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who fulfilled certain criteria and were deemed able to provide relevant and in-depth information for the study. Criteria for teachers included experience teaching English in junior high school, while for 2557

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parents included active involvement in their child's education. Additional demographic factors, such as geographic location, years of teaching experience (for teachers), and socioeconomic background (for parents), were considered to enhance the generalizability and diversity of perspectives. The interviews were conducted in person or via telephone, with detailed notes and audio recordings to ensure thorough data capture. This dual approach of recording and note-taking facilitated a thorough analysis of the interview content, ensuring that no critical information was missed or misinterpreted.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process began with data familiarization, where the researcher repeatedly reviewed the transcripts and notes to gain a comprehensive understanding. This was followed by systematic coding, where key phrases and ideas relevant to the study's objectives were labeled. The codes were then grouped into broader themes, reflecting recurring communication strategies and patterns of interaction between parents and teachers. These themes were iteratively refined to ensure they accurately captured the essence of the data and aligned with the research questions. This analytical approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of the communication dynamics and their implications for supporting students' English proficiency.

## Results

The main research question explores what strategies were used and perceived by parents and teachers to assist in communicating with learners. Thematic analysis was employed to examine the interview data. This method involved categorizing responses according to Epstein's framework, which includes constructs such as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. The results of interviews with parents and teachers are presented below:

#### Parenting

Parenting activities in schools aim to increase families' understanding of child and adolescent development and help parents feel welcome and involved in school activities. Educators need to understand the hopes, dreams, needs and interests of families and students. Teachers highlighted the importance of understanding parents' expectations to facilitate effective and efficient learning.

Teacher IN emphasized "Because by understanding the expectations of parents towards their children, of course it will make it easier for us as teachers and students to make it easier to understand the material, especially in learning English, so that learning can run effectively and efficiently." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher IN, 24/06/2024)

Teacher AZ also agreed, stating "We as educators must know the expectations of parents towards their children's educational development so that first, learning objectives are achieved and children can develop as expected by their parents." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher AZ, 24/06/2024)

Similarly, Teacher SH explained "Yes, because every parent wants the best for their children, they will always ask about their children's development. For example, especially in English language learning, because children are the hope of their parents." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher SH, 29/06/2024)

These statements indicate that parents have positive expectations for their children's developspment, particularly in English learning. Teachers obtain information related to student parenting through various media. As Teacher IN shared, "*I received the information through WhatsApp. Active parents sometimes inform or share their experiences of teaching their children at home, while for less active parents, I occasionally take the initiative to inquire via WhatsApp, especially regarding children who are struggling to keep up with English language learning activities." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher IN, 24/06/2024)* 

Teacher KS provided a similar viewpoint, stating: "As mentioned earlier, it can be through casual conversations in class, or through interviews and approaches during data collection about student information. This usually also includes questions about students' talents and interests." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher KS, 24/06/2024)

The interview above illustrates that teachers emphasized the importance of understanding parents' expectations to facilitate effective learning, particularly in English. Additionally, communication between teachers and parents often occurs via WhatsApp or in-person conversations, helping teachers understand students' needs. Teachers gather information about student progress from both parents and students, with active parents regularly engaging in discussions, while others communicate when challenges arise.

## Communicating

Communication activities encompass strategies designed to enhance two-way relationships regarding school programs and student progress. These activities include the presentation of parent reports on the frequency, content, and methods of communication. Teachers emphasized the effectiveness of WhatsApp and phone calls for maintaining communication with parents.

Teacher IN explained, "Usually, the easiest way is through WhatsApp and phone calls because they can respond immediately, so it doesn't take long. Through WhatsApp and phone calls, they can respond right away. I can be sure of this because when I or other teachers inform parents via WhatsApp, they immediately provide positive feedback, leading to twoway communication." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher IN, 24/06/2024)

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Teacher KS shared a similar opinion, "To maintain communication with parents about English language learning, there are no special meetings; it is usually done through phone calls and WhatsApp. I think both are quite effective because nowadays everyone has a phone and access to WhatsApp, which can be accessed anytime and anywhere" (Excerpt from the interview with teacher KS, 24/06/2024)

Teacher LM added, "For children's progress, I usually call or WhatsApp parents about their children's development such as their children are still lacking or retarded. We rarely communicate, sometimes we often communicate but the parents do not reply until the afternoon. As English teacher and homeroom teacher, I frequently communicate with parents, especially when a student is absent." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher LM, 25/06/2024)

Based on the interviews above, it can be seen that English teachers primarily use WhatsApp and phone calls for communication with parents because these methods are effective and facilitate quick responses. Although some parents may be less responsive, communication typically happens when there are student challenges or behavioural concerns at school. Teacher communication is often spontaneous and does not rely on scheduled meetings such as parent-teacher conferences.

Meanwhile, from the parents' point of view, it relates to the evaluation of the educator's strategy by parents. It also provided other information about the method and frequency of communication with teachers. Parent S described frequent communication with the teacher, "Oh... I communicate very often with the English teacher because, coincidentally, I enjoyed English lessons when I was in school. As for communication, we use both formal and informal styles, depending on the situation, but it's more often informal because we already feel close. Usually, teachers communicate through WhatsApp, but it's more about our child's behaviour, how our child behaves at school, and whether there are any learning difficulties. For progress reports, they usually inform us during report card distribution." (Excerpt from the interview with parent S, 24/06/2024)

Parent L also mentioned, "Sometimes. Mostly just the child's attendance in class. Fortunately, my child rarely experiences difficulties and easily understands the lessons, so there's no special information to share. There are occasional phone calls or face-to-face meetings since we live nearby, and communication also happens via WhatsApp." (Excerpt from the interview with parent L, 29/06/2024)

Parent P expressed a more limited level of communication, "Rarely, only occasionally because I rarely go to school, and with the English tutor also only occasionally. As for the report card, the homeroom teacher is not from the English department. So, it's more like 'oh, the grades are like this... like this', and we usually consult if there are any problems." (Excerpt from the interview with parent P, 29/06/2024)

Based on the interview, teachers rely heavily on WhatsApp and phone calls for effective, timely communication with parents, especially when discussing student progress or challenges in learning English. Parents exhibit varying levels of engagement, with some maintaining frequent communication, while others only connect during report card distributions or when issues arise. Both parties generally perceive their communication as clear and constructive.

## Volunteering

Volunteering mobilizes parents and others who can share their time and talents to support schools, teachers, and student activities. Most parents indicated barriers to participation due to demanding work schedules or family responsibilities.

Parent S expressed, "For voluntary activities, I have never done it, because I happen to work, so I'm busy, it's hard to make time because I happen to work, so I'm busy, it's hard to make time. In my opinion, it is very useful, of course, for children's academic progress too, so children also feel supported." (Excerpt from the interview with parent S, 24/06/2024)

Parent L conveyed a similar perspective, "Never participated in activities... I have three children, so sometimes I have difficulty dividing my time with activities outside the home. Voluntary activities certainly have an impact on children's development and progress, but not all parents can participate in these activities." (Excerpt from the interview with parent L, 29/06/2024)

In contrast, Parent P stated "I have never participated in English language activities, but I am very active in volunteer activities like the current one (Harvest Festival), taking care of everything. I have been involved in activities like the harvest festival from 7th grade until now, handling everything from putting up posters to helping out all day because the children arrive in the morning and leave in the evening. I and the other children enjoy supporting the kids; if they are accompanied, they feel helped and cared for, and I feel like I'm encouraging them. This brings us closer to the children and makes them feel supported, but unfortunately, not all parents are like that." (Excerpt from the interview with parent P, 29/06/2024)

The interviews above demonstrate that parental involvement in school activities is limited, primarily due to work and family responsibilities. Although few parents actively participate, many acknowledge the positive impact of such activities on student development. These activities help build stronger relationships between parents, teachers, and students.

# Learning at home

Home Learning Activities offer families detailed information regarding their children's academic work and guidance on supporting their children with homework. Teachers employ various media to assign tasks and provide additional resources.

Teacher IN shared, "The most effective is through WA. Typically, to help parents assist their children with homework, I provide clear instructions to the students. Parents can then view these instructions and, given the ease of access through YouTube, they can find many materials that are highly relevant to the content taught in school." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher IN, 24/06/2024)

Teacher KS emphasized, "As previously mentioned, communication between parents and myself as a teacher is facilitated easily through phone and WhatsApp, allowing us to discuss matters at any time and from any location. By providing clear guidelines, supplemented with video guides, PowerPoint presentations, or links containing materials aligned with the subject, it is hoped that parents will be able to support their children in learning English effectively." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher KS, 24/06/2024)

Teacher SH added, "Yes, many children do not complete their homework, so communication is done through WhatsApp since in-person meetings are impractical unless the situation is severe. It is not feasible for every subject teacher to meet with parents. Through the explanation of the material, parents can also search for additional information and engage in discussions, often using videos on YouTube to aid their understanding." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher SH, 24/06/2024)

As evidenced by the interview, the teacher provides clear instructions to students regarding the tasks they must complete at school. Additionally, the teacher offers a YouTube link containing a wealth of material relevant to the curriculum. Instructions and links to learning guides and English PPTs are conveyed by teachers through WhatsApp groups for parents and children, allowing parents to assist with homework and reinforce learning at home.

Additionally, support and strategies employed by parents regarding Home Learning Activities vary widely. Parent S shared, "For English lessons, I really enjoy teaching my child even though there are still limitations and even though I only graduated from high school, I really enjoy teaching my child, there is a feeling that I am happy to take part in helping my child's assignments. Usually I help with homework, English homework, I also help with the assignments, coincidentally my child is also specialized." (Excerpt from the interview with parent S, 24/06/2024)

Parent L stated, "I often help with English lessons because it's a foreign language, so my child needs assistance to understand it. I certainly help as much as I can, and sometimes, if I don't fully understand, I watch instructional videos on YouTube, as teachers usually provide links for further study. My child has also been enrolled in English courses and other subjects since elementary school, which has been very helpful." (Excerpt from the 2562 interview with parent L, 29/06/2024)

Parent AH conveyed, "Yes, for English, the support is minimal, mainly to aid in fluency. Communication with my child about English homework is also limited, it is more supportive to take courses." (Excerpt from the interview with parent AH, 24/06/2024)

Teachers use WhatsApp to share instructions and additional learning materials, including YouTube videos and PowerPoint presentations, to help parents support their children's learning at home. Parents, especially those with an interest in English, often assist with homework, utilizing the resources provided. However, the extent of support varies with some parents.

# **Decision making**

Decision-making allows families to participate in decisions concerning policies, programs, and school practices. However, all parents reported that they have never been involved in the decision-making process. Teachers corroborated the lack of parental involvement. Teacher KS explained, "In this case there is no special discussion forum, it is usually situational through individual consultation." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher KS, 24/06/2024)

Teacher SH similarly stated, "So far, if the subject teacher is rare, if I have never been. Usually, the discussion is with the homeroom teacher." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher SH, 24/06/2024.) The interviews indicate that the school does not sufficiently involve parents in decision-making regarding English language learning policies, programs and practices such as holding discussion and consultation forums, surveys and questionnaires, or individual consultation sessions. This suggests that decisions regarding English language learning are made unilaterally by the school.

## Collaborating with the community

Community Collaboration activities encourage school and family cooperation with community groups, organizations, institutions and individuals. Teachers indicated that the school currently lacks external collaborations.

Teacher IN conveyed, "In the past, only now there is no such collaboration, maybe later it will be communicated with the principal because it is very good for student progress." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher IN, 24/06/2024). Teacher KS stated a similar statement, "In the past, there was some collaboration, but currently, the school is not engaged in any external partnerships related to English language learning. However, it remains possible that the school may seek collaboration with the community in the future if needed." (Excerpt from the interview with teacher KS, 24/06/2024)

Based on the interviews, it is evident that the school has previously engaged in collaboration with external entities, such as English language course institutions. However, there are currently no ongoing collaborations between the school and external parties or the community.

# Discussion

This In his framework, Epstein (1995) identifies six categories of parental involvement in their children's education. Communication is identified as one of the most important forms of involvement. The research findings based on the six categories indicate that teachers obtain information about parents' parenting practices through direct communication, such as during the distribution of report cards, or indirect communication via WhatsApp. Additionally, interviews and observations in the classroom provide insights into students' abilities and interests in learning English. Teachers also engage in regular conversations with students.

Communication from the teacher's side is typically conducted via WhatsApp and phone calls, as these methods are effective and promptly responded to by parents. However, there are still some parents who are less responsive in maintaining communication with teachers. Teacher-parent communication is specifically focused on students who are experiencing difficulties with the material. On the other hand, parents rarely initiate communication outside of report card distribution times. Despite this, parents feel that teachers have maintained good communication with them.

Regarding volunteering, the study found limited parental participation in school activities. Most parents cited work commitments or family responsibilities as barriers to involvement. However, all parents recognized the importance of these activities for their children's academic and social development.

For learning at home, which pertains to the strategy's teachers use in assigning homework and how parents support these efforts. The research findings indicate that teachers employ various media to assign tasks to students, distributing these through parent and student WhatsApp groups. This approach is well-supported by parents, who assist their children in completing assignments or seek help from external sources.

The study revealed a significant gap in the areas of decision-making and community collaboration. Unfortunately, this has never been practiced by the school as stated by all parents and teachers. Sixth, concerning collaborating with the community, the school has also not engaged in such efforts. This is unfortunate, as collaboration with various external parties can enrich students' learning experiences at school.

The research findings demonstrate that communication strategies between teachers and parents regarding students' English language skills are generally effective, despite the fact that they do not encompass all six categories of parental involvement in children's education. This finding is consistent with the opinion Lekli & Kaloti (2015) that effective parent-teacher communication is crucial for teacher success and student progress. Similarly, Burhan et al. (2021) posit that collaboration between parents and teachers has a tangible, beneficial impact on students' English language learning.

However, the study also highlights areas for improvement, particularly in involving parents in decision-making processes and fostering community collaborations. Some parents expressed uncertainty about how to initiate relationships with English teachers and when such interactions are appropriate. These findings suggest potential avenues for enhancing parent-teacher partnerships and, consequently, improving students' English language learning experiences.

#### Conclusion

Communication strategies between teachers and parents regarding students' English language proficiency have been demonstrated to be quite effective. Teachers gather information about parenting practices through direct or indirect communication with parents. Communication from the teacher's perspective is commonly done through WhatsApp and telephone for their efficiency and quick response from parents. Despite the effectiveness of these strategies, some parents are less responsive in engaging with teachers. Furthermore, many parents do not participate in voluntary school activities. Teachers use various platforms to assign tasks to students, such as WhatsApp groups for parents and students, which are well received. However, there is a need for increased parental involvement in decision-making and collaboration with the community beyond the school setting.

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