

# International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies

ISSN: 2308-5460



## Study of Correlation between Parental Involvement and Iranian EFL Preschoolers' English Language Learning

[PP: 116-123]

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### ABSTRACT

Research on parental involvement (PI) testifies to its positive impact on students' academic achievement. The bulk of the literature in this domain, however, is imbued with qualitative findings leaving little room for empirical studies particularly in EFL preschool contexts. Given the importance of the understanding of the role of parental involvement in kids' language learning, and the scanty attention given to PI in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, particularly in the Iranian context, this study was conducted to investigate the likely relationship between PI and EFL preschoolers' language learning outcomes. To this end, 50 EFL students studying in Golbaran and Setarebaran nursery schools in Gorgan, Iran together with their parents were invited to participate in this study. The data collection instruments included an achievement test along with the Family Involvement Questionnaire (FIQ) adapted from Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs (2000, as cited in Jeffries, 2012) consisting of three main parts, namely home-based involvement, school-based involvement and home-school conference (video and telephone). The analysis of the data revealed a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between PI and preschoolers' English achievement. Moreover, amongst PI factors, parents' school-based involvement has the strongest relationship, while home-school conference has the weakest relationship with the students' learning outcomes. In addition, the analysis of the data led to the identification of the most widely used teaching aid devices amongst the participant parents. The findings are deemed to be of important pedagogical implications for the main stakeholders, i.e., school administrators and parents.

**Keywords:** EFL, learning outcome, parental involvement, preschool, teaching aid, preschoolers

### ARTICLE INFO

The paper received on: **13/08/2016** Reviewed on: **24/09/2016** Accepted after revisions on: **10/10/2016**

### Suggested citation:

Mozafarinejad, R. & Mazandarani, O. (2016). Study of Correlation between Parental Involvement and Iranian EFL Preschoolers' English Language Learning. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*. 4(3), 116-123. Retrieved from [www.eltjournal.org](http://www.eltjournal.org)

### 1. Introduction

Although the relationship between parental involvement and children's schooling and their academic achievement

has been well-established in the literature, little is yet known about the extent of such a link in preschool context (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008). Research on

parental involvement, their roles in their pre-school children's achievement and teaching practices they use, is still at an early stage in most countries. Such a lack of awareness is more conspicuous in non-Western contexts, and in EFL contexts in which the medium of instruction is a language other than students' mother tongue. This is more apparent in the Iranian context in which there seems a lack of sound experimental research which in turn may exacerbate the condition. Having considered the importance of the parental engagement in children's achievement, and given the dearth of research in the context of this study, this small scale research was conducted to examine the link between PI and students achievement, if any. And to this end, the present study is amongst the few attempts to address such a phenomenon in an Iranian EFL setting.

## **2. Parents' Involvement and Children Achievement**

The important role of parental involvement in children's educational achievement has recently been the centre of attention among different stakeholders (Núñez, Suárez, Rosário, Vallejo, Valle, & Epstein, 2015). Parents from different cultures tend to place high value on their children's educational success. As Lan, Torr and Degotardi (2011) state, research on PI has shown that in most Asian countries, children tend to have the opportunity to learn English prior to their schooling. Research on parental involvement has shown that education can much benefit from PI (Gonzales-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005), even though the indicators of PI in children's educational success tend to be inconsistent across studies (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). A review of the research shows that the connection between parental involvement during elementary, middle, and high school

has been investigated (Domina, 2005, as cited in Jeffries, 2012); nonetheless, as Jeffries argues, few studies have explored PI during the preschool stages and its effect on later outcomes. As Hill and Taylor (2004) posit, most of the studies conducted on parent school involvement is focused on elementary schools. One important hallmark of successful parents, from Crosnoe's (2001) viewpoint, is their active involvement in their children's school. In a similar vein, based on his meta-analysis of 53 research studies, Jeynes (2007) argues that parental involvement exert significant impact on secondary school children. Also Perna and Titus (2005) introduce parental involvement as 'social capital' which is positively related to college enrollment (p. 511).

### ***2.1 Research Questions***

The research questions formulated for the study are as follows:

RQ1: Is there any significant relationship between parental involvement and preschoolers' English learning outcomes?

- Is there a significant relationship between HSC (Home-School Conferencing) and students' language achievement?
- Is there a significant relationship between HbI (Home-based Involvement) and students' language achievement?
- Is there a significant relationship between SbI (School-based Involvement) and students' language achievement?

RQ2: What are the practices Iranian parents engage in at home to teach English to their preschool children?



### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1 Participants***

The participants of this study were EFL preschool students together with their parents. Informed by convenience sampling strategy, the participants were selected from two nursery schools, namely Golbaran and Setarebaran in Gorgan, Iran. All in all, two teachers and fifty parents took part in this research project. The participant parents were from different educational, social, and economic backgrounds. In order to better make sense of the multifaceted nature of parents' involvement, parents' personal background information including their age, level of education, and English language proficiency were collected.

#### ***3.2 Instruments***

This study reports on the participants' responses to a questionnaire, adapted from Fantuzzo, et al. (2000, as cited in Jeffries, 2012) to explore the Iranian parents' involvement, attitudes, and practices germane to their children. As to the main objective of this study which was to investigate the relationship between parental involvement and children success, an achievement test was also used by the researcher to check students' success in English course that they attended during the educational term. The two main instruments are fully discussed in the following:

##### ***Family Involvement Questionnaire***

Family Involvement Questionnaire (FIQ) (Fantuzzo, et al., 2000, as cited in Jeffries, 2012) was used in this study to collect data. However, since the participant parents were likely to be less proficient in English, the questionnaire was translated into their mother tongue, i.e., Farsi. It was given to parents involved in the study to complete and return to nursery school in one week. It is worth highlighting that in order to ensure against the validity and reliability of the translated version of the

questionnaire, it was subject to a pilot study. The FIQ contains a list of family involvement items divided into different types of involvement categories. Involvement categories covered in the adopted questionnaire included home-based involvement (HbI), school-based involvement (SbI), and home-school conferencing (HSC). There was also a demographic questionnaire adopted from Jeffries (2012) consisting of parents and students' information which was further used in the analysis of the raw data. With respect to the internal consistency of the measure, Fantuzzo et al. (2000) found high alpha coefficients greater than .80. In particular, the SBI, HBI, and HSC constructs showed Cronbach's alphas of .85, .85, and .81, respectively (Fantuzzo et al., 2000).

##### ***Achievement Test***

In order to understand the extent to which parental involvement relates to children learning, an achievement test was given to the participant students. This achievement test was in fact a teacher-made test including 20 questions. The instructional material used in this research was the Little Friend English book (containing 10 lessons about letters, vocabulary and poems and songs) taught throughout the course to pre-school children at the nursery schools during the educational year. It is worth mentioning, as to the validity of the instrument, the test was approved by two experts in the field and hence was deemed to be of acceptable content validity.

##### ***3.3 Design***

This study benefited from correlational design. According to Mackey and Gass (2005), correlational design is used to test the relationship between variables. Regarding the present study, therefore, the research made an attempt to test statistically

whether or not relationships exist between the variables and constructs under investigation. As it was stated earlier, in order to probe into parents' involvements and beliefs, and their relationships with children's English achievement, the data was collected by means of two instruments, namely parental involvement questionnaire and an achievement test. Following the administration of the questionnaire, with the preschool teachers' help, the PI questionnaires were taken home by the students. Completed PI questionnaires were then returned to the teachers by the students. The time span between the time that questionnaires were given to the parents and the time that they were returned to the researcher was about one week. There was also a demographic questionnaire that parents were requested to fill in which focused on their personal information such as questions about number of children, educational level, number of hours parents teach or help their children learn English at home, parents' use of any kind of teaching-aid facilities like flash cards, English teaching CDs, DVDs or private classes. Children's English scores from the exams were obtained by the school registrar with permission from the supervisor of the schools.

### 3.4 Ethical Considerations

It is worth mentioning that the researcher has the experience of working in kindergartens for several years. And one reason for choosing the kindergartens for this study was her being as a teacher affiliated to the aforementioned nursery schools. After the researcher was granted the institutional approval, those students whose parents were more inclined and agreed to take part in the study were invited to participate in the research. All the participants were ensured against the sensitive issues of confidentiality,

anonymity, and privacy.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 The Reliability of the Instrument

In terms of reliability, the most important value is the Cronbach's Alpha value, which in this study was .924. Given that the suggested value for being considered as reliable is above .7, the scale can be considered reliable with our sample. This figure gives an indication of the degree to which each item correlates with the total score.

### 4.2 Results related to research question one

The main research question formulated for this study was to examine whether or not there is a significant relationship between total parental involvement and EFL learners' achievement. Since the data were not normally distributed, Spearman's rank order correlation was employed to find the relationship between the two variables. The results, as shown in Table 1, indicated a strong and significant correlation between the two variables,  $r = 0.445$ ,  $n = 50$ ,  $p = 0.001$ .

Table 1: Correlation between PI and Achievement Correlations

		Correlations		
			Achievement Test	Total Parental Involvement
Spearman's rho	Achievement Test	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.445**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
		N	50	50
Total Parental Involvement		Correlation Coefficient	.445**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.
		N	50	50

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### 4.3 Results related to sub-question one

In this section, the results related to the first research sub-question which addressed the relationship between HSC and achievement test is presented.

Table 2: Correlations between HSC and Achievement Test



		Correlations		
			Achievement Test	Total HSC
Spearman's rho	Achievement Test	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.395**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.005
		N	50	50
	Total HSC	Correlation Coefficient	.395**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.
		N	50	50

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on findings from Table 2, it is clear that significance level of the correlations between students' language achievement and home-school conference (video and telephone) is 0.005, which is less than 0.05, suggesting a significant correlation between the variables. The results, as shown in Table 4.2, indicated a strong and significant correlation between HSC and preschoolers' achievement,  $r = 0.395$ ,  $n = 50$ ,  $p = 0.005$ .

#### 4.4 Results related to sub-question two

According to findings from Table 3, the significance level of the correlation between home supervision and students' English scores is .024. This shows that the null hypothesis suggesting no significant correlation between the factors is rejected. The results, as shown in Table 3, indicated a significant correlation between HBI and preschoolers' achievement,  $r = 0.320$ ,  $n = 50$ ,  $p = 0.024$ . So by considering the correlation coefficient and significance level, it was concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between home-based instruction and students' achievement (students' English scores).

Table 3: Correlation between HBI and Achievement Test

		Correlations		
			Achievement Test	Total HBI
Spearman's rho	Achievement Test	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.320*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.024
		N	50	50
	Total HBI	Correlation Coefficient	.320*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.024	.
		N	50	50

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### 4.5 Results related to sub-question three

According to findings reported in Table 4, the significance level of the correlation between School-based Involvement and students' English scores is .001. This shows that the null hypothesis suggesting no significant correlation between the factors is rejected. The results, as shown in Table 4, indicated a significant correlation between SBI and preschoolers' achievement,  $r = 0.458$ ,  $n = 50$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . So by considering the correlation coefficient and significance level, it was concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between parents' school-based supervision and students' achievement (students' English scores).

Table 4: Correlations between SBI and Achievement Test

		Correlations		
			Achievement Test	Total SBI
Spearman's rho	Achievement Test	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.458**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
		N	50	50
	Total SBI	Correlation Coefficient	.458**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.
		N	50	50

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### 4.6 Results related to research question two

The second main research question posed by the researcher, focused on the parents' teaching practices with specific reference to the materials they use to teach

children the answer of which is summarized in Table 5 as follows:

*Table 5: Instructional Materials Used by Parents*  
Instructional materials

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	CD	30	60.0	60.0	60.0
	Flash cards	7	14.0	14.0	74.0
	Supplementary books	10	20.0	20.0	94.0
	Others	3	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

As a side question for this study, the researcher tried to check for some practices parents were engaged at home to teach their children English language. Considering parents' use of teaching aid devices or instructional materials used at home, Table 5 reports parents' use of different types of teaching devices like CDs, flash cards, and supplementary books. As Table 5 shows, 60 percent of parents reported using CDs to help their children learn to read and write in English.

In terms of parents' teaching practices, 14 percent of the parents mostly mothers reported that they used flash cards for their children's English language learning. Asked about the provision of resources for learning English, nearly 20 percent of the parents provided supplementary books for their children's English learning. These findings give evidence to parents' willingness to utilize informal resources such as CDs rather than more direct strategies such as supplementary books. It is worth mentioning that just 6 percent of the parents used other kind of teaching materials for helping their children English learning and improvement.

## **5. Conclusions and Discussion**

Nearly all of the individual components of parental involvement were positively and significantly related to the students' educational outcomes. The specific components of parental

involvement studied here were correlated with school results as strongly as parental involvement as a whole.

Dealing with parental involvement, three factors related to PI were investigated. In other words, the three sub-scales of PI including HSC, HbI, and SbI were all positively and significantly correlated with students' achievement. Based on the significance level and correlation coefficient, there is a positive and significant relationship between each sub-scale, i.e. parents' home-school conferencing, home-based involvement, and school-based involvement with students' English score. One important finding of the present study is that school or educational programs encouraging parental involvement appear to be positively related to achievement for children. This is because parents tend to be enthusiastic about supporting the educational progress of their children on average, and tend to help their children more than parents who are obliged to take part in school activities due to a particular program.

The results of research question one run contrary to the claims by Mattingly, Prislín, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar's (2002) suggesting little support for the contributions of parental involvement programs to students' achievement. The results that emerged from this study about the parental involvement programs are worth considering from several perspectives. They indicate that parental support of preschoolers appears to be highly related to their better performance in learning a foreign language. Such a finding encourages administrators and teachers to convince parents of active engagement with children's learning activities

As a side question, this study was an attempt to check what practices Iranian parents engaged in to help their children



learn English better. The first objective was to assess the parents' reported use of English teaching practices like books, CDs, flash cards and so on. Sixty percent of all parents that were from different educational background and levels from high-school diploma to master degree reported using CDs. So, only about one third of parents read children's English language books to their children.

In terms of parents' teaching practices, nearly 14 percent of the parents mostly mothers reported the use of flash cards for their children's English language learning. The fact that only 14 percent of mothers reported using flash cards, a practice which is often seen as indicative of a more formal approach to teaching children, suggests that the common view of parents as favoring rote learning is not necessarily accurate, at least for pre-school children. Asked about the provision of resources for learning English, nearly 20 percent of the mothers provided supplementary books for their children's English learning. These figures suggest a preference for the provision of informal resources such as CDs rather than more direct strategies such as supplementary books and flash cards. The above results suggest that a majority of studied parents provide English language teaching aids like flash cards, books and especially CDs. It is worth mentioning that around 6 percent of the mothers reported that they provided their children with other kinds of teaching practices and materials to help them learn English or improve it.

### **6. Pedagogical Implications**

The findings of this study can have implications for early childhood educators in Iran. The obtained results may assist early childhood educators to provide opportunities that complement and build on the experiences that parents tend to gain at home. Moreover, these findings may assist

staff to gain insights into the factors influencing the children and families who attend their children's school enabling them to provide learning experiences and parent information which relates directly to the home practices they engage in. The results suggest that parental involvement is very important for students' education. Among parental involvement factors studied in this study, school-based involvement of parents was the most related one suggesting active participation of parents at school which can serve as a pretty strong element related to the type of EFL learning environment. It can also be said that should the educational system aim to raise the English proficiency of all children especially in kindergartens, it may be better to enhance mothers and fathers' participation at home and school. Using educational programs and software especially CDs, flashcards, books and also provision of play-based materials and other resources for English teaching can be very helpful.

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