Family-School Partnership for Enenhancing Pupils' Learning; A Proposed Model

Dr. Omar M. Khasawneh

College of Education
United Arab Emirate University

Dr. Ahmed H. Alsagheer

College of Education
Sharja University

Abstract: Nearly for the last three decades, some research studies have examined family-school partnership and the importance of parent/teacher relationships in order to enhance pupils' learning. The purpose of this research study is to offer practical suggestions for strengthening family-school partnership to enhance students' learning based on the results as well as findings of this study. The two researchers have surveyed one hundred and forty six participants who replied to the forty questionnaire statements, and conducted five personal interviews at the time of data collection. The sample of the study, which included school administrators, teachers, parents, and students, has been employed as a non-probability sampling technique since it is impractical to randomly select a sample representing the study population. Two research inquiries (the quantitative and the qualitative research methods) were employed in this study. Family involvement has recently become a necessary element of a successful academic achievement, and has helped a great deal in enhancing students' life-long learning. The Study findings and results have provided some evidence that family-school partnership is needed in order to improve students' academic achievement and most importantly to enhance their learning. The researchers, finally, suggested a proposed model that could be valid and subject to be applied for effective family-school partnership.

Introduction

Any effort at realizing the potential of education in order to empower individuals and transform society must look beyond schools to families and communities, the values, experiences, and conditions which influence the impact on public education (Brietborde & Swiniarski, 2002). When schools have well-developed partnership programs, families become involved and students become more positive about school and learning, studies found improvement in students' attendance, behavior, homework completion, and report grade cards (Epstein & Janson, 2004,p.23).

The purpose of this research study is to offer practical suggestions for strengthening links between homes and schools. The study focuses on the components which contribute to the challenges that confront evidence on partnership. An evaluation of one hundred and forty six participants' community partnership in The United Arab Emirates is employed in this study as an example to the linkage of home-school relationships. "For school to develop a partnership program involving all parents in a way that increases student success requires new ways of thinking about family and community involvement"(Epstein&Janson, 2004, p.19). The effectiveness of collaboration is likely to improve the practice of partnership provided that it is successful in making a difference in the lives of students.

At the school level, teachers, parents, and community members, as change agents, can be included and engaged in the school affaires as well as the teaching learning process provided that a de-centralization of decision-making is recognized (Everett- Heywood, 1998).   Achieving this will require examining the relationships between parents and teachers, parents and their children, and teachers and their pupils. Students who succeed in schools are almost always supported by their families, while other students struggle without support from home. Epstein & Janson state:

> *Comprehensive partnership program should include workshops for parents, newsletters, parent-teacher-student conference, volunteers, and interactive homework. Each activity raises explicit challenges that must be met in order to*

involve all families and to create two-way connections for educators and parents to share information and support students. (Epstein & Janson, 2004, p.22).

Educators in addition to parents work together in order to plan and implement comprehensive programs of involvement to establish welcoming school environments to enhance students' success. Teachers can be the most important link in the success of any partnership effort, and can provide guidance for families on setting realistic expectations, monitoring and helping with homework, and selecting appropriate books as well as learning materials (Davles, 2000).

The Problem

Key questions to be asked during the assessment phase are "why don't parents become involved in school activities?" And do schools leaders make everyone feel welcome? Understanding the answers to these questions is essential to improving program participation rates" (Dietz & Whaley, 1997, p.2). In schools as learning communities, parents could be partners to benefit pupils as a result of their involvement. Such involvement is linked to students' achievement through their schooling. Students' performance become well when their parents are more involved, and families who are involved in learning communities have the tendency to support them in several ways. For example, they can be advocates in terms of helping in enhancing students' achievement and promoting school improvement. Six types of involvement have been identified in which schools as learning communities may use to collaborate with families. These are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community" (Epstein & Janson, 2004). Through interviews and observations conducted by the researchers, and based on the literature reviewed for the purpose of this study, it has been concluded that there are some needs such as a direct communication between teachers and parents; there is a need to diffuse the culture of workshops throughout the Emirate schools. In addition to the needs of increasing the satisfaction of parents and community with schooling, and improving schools, to improve family –school partnership.

Questions

- What is partnership and what is its significance?
- What is the reality of family-school partnership in the UAE?
- What is the suggested model for improving family-school partnership?

Objectives:

- Understand the importance of educational partnership that includes definitions, instruments and tools, domains, and models.
- Understand the real world of home-school partnership in the UAE.
- Provide a model that is easy to apply in the Emirates society.

Methodology

Sample

The target population of the current research study included school administrators, teachers, parents, and students in Al-Ain school district in the UAE. A number of participants (146) at the time of data collection were surveyed. However, it is impossible to randomly select a sample to accurately represent the study population. Therefore, this is considered a preliminary in nature research study that does not necessarily represent the target population due to the fact that this would be impractical. From the perspectives of the two researchers, such a sample could be sufficient to accomplish the study objectives. In addition to developing eight interview questions and one of the researchers conducted five interviews with five school principals who are also parents.

Instruments

The two researchers developed a questionnaire that consists of four domains, which included thirty six statements, and was reviewed by a panel of seven experts who are faculty members within the college of education at the United Arab Emirates University in order to determine its validity. Their

feedback was taken into account, and changes as well as suggestions recommended by the validation panel have been incorporated into the study instrument.

In addition to the questionnaire statements, one of the researchers conducted five personal interviews in order to collect more information regarding the reality of linking between family and school. This kind of research tool gives more in depth analysis qualitatively. Reliability coefficient was calculated using Alpha (Cronbach) for 36 of the research sample and it was 0.883. In addition, an open-ended question that consisted of both the difficulties which face partnership between school and family as well as suggestions to make partnership more effective has been developed by the two researchers.

Rationale

While the quantitative approach was very helpful in this particular study, as the researchers were able to gather general information of the study sample, the qualitative method helped in making sense of the phenomenon and understands the meanings the interviewees bring to it. Both methodologies were used because even though they differ in many ways, they complement each other. Additionally, the qualitative approach assisted in a deeper understanding through the interviewees or co-researchers' words of their visions towards family-school partnership.

The two researchers employed of the quantitative as well as the qualitative research methods. The quantitative component was incorporated in this study in order to strengthen this methodology to assist the researchers to gain knowledge of the characteristics of large number of individuals responding to a multiple number of questions within a relatively short period of time. The quantitative approach provides information from a group of people to describe some aspects as well as characteristics of larger group.

The purpose of interviewing, according to (Seidman, 1991), was the researchers' interests in what the participants' experience is like and what meanings they make out of it. Interviewing was chosen for several reasons. It is consistent with people's ability in order to make meanings through

words. It is deeply satisfying to researchers who are interested in other people's stories or experiences. Regardless of the differences among both styles, the two researchers have come to appreciate both methodologies as the quantitative approach has given them the opportunity to add breadth in providing a broader understanding of how principals view home-school partnership. The qualitative approach has assisted in a deeper understanding through the interviewees' words about the relationship between schools and families. (Neuman, 2000).

Literature Review

Partnership is " An effort that involves families, school staff, and community representatives as equal partner working interdependently to plan, implement , and assess : (a) coordinated comprehensive services ... (b) academic support services ... to increase children's school success and improve the functioning of their families and communities. " (Molloy, Fleming, Rodrignez, Saavedra, Tucher and William, 1995).

The concept of Partnership could be based on a cohesiveness linkage among several factors to achieve mutual objectives. It means, according to school communities, that schools are to be open to the surrounding community. Educating and preparing youngsters is not only schools' enterprise, but also it is a collective responsibility shared by families. Community members and organizations along with schools make up a " company " in which all teachers, administrators and students, on one hand, and the community as a whole, on another (Alsagheer, 2003) .

The importance of home-school relationships for the success of children has been emphasized through research (Broussard, 2003). Family involvement in the schooling of the child, as the common interest, is too important to neglect. Teachers' success in developing home-school partnership depends on a match between teachers and parents' culture, values, social force, and how they view their roles (Keyes, 2002).

Family involvement is a key feature in students' success as research has proven during the last three decades. Such involvement may lead to

empowered families, and improved teachers, parents, children's attitudes, improved school-community relationship, reduce dropout rates, increase attendance, raise test scores, increase academic achievement, improved self-esteem, motivation, behavior, and engender success throughout the lives of children (Cochron & Dean, 1991; Epstein, 1992; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Desimone, 1999; Benpechat, 1990; Broussard, 2003).

Sar & Wulff, (2003) recommended that activities such as meetings, having lunch with teachers and children, talking and meeting with family members and organizing some events through which family and school members interact could be appropriate tools in enhancing and fostering partnership between school and family. This may help in resolving student behaviors and other problems that they may be taking place.

Understanding partnerships between families and professionals could be a form of stress and concern for parents and teachers. Parents complain about communicating with teachers and claim that their children's teachers do not understand nor respect cultural diversity to some extent. They believe that an ongoing struggle is another problem in which their kids do not receive appropriate and comprehensive services. Professionals blame school administration in their relationships with families and they are not prepared to work nor do they feel comfortable working with families (Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull, Poston, & Nelson, 2005). A two-way communication between family and school is a way to achieve mutual understanding of the cultural practices of both home and school (Lazer & Weisberg, 1996).

Schools which are concerned with developing high quality programs of family, school and community partnership must be supported by not only the school itself but also by community members. To promote their involvement efforts, schools need to evaluate their partnership activities. Schools that have higher quality programs may have more volunteers, representatives on school decision-making committees, and encourage parents to become involved helping their children with their homework. These programs bring together all three major components of partnership school, family and community. Such an involvement will likely benefit students (Sheldon and Van Voorhis, 2004).

As a result of classroom visits, the attitudes of parents and students had been developed toward the partnership policy, and parents claimed that teacher communication as well as student behavior at home were improved. Six months after implementing the partnership policy, students had higher attainment in several core subjects. Additionally, all students had improved the quality of their academic work in different disciplines. (Kyriakidas, 2005).

The effectiveness of partnership provides teachers and administration a great deal of information about students through what parents tell them in addition to students' benefits as a result of frequent communication. Partnership represents and contributes to building collaborative learning communities which require school leadership enthusiasm (Taylor & Pearson, 2004). School involvement consists of volunteering, communicating with school personnel and teachers, assisting in academic activities at home, attending school events, meetings of parent-teacher associations, and parent teacher conferences (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Families accompany their children to school if not in person; they come to school in their minds, hearts, hopes, and dreams. Teachers and administrators have explicit or implicit contact with families. Without understanding the context where students work, live and play, school teachers and administrators ignore parents' role. Educators also ignore the whole child without partnerships, and when dividing students into the home child and the school child reduces support from families (Epstein, 2001).

Results

The Presentation of Data Results: Quantitative Analysis

The first methodological approach in this research study was the quantitative method represented by four different domains that are: School Administration, Teachers, Students, and Parents. This section will present each domain individually.

The First Domain: School Administration

Responding to statement number 10 "School communicates with homes about students who cause classroom disruptions" (81%) of the study

sample (principals, teachers, and students) indicated that disruption is an obstacle that hinders the teaching/learning process.   Therefore, teachers need to directly communicate with parents By replying to the second statement that states: "School contacts the homes of students who are having academic difficulties", (79%) of the respondents believed that teachers need to keep in touch with parents in order to resolve any obstacle that could be encountered in classrooms. A third evidence that requires teachers to be involved along with parents in the business of the teaching/learning process is the Parents Teachers Association (PTA). Replying to the eighth statement "Parents Teachers Association (PTA) is effective at school" (73%) out of the study sample indicated that the school itself takes into account the effectiveness of these associations in which parents and teachers negotiate different matters.

Furthermore, (65%) of the respondents believe that schools ought to inform parents of their kids' positive performance and this is shown through their responses to the statement, which states "School sends home positive messages about students", About two thirds of the respondents (63%) believe that school shares its vision and mission with the local community represented by parents. This could be done through the meetings which take place in the parents' teachers associations.

Strangely enough that the participants shared a relatively high degree of agreement with the statement that suggests: "School allows parents to provide volunteer work". A (62%) of the study sample responded that school allows parents to provide volunteer work. "School sends home notices of PTA meetings" scored (57%) which is considered a low percentage indicating that school does not send notices on regular basis about what usually takes place within the PTA meetings. Another reason for this degree of agreement could be that those meetings are not held monthly. On the other hand, the attractiveness of community members for financial support is an effort that school puts, but these are not enough efforts to receive enough financial support especially from the wealthy community members.

Even though it's not part of the Emirate culture to constantly observe what is happening in the classroom, half of the respondents indicated an agreement with the related statement "School provides parents with

opportunities to observe classrooms".   Additionally, (49%) of the respondents, which is considered low, indicated that school does not offer information and educational ideas to develop positive home conditions that support learning. The same percentage of the respondents replied to statement number six "School allows parents to use its facilities". The culture of schools throughout this region focuses only on learning, while recent literature calls for that schools should be open to community members. Culturally speaking, the respondents did not agree on offering school facilities to community members.

Item number (13) indicates a high agreement by the study sample individuals (45%) regarding the homework telephone hotline The researchers had expected a much lower degree of agreement due to the fact that most of the schools do not have a homework telephone hotline. However, the respondents might have misunderstood the item or did not read it carefully. Therefore, a deeper analysis is provided in the qualitative part of this research study regarding this argument. According to item (3) "School provides parents with workshops on home schooling", the results of (34%) somewhat met the researchers expectations. Although this percentage indicates that workshops are not offered through schools sufficiently. Furthermore, it is an indicator of an actual culture within the schools where workshops are not considered part of the school culture in the Middle Eastern countries in general and in the UAE in particular. Therefore, there is a need to diffuse the culture of workshops throughout the Emirati schools. Responding to Item (2) "School provides parents with videotapes or audiotapes on partnership", (14%), which represent the lowest degree of agreement, reflects a realistic view of the respondents. In spite of the importance of the videotapes as well as audiotapes' roles in improving students learning, this could play a pivotal role in the awareness of parents about the importance of partnership.

The Second Domain: Teachers

The results of the second domain (ranging from 51% to 84%), which is related to teachers' roles in enhancing partnership, indicate a positive belief towards the linkage between schools and families. This is evident through the respondents' degree of agreement (84%) among the nine

statements of teachers' domain, that is, item (15) "The two-way communication with the families can enhance pupils' learning at home and in the community".

The study results showed that the teachers' degree of agreement (71%) in terms of items, (19, and 20) is considered reasonable indicating that teachers communicate with parents and respect individual differences. In regards to items (21, 16, and 23), the results showed a close agreement (68%) to a large extent that is; item (21) "Teachers pledge to explain academic and classroom expectations to parents". Items (16, and 23), showed that (68%) of the respondents agreed that teachers play a significant role in enhancing partnership between schools and families and explain the educational objectives, and grading system to students and their families. With regards to item (18) more than half of the respondents (55%), suggest that teachers play a significant role in terms of arranging meetings before and after classes. Finally, responding to statement number (22) "Teachers guide students and parents in selecting reading materials and TV programs", (51%) of the study sample desire to see teachers guiding their students to select reading materials as well as TV programs. However, this is a high percentage when compared to the school popular culture, which does not give special attention to TV programs and external reading materials.

The Third Domain: Parents

The results of the third domain (ranging from 51% to 85%), related to parents' participation in enhancing students learning illustrates a positive agreement on the questionnaire statements. (85%) of them encourage their kids to respect their-selves and others as the first statement of this domain, which is indicating a special care through parents due to its connectedness to the popular culture that calls for mutual respect. Additionally, (80%) of the parents are aware of and follow their kids' performance through meeting with teachers and the school administration. The results also showed that two thirds of the parents, (75%), encourage their children to pursue good study habits such as study times at home.

Furthermore, the study showed that (71%) of the parents are aware of the progress that their children achieve at school indicating another evidence of parents' awareness of their kids' progress and performance in the

schools.   With regards to communication between parents and their kids about school activities on daily basis, the degree of agreement (68%) is providing a third evidence of parents awareness of their children's performance. Even though a (61%) is not a high degree of agreement on the questionnaire statement that calls for parents to enhance good reading habits at home and read to them or motivate them to read by themselves, it gives parents an indicator to help their children improve their reading performance.

A (52%) is a high degree of agreement on the statement: "Parents volunteer for their children's school district", and surprised the researchers due to the fact that volunteer work is not part of the Emirate school culture, indicating the reality of home schooling. Half of the respondents (parents), (51%), who may be educated, are aware of the importance of directing their kids to select programs from which their kids can benefit. On the other hand, a similar percentage did not agree. The reasons might have been due to the unawareness of the program variety and their influence on their children. All in all, parents participate in their children's school work within the home, they nevertheless do not go the extra mile in order to help or, volunteer in school activities.

The Fourth Domain: Students

The results of the fourth domain (ranging from71% to 93%) related to students showed that partnership has a great influence on learning, performance, self-confidence, security, and problem-solving. This is evident through the responses of the study sample individuals to the questionnaire statements. For example, the responses to statement "Partnership helps in student problem-solving" placed the highest (93%) and this shows the pivotal role of linking schools and homes to solve students' problems. The second highest degree of agreement was responding to the statement that calls for a contribution through the linkage that assists their academic performance.   Ninety percent of the students believed that partnership between home and school help their academic performance. Nearly three quarters of the students participating in this study, (88%) believed that their confidence and academic achievements are improved as a result of the involvement of their parents and positive relationships between homes and

schools. Replying to the statement: "Students respect themselves, their family members, and school staff members", (87%). This is a high degree of agreement and congruent to the statement of the third domain (85%), which calls for parents to reinforce respect for self and others. "Respect self and others" is an essential tradition of the popular culture.

Consistent with the highest agreement on this domain, 86% of the students agreed with the statement "Students feel more secure as a result of partnership". This is another indicator of the importance of parents' involvement and being in the schools from time to time. This gives students more confidence, helps them in discussions, and improves their academic performance. Another high percentage (85%) has been provided by the respondents reacting to the statement that calls for the involvement of parents in school activities, which makes their children feel good. Seventy one percent of the students agreed on the statements related to an active participation by students whose parents carry out some of the school activities, and discuss the learning process at school. In addition, 68% agreed on the statement related to conversations between children and their parents. Generally speaking, parents discuss with their children what goes on at the school, but some parents do not go to see what really happens at the school.

In addition to the above four domains, the study questionnaire consists of two open-ended questions. They are:

Q1. What are the difficulties that face partnership between schools and families?

Q2. What would you suggest to make partnership between schools and families more effective?

The responses to the above two open-ended questions were summarized by the two researchers as follows:

The Difficulties and Suggestions:

The difficulties that face partnership between schools and families are concluded through the responses of the study participants who always agreed on the fact that the academic level of parents is low. Some parents in

the UAE are illiterate which influences their awareness of their children's school problems. This leads them to be careless and not keep up with their kids' performance in schools. As a result, parents' school visitations are not sufficient.

(difficulties)

The responses to the first question were:
1. A low of the academic level of parents, especially the villagers.
2. A lack of parents monitor of their kids performance.
3. Some parents weakness in terms of their realization of the partnership significance.
4. Some parents are unaware of their kids' problems, and too busy to spend quality time with them.
5. Family problems such as divorce, poverty and living afar.
6. A lack of parents' visitations to school.
7. Unawareness of partnership culture and its importance.
8. Different minorities who do not communicate well with school.
9. The majority of parents do not attend conferences.
10. The weakness of school programs to make partnership effective.
11. School districts and local community do not support the idea of partnership.
12. "Students' learning is the responsibility of the school only" is a school widespread culture.

(suggestions)

The responses to the second question were:
1. Organize training sessions to help parents attend meetings, become aware of partnership, and observe classrooms.
2. Parents should volunteer for their children's school district.
3. Schools should provide brochures and booklets about partnership to families.3.
4. Informing parents of partnership benefits.
5. School districts and administration should provide a clear plan to make partnership effective.
6. Using the media to educate the public about the importance of partnership.
7. Continuous communication and awareness using different tools.
8. Respect cultural diversity among parents.
9. Teachers should visit the homes.
10. School and family work together for common interests.
11. Encourage community members to support their schools programs.
12. Choose appropriate time for school meetings and designate special places for parents at the school.
13. Teachers should play a parental role.

The Presentation of Data Results: Qualitative Analysis

The second methodological approach in this research study was the qualitative one represented by conducting five different interviews with school principals who were also asked to respond to the research questions as parents. Those interviews were conducted by one of the researchers in order to provide a deep understanding of the research findings, while the distribution of the questionnaires provided broad responses through 146 participants.

A thematic presentation of the results based on the research questions will be presented throughout this part of the research study. The reader will have the opportunity to learn the responses of each participant to the interview questions of this study, not purely through the researchers' words, but through the words of the participants themselves. The first interview question of this research study states as follows: "Is there a partnership plan designed by the school to educate and benefit from parents? The Participants responded that there is no partnership plan designed by the school to educate parents and benefit from their academic and financial abilities. However, two of the respondents indicated that there is a school strategic plan, despite the fact that this partnership plan is not implemented. In other words, three of the participants said that there is no such a plan, while two of them said that their schools have a partnership plan within the strategic plan, but not taken into account.

The second interview question of this research study is "Does your school hold a general meeting for parents in order to clarify its vision and mission?" Again this question will be answered through the words of the participants. Four of the respondents concluded that during the first annual meeting, other issues are discussed such as forming and electing PTA members as the primary goal of the meeting. During this orientation, the roles of these parents, who have been elected as PTA members, are assigned. In addition to explaining some of the school policies, some students' needs are shared with parents. However, general meetings are not held to clarify the school mission and vision. The fifth respondent, on the other hand, indicated that schools view vision and mission as a new culture and to some schools; both terms are not yet comprehended.

Responding to the third question: "Does the school provide parents with workshops to help them in home schooling and become aware of their children's performance?" Only one of the participants articulated that very few schools provide parents with such workshops and those are the modern schools. Nevertheless, four of them indicated that schools do not offer workshops to involve parents in home schooling. Regarding the fourth question which states: "Does the school offer opportunity to parents and local community members for volunteer work?" All of the respondents strongly believed that volunteer work does not exist throughout their schools. One of them, however, said that there are some individual efforts by parents every now and then.

When asked the study participants whether or not teachers arrange meeting times with parents before and after school day, the first respondent replied: "…difficult because teachers have a heavy load on their burden in addition to the parents' unwillingness to come to the school". The second respondent said: "…provided that there is a problem, parents are usually too busy to be involved". The third response was: "…teachers arrange meeting times, but not periodically". The fourth reaction was as follows: "there are no such meetings and the school administration does not get involved in the first place". The final response to the fifth question was: "teachers arrange meeting times only when a problem is caused by a student, and there is only one meeting a year during the PTA in which very few parents attend".

Even though, some of the responses to the questionnaire statement that states: "The school has a homework telephone hotline" revealed that forty five percent of the respondents believed some schools have a homework telephone hotline, the interviews revealed that such an idea does not exist at all. The interviewees indicated that some schools have web sites, which allow parents to be acquainted with their kids' progress. Similar to the above responses, the interviewees articulated that teachers do not guide students and parents in selecting reading materials and TV programs. Meanwhile, about half of the questionnaire respondents (51%) believed that teachers provide students and parents with guidance to help them in selecting materials to read as well as TV programs to watch. On individual basis, however, some teachers provide such guidance.

The final interview question was: "Do teachers respect the uniqueness of students and their families (Diversity)?"   The comments of the participants varied. Two of them believed that the idea of diversity is not taken into consideration. Three of them, on the other hand, believed that schools consider individual differences among students. Doing so through determining students' academic levels in order to place them in suitable classrooms. The same three respondents indicated that diversity is not taken into account when it comes to parents. Based on the study findings, results, and literature, and since family-school partnership is too important to neglect, the two researchers proposed a model for effective partnership to enhance students learning.

The Model

One of the purposes of this study was to offer practical suggestions for strengthening links between home and schools in order to enhance pupils learning. In light of study results, findings, and literature, family-school partnership is too important to neglect. In this partnership, benefits and advantages reflect on 'one team' that includes school, family, students, and community members. Additionally, this study revealed some obstacles and difficulties that limit implementing effective partnership between school and family. Accordingly, the current study aims at providing a suggested model valid and subject to be applied based on the following rationale:

- Partnership is one of the main school quality criteria in modern schools.

- Family-school partnership benefits community members, parents, teachers, school administrators, and most importantly students.

- Partnership could be based on mutual planning, vision, and performance.

- Partnership represents one of the major school important approaches.

- The need for new approaches, for example partnership, that contribute to improve school performance in general and solve problems within schools in particular.

- Partnership offers a better understanding for parents' needs and the needs of their children.

- Partnership can help families and schools in solving students' problems.

- Partnership can build bridges and channels of communication toward excellence between homes and schools.

- A diffusion of the "culture" of partnership based on mutual and common benefits among all team players.
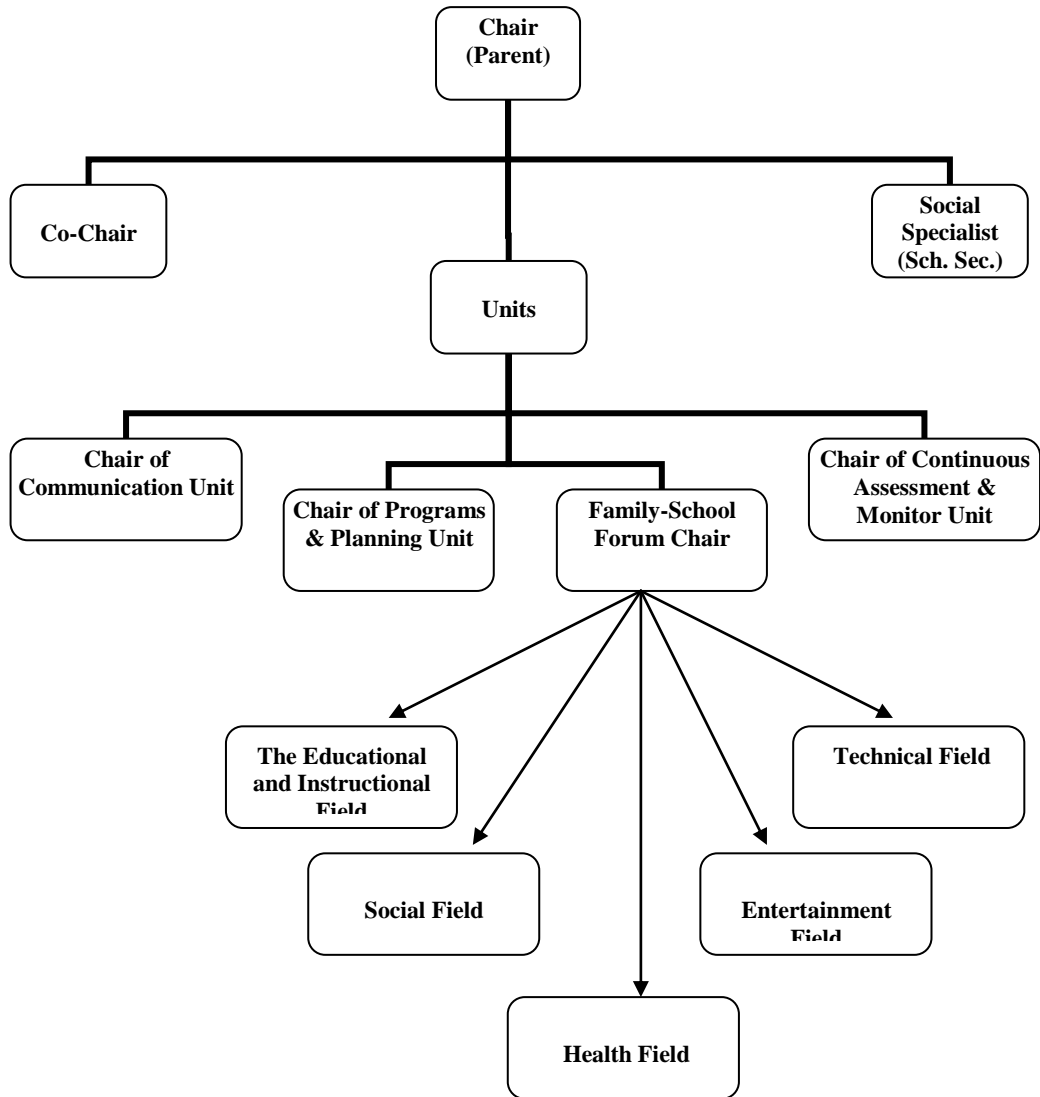
The Model units

One of the primary research questions was: What is the suggested model for improving family-school partnership? The results showed the need to enlist parents in the learning enterprise of their children, and their involvement has positive effects on their children's learning. To improve the performance of schools and families for enhancing and caring for the improvement of student performance level, the two researchers are providing a proposed model based on the study results and findings. The model includes the following units:

1. Organizational Structure.

2. Communication.

3. Programs & Planning.

4. Family-School Forum.

5. Continuous Assessment & Monitoring.

First, the Organizational structure:

A group of individuals who perform actual tasks or assignment that facilitates the model application.

Organizational Structure of the Model

```
                           Chair
                          (Parent)

  Co-Chair                                         Social
                                                 Specialist
                           Units                 (Sch. Sec.)


   Chair of                                    Chair of Continuous
 Communication Unit                              Assessment &
                 Chair of Programs   Family-School  Monitor Unit
                  & Planning Unit    Forum Chair


       The Educational                        Technical Field
       and Instructional
            Field
              Social Field      Entertainment
                                    Field

                    Health Field
```

The above figure shows the components of the organizational structure that includes the chairperson, who is an educated parent and willing to offer the school volunteer work. The co-chair , the school principal, who plays the role of the chair assistant, and the school secretary, who is also a second assistant of the chair as the social specialist. The different units include the communication unit, family-school forum, programs and planning unit, and the continuous and monitor unit. The family-school forum consists of six fields; they are: the educational and instructional field, the social field, the health field, the technical field, the economic field, and finally the entertainment field.

Second, the Communication Unit:

It is a unit in which the connection between school and students' families is facilitated. The chair of this unit, who is a parent with computer skills in addition to a school teacher design appropriate communication tools in order to support partnership. Such communication tools are; designing a school web site, developing a telephone hotline, and developing booklets and brochures that provide sufficient information about partnership, its importance, its requirements, school performance, its nature, and some events, which had already taken place and affected the performance of school, parent, and most importantly students.

Third, Programs & planning Unit:

It is a unit in which the chair who is a parent with administrative skills and planning background in addition to a school teacher design the needed programs as well as planning units in order to support partnership between school and family. This could be done through the following cohesiveness steps: conducting study surveys to determine parents' different levels in terms of their social, academic, economic, health, and needs based on their backgrounds. As a result, the objectives and the outcomes of the programs & planning units could be determined to meet their children's needs (see the following figure).

Programs & planning Unit
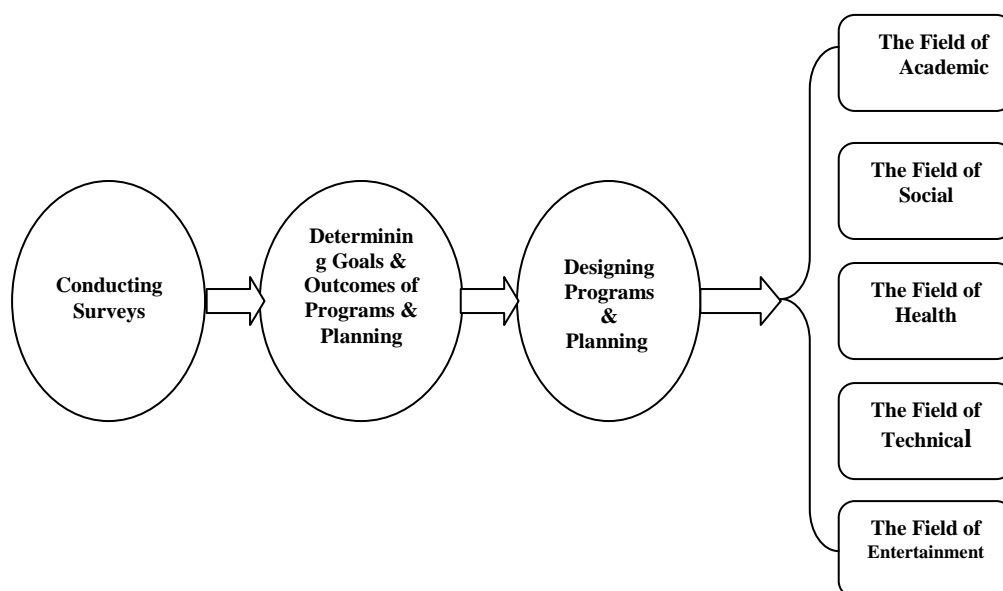
In addition, volunteerism could be discussed to investigate the readiness of parents who are willing to provide the school with volunteer work. The Programs & Planning unit can elaborate on such discussions with parents to determine the type of work each parent can offer. This unit will be able to develop a time table so that services and volunteer work are provided by parents.

Fourth, Family-School Forum:

The forum could be defined as a meeting place to express, discuss, and implement the designed programs and planning.

The forum may provide the following services:

The Academic Field.   For example, providing workshops or, conferences, lectures, seminars, and to discuss effective teaching and tutoring methods, learning styles, and home schooling strategies.   The

parents' awareness of their significant educational role would reflect upon their children's school performance as a result.

The Social Field. An example of this is providing parents with information about their vital role as role model, and educating them of their leadership role at levels, family and society. Societal influences may be positive or negative on children and their behavior within the school. Furthermore, parents may acquire and become loyal to their society, which will most likely reflect on their children's loyalty. The forum also can discuss such issues that are related to family problems such as divorce, poverty, and other social issues. A discussion of such issues could help parents become aware of the influence of these problems on not only their children, but also on the society as a whole.

The Health Field. Through this field, parents and their children could benefit from the information provided about health and its relation to students' academic achievement and their performance in general. Schools, which contact the homes of students who are having academic difficulties, can offer health habits, train parents about first aid, health principles, and help them become aware of health problems such as smoking, and addiction to drugs that result in jeopardizing their kids' future and threaten their academic future.

The Technical Field. The forum can conduct training sessions for parents about computer basic skills and how to use the internet to communicate with the school, in addition to discussing some ethical problems so that they can protect their children from its danger.

The Entertainment Field. For example, the forum can discuss the importance of the entertainment domain as an educational way in order to help children grow mentally as well as physically. Sports competitions may be performed within the schools while parents, as spectators, watch their kids compete and practice different forms of physical activities. Plays and occasional parties could also be performed by students who can invite their families to watch them. Additionally, distinguished students may be recognized by holding special gatherings that include their parents, and other community members.

Fifth, the Continuous Assessment and Monitor Unit:

The chair of this unit, who is a parent with an assessment background helped by a school teacher, can monitor the applications of the model. This could be done through a continuous supervision and overseeing the work performed, and controlling any problems that may occur. This team should design appropriate assessment tools and rubrics to measure the degree of success to achieving the outcomes. Some examples of the assessment tools would help in designing questionnaires, conducting interviews, and observations. At the end, the unit chair ought to provide the executive with regular reports stating the performance of the model. All the organizational structure members will have to discuss this report in order to improve the performance of the model.

Discussion & Conclusion

Family involvement is necessary for successful academic achievement, and helps in enhancing life-long learning of students. The purpose of this study was to offer practical suggestions for strengthening family-school partnership to enhance students' learning. Even though the study showed some difficulties that limit implementation of effective family-school partnership, the current results indicated the importance of the linkage between homes and schools which provides easy access and communication between parents and teachers in terms of what takes place at schools. The findings of this study provided some evidence that family-school partnership is needed to enhance students' learning. These results were consistent with previous resarch which showed the need to enlist parents in the learning enterprise of their children, and their involvement has positive effects on their children's learning. For example, (Sheldon and Van Voorhis, 2004) argued that schools which develop high quality programs of family, school and community linkage must be supported by community members in addition to the school itself . Such schools may have more volunteers, representatives on school decision-making committees, and encourage parents to become involved and help their children with their homework. The involvement of the three major parties school, family and community definitely benefit students.

Consistent with Kyriakidas, (2005), this study results showed that parents who work with their children in class and found that six months after implementing the partnership policy, students had higher attainment in several core subjects.   All students had improved the quality of their academic work in different disciplines.   The attitudes of parents and students had been developed toward the partnership policy, and parents claimed that teacher communication as well as student behavior at home were improved as a result of classroom visits.

Additionally, this study showed that teachers need to directly communicate with parents, school should contact the homes of students who have academic difficulties which is an indicator that teachers need to keep in touch with parents in order to resolve any obstacle that could be encountered in classrooms, and the school itself should take into account the effectiveness of these communications through which parents and teachers negotiate different matters.   These results are consistent with (Taylor & Pearson, 2004), who argued that the effectiveness of partnership provides teachers and administration a great deal of information about students through what parents tell them in addition to students' benefits as a result of frequent communication. And with (Hill & Taylor, 2004), who argued that partnership represents and contributes to building collaborative learning communities which require school leadership enthusiasm.

The effectiveness of partnership between families and schools is demonstrated as a major finding of this study which may indicate that parents and teachers in the United Arab Emirates must communicate constantly. School-home partnership has recently been a focal issue in education theoretically, but needs to be put in practice throughout the Emirati schools.

References

Al Sagheer, A, H. (2003). Egyptian school culture in the21st century: A field

Study at Egyptian schools. Journal of Education & Development. Year 11, (27), 48-101.

Bempechat, S.B. (1990). The role of parent involvement in children's academic learning: A review of the literature. New York: Clearinghouse on Urban Education.

Berg, B. L. (1995). Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences. Boston. London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Allyn and Bacon.

Breitborde, Lou- Mary & Swiniarski, Louise Boyle (2002). Family education and community power: new structures for new visions in the educational village. Journal of educational studies. 28, (3), 305-317.

Broussard, C. Anne, (2003). Facilitating home-school partnership for multiethnic families: School social workers collaborating for success. Children & School Journal, 25, (4), 211-222.

Cochran, M. & Dean, C. (1991). Home-school relations and the empowerment process. The Elementary School Journal, 91,261-269.

Davels, Don. (2000). Powerful partnerships among schools, parents and communities. The National Association of Elementary School Partnerships: Boston.

Desimone, L. (1999). Linking parent involvement with student achievement: Do race and income matter? Journal of Educational Research, 93,(1), 11-31.

Dietz, Michael J. & Whaley, Jamie. (Editors). (1997). School, family and community: techniques and models for successful collaboration. Aspen Publishers, INC: Gaithersburg, Maryland.

Epstein Joyce L. & Janson Natalie R. (2004). School, family and community partnerships link the plan. Education Digest.69, (6), 19-23.

Epstein, J.L. (1992). School and family partnership. In M. Alkin (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Educational Research (6th ed.): Macmillan, New York.

Epstein, Joyce L. (2001). School, family, and community partnerships. Westview Press. The United States of America.

Everett- Heywood, Gary. (1998). Problem solving as home: School Strategy and Research Methodology.4, (1), 57-77.

Henderson, A. T, & Berla, N. (1994). A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement: National Committee for Citizens in Education, Columbia, MD.

Hill, Nancy E. & Taylor, Lorraine C. (2004).   Parental school involvement and children's academic achievement: American Psychological Society, 13,(4), 161-164.

Keyes, Carol R. (2002).   A way of thinking about parent/teacher partnerships for teachers international. Journal of Early Years Education, 10, (3), 177-1

Kyriakides, Leonidas. (2005). Evaluating school policy on parents working with their children in class. The Journal of Educational Research, 98, (5), 281-298.

Lazer, Althier, M. & Weisberg, Renee. (1996). Inviting parents' perspectives: Building home- school partnerships to support children who struggle with literacy. The Reading Teacher Journal. 50, (3), 228-237.

Molloy, P., Fleming, G., Rodrignez, C.R., Saavedra, N., Tucker, B. & William, D. L. (1995). Building home, school community partnerships: The Planning Phase. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory : Austin, Texas.

Neuman, W. L. (2000).   Social research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches. Boston, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Allyn and Bacon.

Sar, Bibhuti K. & Wulff, Daniel P. (2003). Family builders approach: Enhancing the well-being of children through family-school partnerships. Children & Schools Journal 25,(4), 241-251.

Seidman, I. E. (1991). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and social sciences. New York and London: Teachers College Press.

Sheldon, Steven, B. & Van Voorhis, Frances, L. (2004). Partnership programs in U.S. schools: Their development and relationship to family involvement outcomes. School Effectiveness and School Improvement Journal, 15,(2), 125-148.

Summers, J.A, Hoffman, L., Marquis, J., Turnbull, A, Poston, D., & Nelson, L.L. (2005).   Measuring the quality of family-professional partnerships in special education services. Exceptional Children Journal, 72, (1), 65-81.

Taylor, Barbara M. & Pearson, P. David. (2004). Research on learning to read at school, at home, and in the community. The Elementary School Journal, 105, (2), 167-181.