

ARABIC PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN
AMERICAN SCHOOLS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Background	1
Research Problem	2
Significance of the Study	3
Definition of Terms	3
Organization of the Study	4
II. REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH	5
Importance of Parental Involvement	5
Factors Influencing Parental Involvement	6
III. INTRODUCTION	10
Subjects	10
Instrument	12
Research Design and Procedure	12
Analysis Procedure	13
IV. THE RESULTS	14
Degree and Types of Parental Involvement	14
Reasons for Passive or Noninvolvement in American Schools	
By Arabic Parents	16
Arabic Parents' Concepts of Parental Involvement in Schools	19
Differences Between Arabic and American Schools	20
Summary	25
V. CONCLUSIONS	27
REFERENCES	33

Chapter	Page
APPENDICES	37
APPENDIX A - INTERVIEWEES.....	38
APPENDIX B - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	40
APPENDIX C - INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL FORM	42

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The United States is well known for its diversity of cultures, which makes meeting the needs of different aspects of the society a challenging task. As society faces changing needs, parental involvement in schools has become an important issue in many educational reports and research.

The role of the school has become more important in preparing youth with the ability to face changes in political, economic, and social arenas, but the school alone cannot do an effective job of preparing society's youth. A family is needed to provide the emotional support and psychological intimacy that is not possible in a larger school environment. To help our students, who are the future for any society, we have to give them a good environment which can offer support in meeting challenges of the real world. To support the school's job, a good relationship between school and family becomes essential. Most studies in parental involvement have been conducted without specifying certain ethnic groups or minorities, although some have acknowledged the diverse ethics of different cultures. A few studies have looked for obstacles to parental involvement for such minorities as Japanese (Shoho, 1992) and Chinese (Constantino, Cul,

and Faltis, 1995, and Zhang and Carrasquillo, 1996). However, there is no study conducted to see how international students, particularly those at major universities in the United States, perceive school involvement.

Of particular interest are students from Arabic-speaking countries. This group has not been studied before, although they have become one of the larger international groups in the United States. In comparison with American culture, Arab culture is more conservative. It would be interesting to see how they adapt to the more liberal culture of the United States. This study was conducted with Arab students at a southwestern university to determine their involvement in schools as parents and what they perceive as barriers to their involvement. Are Arabic parents who are international students having the same difficulties as minorities reviewed in the research literature? The results of this study will provide part of the answers to these questions.

Research Problem

This study will try to answer these questions:

1. How are Arabic parents who are international students at a southwestern university involved (noninvolved, passive, or active) in American schools?
2. What barriers keep these parents from being passively or actively involved in schools?

Significance of the Study

As previously explained, parental involvement in schools is important for student success and therefore, for society's success. International students face many challenges adapting to a new environment, such as different language, social norms and academic

expectations. Thus, it is essential to see how minorities or other ethnic groups participate in schools as they become part of this society and help build its future. To have vital communication between parents and school, we have to know the obstacles that could hinder participation and then determine ways to overcome these obstacles. Suggestions will be presented which will assist in understanding the nature of Arabic culture as it relates to school involvement.

Definition of Terms

The Department of Education and Training (1994) defines parental involvement as the following:

Parental involvement at schools refers to parent volunteers who assist teachers, administrators, and children in classrooms or other areas of the school. It also refers to parents who come to schools to support student performances, sports, other workshops or other programs for their own education and training (p. 15).

For the purpose of this study, Philipsen's (1996) study regarding parental involvement will also be utilized as a definition of parental involvement. Philipsen (1996) classifies parental involvement as three types: passive, active, and non-involved. His definition of active involvement ranges from "visible participation in school-related activities to active participation in school governance and policy making" (p. 8). Passive involvement includes parental support (but not attendance) of children's activities, "silent" encouragement at home of children's efforts, and making sure students finish homework. Non-involvement is used to describe those who do not fit in Philipsen's categories of passive and active involvement.

Arabic parents who are international students will be defined as students who come from Arabic-speaking countries, to study at a major state university in the southwest, and then return to their home country.

Organization of the Study

The following chapter is a review of the literature. Studies have shown which difficulties keep parents from participation in schools. The methods chapter contains how the subjects will be selected and the method used to collect the data. The fourth chapter presents the interview information, while the fifth chapter presents conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

This literature review investigated the area of parental involvement in American schools. Two main points discussed were the importance of parental involvement and factors influencing parental involvement. Some research which mentioned involvement of minority parents was especially studied. This investigation used recent findings, mainly from the last ten years.

Importance of Parental Involvement

Most of the studies on parental involvement found the importance of having a positive relationship between parents and the school (Cockrell, 1992, Taylor & Machida, 1994; Hopper, 1992; Ames et al. 1993; Morris, 1995; Keith, 1992). Some of the benefits of this relationship include higher achievement levels and fewer behavior problems. Cooperation between the school and home makes the school's job easier and students' time more profitable. All these studies emphasized the importance of parental involvement in schools, especially for students who are at risk. Snipes (1995) found that what makes the difference in high-achieving elementary schools is having a strong parent-teacher organization and sending a newsletter home. Keith (1992) found that homework is an important factor to students' achievement. More than one study reported that a parent-teacher organization, open houses, conferences, newsletters, and calls are

important (Cotton & Mann, 1994; Holden, 1990). Cotton and Mann (1994) also found that parent have an indirect influence on decision making in schools such as determining the courses that could be taught, school board, and parent-teachers organization. Miller and Narrett. (1995) found that parent involvement is important for students who are at-risk in reading. Dolan and Gentile (1996) found that educators must know how to contact and communicate with parents and that mutual respect and trust is important.

Factors Influencing Parental Involvement

There are a number of different reasons for parents to remain uninvolved in their children's schools. Harry , Allen, and McLaughlin (1995) found that late information and inflexible time for conferences, an emphasis on documents rather than participation, and the use of "educatorese" or jargon limited meaningful participation. Economic and social factors might also pose obstacles to parent involvement. Wilson , Pentecoste, and Nelms. (1983) indicated that the age, occupation, and education levels of parents influence their involvement in schools.

In another study, Philipsen (1996) interviewed teachers, administrators, and parents and asked them to rate the level of parental involvement in their schools. The purpose of the study was to make parents and educators understand the complications of parental involvement. He observed PTA meetings and other events related to teachers and parents, interviewed parents and teachers, and he used document analysis. He found that a high degree of parental involvement and academic success for the school did not represent positive relationships among those who were involved in the school, and it did not mean that the relationship between parents and educators was a positive. He

discovered that parents differed in their interpretations of school participation, from inactive support to actual participation in school activities to participation in decision-making. These findings can be used to categorize parental involvement into three categories: noninvolvement, passive involvement, and active involvement. Philipsen felt it was important to recognize that parent involvement not only differs in interpretation by various groups of parents, but it also differs over time. He found that as the students get older, their parents stop participating in school. This noninvolvement may be caused by children not wanting parents to be at the school or by parents feeling their children no longer required their involvement. Additional causes for noninvolvement were economic and social struggles.

Holden (1990) found that some reasons behind low parent involvement in school were lack of time, long distances from job or home to the school, parents not asked to be involved, and lack of transportation and child care for activities. However, parents still wanted more communication with teachers, especially if there was a problem (Holden, 1990). In addition, Cockrell (1992) found that Native Americans had difficulty in communicating with schools because they did not trust the schools to treat their children fairly, and they felt that schools was not willing to cooperate with them. Ehman (1995) also saw that there was distrust on both sides, which lowered the level of parental involvement.

Simply having a good relationship with educators or in the community does not produce a high level of parental involvement, as Cotton and Mann discovered (1994). However, they also determined that parents participated well if their children participated in activities. Their study found that having parent-teacher organizations, sending

newsletters home, open houses, conferences, and calls gave more opportunities for such participation. All these findings should encourage the educational system to be aware of the significance of parental involvement in school and to provide opportunities for such participation.

In addition, there are some studies have been conducted to see how certain minorities, such as Chinese and Japanese, are involved in schools. No similar study was conducted with Arabic parents. One of these studies (Constantino, Cul, and Faltis.1995) showed that lack of language skills was an important reason for some, such as immigrant Chinese, to not cooperate with schools. Zhang and Carrasquillo (1996) looked for cultural and family factors which could have influenced four unsuccessful Chinese students. Their search included interviews with the parents and students, students' essays, questionnaires and the students' academic records. They found that parents could not help their children with homework or visit school due to language barriers and the long working hours of the parents. Also the Chinese parents did not like the way American students dealt with their parents or their teachers. They said it was disrespectful, and they did not want their children to be like them. Shoho (1992), who conducted an historical comparison of parental involvement in three generations of Japanese Americans in the education of their children, found cultural differences and language were the main factors to lower first generation involvement in school. From the second generation and the third generation the parent involvement in school gradually became more active as they adapted to the language and society of their new home.

This study focuses on the parental involvement in a group that has not been studied previously. It investigates how Arabic parents who are international students at

the university are involved in their children's schools, and what obstacles they face in becoming more involved.

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the subjects, their characteristics, and the selection process. Then the instrument and what it measures is explained, followed by a description of the design and procedures. Finally, there is a section discussing analysis of these data.

Subjects

The group interviewed consisted of twelve Arabic parents who were international students from different Arab countries; three from Saudi Arabia—one mother identified as (ISAM1), and two fathers identified as (ISAF1) and (ISAF2); one father from Jordan—identified as (IJOF1); one father from Kuwait identified as (IKUF1); three from Sudan—two mothers identified as (ISUM1 and ISUM2) and a father as (ISUF1); and four from Egypt—three mothers identified as (IEGM1, IEGM2 and IEGM3) and one father as (IEGF3) (Appendix A). Parents were selected from a list provided by the International Student Office. Those interviewed were parents who had children in local public schools, and who are living here in the United States for a short time. Family size ranged from 1 to 5 children, but most families had two or three children. The children ranged in age from five to thirteen and were in kindergarten to sixth grade.

The parents who were interviewed represented the distinct economies of Arab countries. The Arab-speaking world can be divided into low-income, middle-income,

and high-income countries. Low-income and middle-income economies are often referred to as developing economies. The country in this study from the low-income division is Sudan; those from the middle-income are Jordan, Egypt, with Saudi Arabia classified as upper middle; and from the high-income is Kuwait (The World Bank, 1997). Those countries with developing economies do not have as many resources to spend on education; schools are frequently older, poorer, and more traditional in their focus. They do not have access to technology or more modern educational theories and curriculum. On the other hand, Kuwait, an upper-level economy, has a more modern view of education. Their schools are well-equipped, teachers are well-educated, and teaching methodology is more up-to-date (The World Bank, 1996). Saudi Arabia presents an interesting anomaly. Although its educational system is technologically advanced, methodology and curriculum are more conservative. This may be due to traditional customs and more strict religious interpretation in Saudi Arabia. Because all these countries share the same religious background, they have similar ideas about values and culture which influence all aspects of daily life. Some of these important ideas are prayer (five times a day), respect for elders, obedience to parents, honesty, extended family, modesty, separation of the sexes, sexual morality (purity before marriage, fidelity after marriage). Religion in these countries is the center of all practices in religious and secular life (Patai, 1983).

Instrument

A structured interview was developed to collect data. The questions about parental involvement were derived by using information in the definition of parental involvement from Philipsen (1996). The research questions are:

1. How are Arabic parents who are international students at a Midwestern university involved (noninvolved, passive, or active) in American schools?
2. What barriers keep these parents from being passively or actively involved in schools?

This interview was presented in the Arabic language first, using a tape recorder to record the sessions. The questions and responses were translated into a written transcript in English. The interview had nineteen questions about involvement in schools (Appendix B). Questions #1-4 dealt with general information. Question #5 was used to determine involvement or noninvolvement, while #6-13 were used to categorize the type of involvement (passive or active) according to Philipsen's definitions. Finally, questions #14-19 were used to elicit information about barriers to involvement and a general overview about involvement in American schools.

Research Design and Procedure

The interview contains questions that provide information to answer the research questions regarding Arabic parent involvement and barriers to their involvement. In the interview, sensitive questions (such as age or income) were avoided so that the subjects felt comfortable in responding to the researcher; also, there were no questions that could specifically identify the respondent. Each interview was held after first calling parents

and arranging a time to interview them in their homes for one hour. Additional time was scheduled, if necessary. A tape was used to record the interview, after receiving permission to do so.

Analysis Procedure

The first step in analyzing the data was to number each interview, then to number every line of each interview. Next, each question was put in a separate computer file and the answer from each of the twelve respondents was compiled in this file. Next, each computer file was reviewed to search for commonalties and exceptions. Answers then were examined to determine how they fit with Philipsen's findings. Finally, information pertinent to the research questions was organized using Philipsen's categories.

Parents were categorized in to three groups according to their responses to the questions. All twelve of the parents interviewed were placed in one of the following categories : noninvolvement, passive involvement, or active involvement.

Parents who answered "no" to all questions # 5,6,8,10,12,13 were categorized as non involved. Positive responses to questions # 6 (when the answer meant "at home") and # 10 placed parents in the category of passive involvement. Additionally, if parents answered "yes" to only one or two of questions 5, 8,12,13 they were also considered passively involved. Parents who responded "yes" to at least three of questions 5, 6, 8, 10 (meaning other activities), 12, and 13 were categorized as being actively involved.

CHAPTER IV

THE RESULTS

In order to determine the extent of participation from Arabic parents, twelve parents from various Arab countries were interviewed in their homes for approximately one hour each. Questions were designed to determine the amount of involvement in the public schools, what type of involvement parents had, and what barriers they encountered to such involvement. In addition, parents volunteered information about their concepts of involvement and differences in the American and Arabic school systems.

Degree and Types of Parental Involvement

Philipsen describes three ways that parents may support their children: no involvement, passive or "silent" involvement with schoolwork at home, and active involvement by participating in activities at school.

Two of the parents who were interviewed fit this category of noninvolvement. These parents' comments reflect their feeling of little need for further participation. One Sudanese father (ISUF1) said, "So far I never volunteer and nobody asks me to do anything." Another Sudanese mother (ISUM2) said she participated, "Just when they ask." Also there was a Sudanese mother (ISUM3) who answered the question # 5 "Do you involve in school by asking or volunteer?", she said: "There is a weekly report, so I do not need to worry about my son."

Five parents who were involved passively expressed interest and concern in their children's work, but did not volunteer for activities and were not involved at the school building. Their support was provided at home. Comments which reflect this passive support include one Egyptian mother (IEGM1) stated she helped "... them in their math, science and English homework." Parents also felt they assisted their children by providing necessary fees or extra supplies. A father from Kuwait (IKUF1) said, "If they want anything for their schools, we give it to them like fees, also if they need help in their homework I help them on it."

Parents who were considered actively involved, volunteered, participated in school functions, attended various meetings, and occasionally gave classroom presentations. One Saudi father (ISAF1) stated, "I ask about them voluntarily once every two weeks." He also said, "I go to sit in the classroom to see what is going on, help my children in their homework." There were also a few parents who communicate with teachers by sending a letter to ask about their children. Four from the sample answered positively that they helped teachers by making presentations about their culture and history. An Egyptian mother (IEGM1) who noted, "I presented different cultural and religious holidays, like Ramadan, Eid Al Feter, and Eid Al Adha. Egyptian History and culture was the topic of my presentation several times."

Most of the activities in which the parents are involved include attending athletic events, carnivals, and assemblies. The pervious Egyptian mother (IEGM1), mentioning these activities, said, "... especially the [events] which my sons are involved in." None of the subjects assist the administration in any area nor do most of them assist the teacher in the classroom.

Reasons for Passive or Non Involvement in American Schools by Arabic Parents

In order to understand the type of parental involvement of Arab parents, it is necessary to clarify the reasons they may have for passive or noninvolvement. Two of the fathers said that they are not involved at all in the American schools, although they do have some involvement in the local Arabic school. In Stillwater, many Arabic-speaking children attend the local Arabic School three evenings a week, 4-5 hours each evening, to work on curriculum in their native Arabic. The school currently teaches thirteen students, first through seventh grades, and has four teachers, all women—one from Saudi Arabia, two from Egypt, and one from Sudan. Although not all of these women have special training in education, they all have at least a Bachelor's Degree from their native country. The school uses the Saudi curriculum, teaching science, history, math, Arabic language, and religion. This school was originally exclusively for Saudi students. Now 95% of the students are from the Saudi Arabia and 5% come from areas such as Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. All thirteen of the children currently enrolled belong to parents who were interviewed for this study.

When asked about his non-involvement in the American schools, one Saudi father (ISAM2) said that he does not have time and also that his children attend the local Arabic School in the evenings. "I am not involved in any activity in school because I do not have time." The other parent, a father from Sudan (ISUF1), said the schools are doing their best and everybody knows his job: "Nothing really, I think they are doing their best." Two subjects answered that if it is necessary they will go to ask about their children.

The Saudi father (ISAF2) also mentioned the Arabic school: "I do not have time, and their mother helps them in Arabic School, but she does not have language that could help them [in English]." Another Egyptian father said (IEGF1), "I am not involved in any activities, but if the school wants me, I will be happy to help." One Egyptian mother (IEGM2) stated she would like to have more involvement if she had transportation and time. A father from Egypt (IEGF1) said he sends letters instead of going to the school: "If I could not go, I send a letter for the teacher with my daughter, and the teacher sends an answer back with my daughter. I prefer this way because sometimes I cannot visit the school."

All of the parents interviewed, when answering question # 14, they said that they do not face any major difficulties in their involvement. However, after their initial answers most of them began discussing specific problems. One actively involved Egyptian mother (IEGM2) who wanted to be more involved stated, "Whenever I ask them to help they say 'no thanks, when we need your help we will let you know', but actually they do not let me in or try to give me responsibility to help." The same mother said, "... give me more chance to be more involved in schools, by letting me know what can I do to help-- even cut paper." One father from Saudi (ISAM1) described a problem when he wanted to put his children in the schools according to their Saudi Certificate. He discovered that American schools determine grade level by the child's age, which is different from grade determination by testing in Saudi Arabia.

When I came I faced difficulty to let my children to be in the same grade they were in their Arabic school. And the Embassy depends on their grade they were in to give them certificate to help them to transfer from their grade to another one in Saudi. Therefore, I had difficulty with the principal to persuade him to let my kids in the same grade. Here they are more serious about age to determine which grade to be in. Then I had to talk to

the Board of Education and they agreed to let my children to be in the grade we want, but I needed to write a statement that I am responsible about that. The teachers sent reports for me about my kids, but it talked about progression without mentioning that they have any problems. At the end of the year, they sent a letter to me indicating that my kids will stay in the same grade because they were weak in reading and writing. Why didn't they tell me that before so that I could do something about it? Because of this mistake my kids study full time in American schools and full time in Arabic School (at night) so they can pursue their education without losing any year when we return to our country.

Many of the subjects continued to express various other problems that they face such as difficulties with their own busy study schedules; language difficulties for most of the wives, which prevents their communication with the schools; and unclear policies about participating in parent associations. Other problems included the mother not having a car or having young children who need day care, but there is no place in the schools where younger children can stay while parents are in classrooms. As a Kuwaiti father (IKUF1) said, "They do not have day care, so my wife cannot be involved because we have small kids, and also we have one car, and she can not participate unless I give her a ride, and I am busy with my studies." Another parent from Sudan (ISUF1) mentioned that picking up his son from activities made the father miss his work sometimes. Additionally, some parents may be reluctant to become involved in an activity with which they are not familiar. One Egyptian mother (IEGM1) suggested that there should be more multicultural activities so she could be more involved in her area of knowledge.

Arabic Parents' Concepts of Parental Involvement in Schools

Cultural expectations also play a role in the degree of parental involvement. In a more traditional environment, parents often accept the teacher as the sole authority. Arab parents usually come from traditional backgrounds and may feel uncomfortable in asking the teacher if she “needs help”; some may even consider that such involvement indicates a lack of respect for the teacher. When the subjects discussed their level of participation, few of them expressed dissatisfaction. One Sudanese mother (ISUM2) explained her lack of involvement (by American standards) as follows:

I believe that everyone knows his responsibility, and when my kids are in school, it's the school's responsibility. We do our job at home, that is it. When I was young my family do not ask about me, my father was a teacher, every one has their job.

This view indicates a difference in cultural and personal perceptions of what involvement could or should be. The way Arabic parents themselves were raised is frequently reflected in their own attitudes and actions. Arabic parents coming from more traditional or conservative backgrounds may not be aware of the level of active involvement that many parents have in American schools. They may also be hesitant to speak out or volunteer, not knowing what is the proper cultural approach to such a request.

Differences Between Arabic and American Schools

As previously mentioned, many Arabic children attend the local Arabic school part-time. However, for the purposes of this discussion, Arabic Schools designate the full-time schools and educational system in the subjects' native countries. All the subjects agreed that American schools are more fun; their children do not want to miss school. Arabic Schools require a lot of homework. As a Kuwaiti father (IKUM1) said, "In Arabic Schools, there is a lot of material to learn and homework which is pressure to the students; whereas, in American schools the teaching is through playing." A father from Jordan (IJOF1) said, "Here they finish at four o'clock, they do not bring their homework, they have fun in schools, and they do a lot of activities. They really enjoy their time."

Several parents also mentioned more technology and more creativity in American schools, such as a father from Sudan (ISUF1). "I finished the university without even seeing a computer." Another Egyptian father (IEQF1) said, "The technology and the structure of the schools, the American schools are very good, even the private schools in my country are not as good as public American schools."

Another frequent comment concerned a more flexible timetable and flexible teaching, which is not found in Arabic Schools. A Saudi father (ISUF2) said, "American schools are more flexible in the treatment. In Arabic Schools the relationship is more formal." Another Egyptian mother (IEGM1) said that "They [American schools] are more lenient, and there is no uniform required." This same mother (IEGM1) commented, "In the upper grades, there is the freedom to choose some elective classes, also there is

driving lessons which is not available in Arabic Schools.” Parents also remarked that American teachers are more friendly and specialists in their fields. An Egyptian father (IEGF1) said, “The teachers here are more specialists and understand how to deal with students; they use their skills well.” Several of the subjects discussed how American schools concentrate on practical skills in addition to academics. As a father from Sudan (ISUF1) said, “The teacher in Arabic Schools does everything for the student [like experiments]. The students don’t get the practice. Even when we get to the university we may be very good in scientific theory and we dress professionally, but we still cannot do it practically.” Also another Egyptian father (IEGF1) said, “They teach our sons appropriate behavior and the relationship between the teacher and the students is more flexible. For example, they teach them how to take care of their personal things and to be organized.” This idea of organization was also mentioned by a Saudi father (ISAF1): “I like the way they organize the lunch, each class has its time, then the other class, that avoids crowding and the students enjoy their lunchtime.” All of them agree that they and their children receive kind and friendly treatment, although the previous father (ISAF1) commented that his child was not treated fairly when he first came but now he is fine. “I remember that my son ...told me that once he wanted to play basketball, and another kid want to play football, the other kid accused him of cheating and when my kid went to the teacher, the teacher said I saw you, but he was not cheating.”

Parents also commented favorably on the small class size. A Sudanese father (ISUF1) mentioned, “... the number of the students is small compared to the number of the students in Sudan.” Other parents discussed the parent and teacher organizations, saying that they are more active and they give parents chance to participate in the

curriculum. A Kuwaiti father (IKUF1) said, "They explain the curriculum at the beginning of every year and they encourage parents to give their suggestion and opinion about on the curriculum." Another difference parents mentioned was the schedule for beginning and ending classes. Arabic Schools start at seven thirty and finish at one o'clock.

On the negative side, none of the parents like the coed schools because of behavior problems created by boys and girls in close proximity. One Saudi father (ISAF1) suggested coed schools but separate classes (for boys and girls). A Jordanian father (IJO1) also commented, "I like that they have fun, but I do not like the idea of mixed [gender] schools." Also parents dislike the lack of an examination to transfer the student from one grade to another (which Arabic schools have), and the fact that there is no clear standard to judge the student's performance. One Sudanese mother (ISUM2) said, "There is no examination to move from one grade to another grade, just comparing the students with each other." She also mentioned the differences in the practices of punishment in American schools, "... punishment here is different. The punishment here is time out and watching movies which encourage the students to misbehave, while in Sudan the punishment makes you think before you misbehave because you will be beaten and hurt."

Parents do not often know what the expectations are for their children, and they may feel "lost" without copies of the textbooks. As one Egyptian mother (IEGM2) said, "In American schools I do not know the expectations from the teacher for my daughter so I cannot help her at home. I want to go through it with her, like in Arabic schools where I know each day what my daughter is studying."

Most parents commented that they feel Arabic schools are safer, and they separate boys and girls. An Egyptian mother (IEGM2) said, “What I do not like is the sex classes specifically in the early age, and the relationship between boys and girls specifically in high school ” A Saudi father (ISAF1) commented: “Once my son refused to go to school because he dreamed that somebody will bomb it, especially after what he heard from the news about violence, which happens in some schools I do not recall the name now ” Many parents felt more comfortable with Arab schools where the parents have access to the books, and parents know every day what the child is studying in class. In this way, parents feel they can help the teachers.

Also Egyptian and Sudan families noticed that their children’s behavior changed after their children entered American schools A Saudi father (ISAF2) said, “Once my son told his mother when she wanted him to do something that she is not his boss. From a religious point of view, your parents must be given a lot of respect—we do not like our children to treat us like this.” Another mother from Sudan (ISUM2) worried about some of the sub-culture behaviors that her son was copying. “I don’t like my sons to behave like some Black Americans do.” Also some teachers have certain ideas which are not acceptable to the Arabic culture. One Egyptian mother (IEGM2), concerned about a child’s masturbation, said she was told not to worry. “They do not take care about the appropriate behavior, if they touch themselves, they will say let her explore herself, they are kids, which is not acceptable to us.” Also, teachers here ignore some behaviors, such as rudeness or inappropriate talk between students. Arabic parents do not approve of the way that social problems are solved. A Kuwaiti father (IKUF1) said:

My daughter picked up some bad words and when she heard some of these words and went to the teacher to complain the teacher does not do

anything about this behavior. It is acceptable for them while we do not believe it is. . . when they have any problem with our children, they will say it is a psychological problem. Everything is psychology with them. Once I tried to let my son enter the school but the teacher raised her voice, my son thought that she is shouting at him, he started crying, they call us, and told us that our son has psychological problem, come and take him.

Most of the parents agree that the schools do not give enough attention to other cultures; they concentrate on American culture and their holidays. A Kuwaiti father (IKUF1) said, "They teach them their culture and their religion through their holidays like Christmas, through their exercises and their gifts, also Easter and Thanksgiving, even if indirectly." Another Egyptian father (IEGF1) said, "What I do not like is some values here are against our religion and culture, but thank God there is little effect for it in elementary schools, and I will not stay here when my daughter gets older."

A different issue relates to health concerns. One Kuwaiti father (IKUF1) mentioned a problem of lice in her child's classroom. He felt that there was not a strong enough response and that the schools lacked enough nurses to investigate properly. Arabic schools have one nurse per school. He said, "Also a routine of physical examination is not available here. In our country every child is examined carefully about twice a month by a nurse."

Another problem that a Kuwaiti father (IKUF1) mentioned was the lack of control on the bus to watch student behavior. Additionally, one parent felt that most of the school meetings are about fund raising as Egyptian mother (IEGM2) said, "...the formal meeting it is about fund raising but not more."

Summary

Several main points are derived from these interviews. Two parents were in the noninvolved group due to their own studies, lack of transportation, and the mother's inability to communicate well in English. Five parents were passively involved, through support, encouragement, and help with assignments. For those five parents who were actively involved, their involvement usually consisted of attending activities their children participated in, such as athletics, and occasionally giving classroom presentations. All the parents agreed that they do not assist the administrator and seldom help the teachers. Rarely do these parents feel they face difficulties with the schools and they feel the schools treat them kindly. All of them like the relationship between the teachers and the students.

However, the parents have several criticisms which include: the social environment of the American schools, coed schools and sex education, American schools ignoring their religion and their culture, problems with discipline on the buses, lack of school nurses, no access to texts, and not informing parents about nominations for official organizations.

We can also see that there are differences in interpreting parent involvement in school. Most of the Arabic parents' ideas about parental involvement and its importance in American schools are clear. Additionally, these parents see a difference between Arabic Schools and American schools in the areas of technology and organization. The majority of the parents interviewed appreciated the educational methodology, the creativity, and the access to technology that benefit students in American schools. On the other hand, within the Arab culture, there are still differences in attitude. These often

relate to the economy of the country. Parents from poorer economies, such as Egypt, Jordan, and Sudan, express satisfaction with the technology in the U. S. educational system. However, the parents from higher economies, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, did not express the same degree of fascination with the technological advances in their children's schools.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that these parents, although from different countries, share a cultural and religious heritage. Many of the criticisms of American schools come from this shared background. Additionally, those countries which are more fundamental and conservative often voice stronger objections to certain aspects of the American school system. Although none of the parents interviewed acknowledged that cultural perceptions might cause some barrier, many of their answers tacitly point to this problem. For example, one of the fathers from Sudan (ISUF1) explained the system here saying, "It is their culture and their system and we have to respect that."

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

When we look at the definition of parental involvement in this study, as defined by the Manitoba Department of Education and Training (1994), it appears that Arabic parents are not highly involved in American schools. From the information generated, however, we see that these parents are interested in their children's education and willing to be involved, when possible, even though problems with language, study pressures, and transportation may limit their active participation. Therefore, if we expand the definition of involvement to include other areas of assistance, rather than limiting it to assisting at schools or attending programs, we recognize that Arabic parents are concerned and do support their children's efforts. According to Philipsen's study (1996), the parents interviewed would be grouped as follows: noninvolved-two; passively involved-five; and actively involved-five. From these figures, it is clear that the majority of Arab parents have some involvement in their children's education here in America.

However, their ideas of parental involvement vary from person to person or country to country, and are often different from the American viewpoint. Their ideas of participation may be more in line with Philipsen's definition of noninvolvement or passive involvement. Nevertheless, we can find that there are always some parents who are more interested than others. Some parents from Egypt consider working with their

children in the textbooks a kind of involvement, but they also want to be more active in the classroom. Others from Sudan believe that parent involvement means helping your children at home, but not “interfering” with what teachers do at school. Still others, mainly from the Arabic Gulf Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, in line with the definition of active involvement, feel that parental involvement means helping children at home and also participating at the schools.

In the findings of this study, the barriers to parental involvement agree with Holden’s (1990) findings of lack of time, parents not asked to be involved, and lack of transportation and child care for activities. This study also confirms the findings of Constantino et al. (1995), Zhang and Carrasquillo (1996) and Shoho (1992) that language is a major barrier for immigrant parents to become more involved in the American schools. It also agrees with Carrasquillo (1996) that the immigrant parents often do not like the changes to more casual behavior that their children exhibit after entering American schools.

Nevertheless, most of the parents interviewed feel their children are doing ‘fine’ in school. Why then should greater parental involvement be encouraged? The results of this study show that many of the parents had criticisms or misconceptions related to culture and values that need to be clarified. Another important benefit of parental involvement is the continued success of their children. However, success must be measured by more than simply “getting good grades”. Understanding differences, dealing with conflict, awareness of independence and interdependence are also important lessons. However, these lessons are not solely for international students that are studying in the United States. Americans need this understanding as well.

A major benefit of involvement by international parents is the chance to increase global awareness and clarify cultural misconceptions. Some teachers may feel uncomfortable with any parents in the classroom. When parents have different values, appearances, or culture, this discomfort may actually cause some teachers to be less supportive of parental involvement in the classroom and the schools may be satisfied with the present level of involvement. Therefore, it becomes even more important for both teachers and international parents to understand other cultures and the differences (and similarities) in value systems.

We must remember that most of the parents of this study are in the United States for a predetermined period of time, after which they and their families will return to their own countries. These parents do not feel the urgency for their children to assimilate into mainstream America; indeed, they may definitely prefer that their children do not become too "Americanized." American educators must be aware that many of the students who come to this country will return to their homes to become leaders in government and education. Americans have an opportunity and responsibility to give these international students the best exposure to the American education system. In return, international parents have the opportunity and responsibility to assist Americans in understanding their countries.

Suggestions for increasing understanding of the American school system and raising participation from parents of other countries may involve simple changes in practical implementation, such as:

1. Send transportation for some mothers who cannot drive or provide some way for attendance at meetings, conferences, or school visits.

2. Make it clear to international parents that they can participate in the schools.

The children's success depends upon cooperation between home and school.

- 3 Explain school procedures and let international parents know they are welcome to attend, nominate, or be elected to various positions.

Other suggestions relate to the necessity of cultural awareness. These include:

- 1 Do not concentrate on one religion if there are various cultures represented in the class
- 2 Consider the major Arabic holidays in the schools and give the students a formal excuse to be absent for celebrating their holidays.
3. Clarify certain cultural and school-related misconceptions. For example, Arab holidays are usually associated with a religious occurrence. Therefore, some parents may assume that all American holidays also have religious connotations. These parents need an explanation of cultural holidays, like Valentine's or Thanksgiving.
- 4 Explain policies and procedures, especially in areas where the cultural "subtext" may be quite different, as in the case of the mother who thought American punishment consisted of watching movies
5. Assist local administrators and teachers in understanding various cultural views. Teachers themselves may feel uncomfortable in dealing with limited English speakers or people of different cultures. This attitude, although unspoken, may hinder communication and parents may not actually feel welcome to participate in a classroom.

There are several possible ways of implementing these ideas. One of the simplest would be to make available to international parents a brochure or handout, explaining cultural expectations, policies, and procedures. Another possibility would be

parent/teacher/administrator conferences when international children enroll. In-service for teachers should also be provided, with information about other cultures, as well as suggestions for communicating with parents. Another means of assisting international parents would be a committee of American parents who would take time to visit with new students and parents in their homes. One of the best ways to deal with these problems could be addressed by hiring an International Student Coordinator for the public school system. This person would be responsible for making home visits, communications, and general explanations of school policies and expectations and could seek opportunities for parental involvement. Additionally, this coordinator might be assisted by a volunteer parent group, consisting of parents from a variety of cultures represented in the public schools. This coordinator would need a background in education as well as an understanding of various cultures. She would be available to act as liaison for administration, teachers, parents, and students, thereby ensuring greater awareness, understanding, and participation.

This study focused on the results of interviewing Arabic parents about their perceptions of their involvement in American schools. However, the point of view of the school and the American teacher is an issue which still needs to be addressed. A future study could seek answers to questions such as "Do teachers really want involvement from international parents?"; "What do the teachers see as the main obstacles to involvement?"; and, "What can the schools offer international parents in terms of cooperation and participation?"

Throughout this study, Arabic parents expressed their concerns, hopes, and fears. We must recognize the validity of their comments and work to increase communication

and understanding between international parents and school personnel. Only then will the children be able to fully value the experiences of life in two worlds.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWEES

Country	Interviewee	Children	In Arabic School
Egypt	Father (1)	F 1	NO
	Mother (1)	M 2	NO
	Mother (2)	F 2	YES
	Mother (3)	M 1, F1	NO
Jordan	Father (1)	M 3	NO
Kuwait	Father (1)	F 1	YES
Saudi Arabia	Father (1)	M 1, F 2	YES
	Father (2)	M 2	YES
	Mother (1)	M 3 , F2	YES
Sudan	Father (1)	M 2	NO
	Mother (1)	M 3	NO
	Mother (2)	M 1	NO

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*Basic information:

1. Where are you from?
2. How many children do you have in school?
3. In which grade are they?
4. Would you mind commenting on their performance in the school?

*Questions related to research problem:

5. Do you get involved in school by being asked or by volunteering?
6. Do you assist teachers in classrooms or other areas?
7. If yes, how do you help them?
8. Do you assist the administrators in any area?
9. If yes, how do you help them?
10. Do you help your children in their class or in other activities?
11. If yes, how do you help them?
12. Do you visit the school to see what your children are doing in school?
13. What kind of activities are you involved in at the school (such as athletic events, music concerts, etc)?

Evaluation by parents.

14. Do you face any difficulties?
15. If yes, what kinds of difficulties do you face?
16. Could you describe the treatment of the teachers towards you and your children?
17. What do you suggest the school could do for you to become more involved in your childrens' schools?
18. Do you see any difference between Arabic schools and American schools? What are these differences?
19. What do you like about American schools? And what do you not like about them?

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

APPROVAL FORM

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date: March 23, 1998

IRB #: ED-98-099

Proposal Title: ARABIC PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Principal Investigator(s): Martin Burlingame, Shaikah AL Tanciji

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

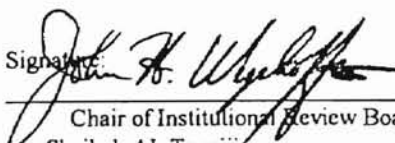
ALL APPROVALS MAY BE SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AT NEXT MEETING, AS WELL AS ARE SUBJECT TO MONITORING AT ANY TIME DURING THE APPROVAL PERIOD.

APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR DATA COLLECTION FOR A ONE CALENDAR YEAR PERIOD AFTER WHICH A CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD APPROVAL.

ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

=====
Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Disapproval are as follows:

Signature:


Chair of Institutional Review Board
cc: Shaikah AL Tanciji

Date: March 24, 1998

VITA

Shaikah Al Taneiji

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: ARABIC PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Biographical:

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