

# Elementary preservice teachers' opinions about parental involvement in elementary children's education

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## Abstract

Although parent–teacher interaction is a key factor for children's education, little attention has been paid to this issue in teacher education programs. This study explores and examines the opinions of elementary preservice teachers about parental involvement in elementary children's education. While a total of 223 preservice teachers from a large research university in the southeast of United States participated in the quantitative part, twelve preservice teachers within the same sample who were at the end of their student teaching participated in the qualitative part of the study. Study results suggested that teacher education programmes where parental involvement instruction and activities are integrated into the courses help preservice teachers become better prepared and carry positive opinions toward parental involvement.

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**Keywords:** Parental involvement; Preservice teachers; Elementary education programme

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## 1. Introduction

Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar (2002) stated that through the last three decades there has been an emerging consensus that the quality of relations between schools and families plays an integral role in student success. Parental involvement in children's education has been emphasized as a particularly important aspect of the school–family relationship, with significant implications for children's education. Mattingly et al. (2002) pointed out that “at the national level, the goal of improving parent participation has enjoyed bipartisan support and has been part of all major educational reform legislation. Most recently, par-

ent involvement is one of the six targeted areas in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001” (p. 549). *How Will NCLB Affect You* (2006) states that NCLB includes requirements about parental involvement in addition to requirements such as highly qualified teachers, scientifically based reading instruction, tutoring and supplemental educational services, research-based teaching methods, and school and school district report cards. Heath (2006) states that NCLB covers all states, school districts, and schools that accept Title 1 federal grants. Title 1 grants provide funding for remedial education programmes for poor and disadvantaged children in public schools, and in some private programmes. NCLB applies differently to Title 1 schools than to schools that do not receive Title 1 grants. However, one way or another, this law covers all public schools in all states.

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According to a study in United Kingdom, parental involvement in the education of children has been identified nationally as a major contributory factor in overall levels of attainment in school. Consequently, many new deal for communities (NDC) partnerships have included parental involvement schemes among their education projects. Lall, Campbell, and Gillborn (2002) stated that parental involvement has become a focus for government policy and educational initiatives more generally.

Scottish Schools Parental Involvement Bill (2006) states that Commission for Racial Equality reported that the Scottish Schools Parental Involvement Bill will provide a new framework to promote and support parental representation and involvement in schools. School Boards will be replaced by parent councils representing a larger parent forum. Membership and functions of parent councils will be decided locally by parent forums within the framework of legislation and guidance. The Bill will also place a duty on Education Authorities and Ministers to promote involvement of parents in school education.

Cotton and Wikelund (2001) revealed that parent involvement in children's learning is positively related to achievement. Also the more intensively parents are involved in their children's learning, the more beneficial are the achievement effects. This holds true for all dimensions of parental involvement in children's learning and for all types and ages of students. According to Gorard, Rees, and Fevre (1999) "families are universally acknowledged as a key determinant of educational performance in primary and secondary schooling and, by extension, in higher education too" (p. 517). Riggins-Newby (2003) reports that family involvement leads to higher grades, better attendance, and increased motivation in students regardless of their ethnic background, socioeconomic status, or their parents' level of education. According to US Department of Education (1997), schools cannot work successfully in isolation from students' families and communities. Policymakers who formulated the national educational goals in 1990 recognized this inescapable fact and made family involvement in children's learning a priority area for program development. Moran, Ghate, and Merwe (2004) stated that in the last 20 years, the literature in parental involvement field has grown from a trickle to a flood. In early 2003, the Family Research Policy Unit of the Home Office commissioned the independent Policy Research Bureau to carry out a review of the

evaluation literature and evidence on effective practice 'what works' in interventions to support parenting.

Students at all grade levels perform better in school, have more positive opinions toward school, and behave better when their parents are involved in, know about, and support the school (Becker & Epstein, 1993; Coleman, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Getting to Know F and ST Canada (2006) states that "Families and Schools Together Canada" is built on the belief that every parent loves their children and wants a better life for them. The goals of the programme are to improve family relationships and build stronger family bonds; promote children's success in school; prevent substance abuse by children and their families; reduce the stress that parents and children experience in daily life; and increase parent involvement in their children's school and in their community. Families and Schools Together Canada gives parents and their children opportunity to spend quality time together, enjoy and support one another and participate more fully and comfortably in their school and in their community.

Family Service (2006) founded in 1982, stated that Canada is a not-for-profit, national voluntary organization representing the concerns of families and family-serving agencies across Canada. Membership includes family service agencies, corporations, government agencies and interested individuals.

Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (2004) found that parental involvement in parent/teacher interviews, attendance at information evenings and other activities connected with monitoring their child's progress have a positive effect on students' attitudes, behavior and learning. Strategies to encourage this participation are significant in the school being effective. Although it has been found that parental involvement in academic matters is higher in primary schools than in secondary schools, effective schools manage to encourage parent participation in other areas too. A positive partnership between school-parent-child can communicate the importance of education to the child.

Even though teachers, principals, and teacher educators agree on the importance of parental involvement, teacher education programmes do not generally address this issue (Chavkin & Williams, 1988). Furthermore, according to Chavkin

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