

# Parent Involvement in Pre-Schools: Barriers and Opportunities

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## Abstract

Family involvement promotes safety, security, and well-being of children and families. When families are involved, children understand that their families are valued. The objectives of this research paper were to study the factors influencing family involvement, ways in which pre-schools involve families, means of communication pre-schools use with families, barriers to family involvement and how they could be reduced. 12 pre-schools participated in this study. Self-structured questionnaire was used to get information on the various aspects of family involvement in the school. Results indicate that socio-economic background of the teachers and family, student-teacher ratio, approach to discipline, number of family contacts by the teacher are some of the factors influencing family involvement. The school involves the family by the teachers taking lead in developing positive parent-teacher relationship; communicating often about the need for and importance of family involvement, accommodation of family needs, show case what students are learning and accomplishing, create opportunities to connect, plan events and workshops that bring families into school and assign homework that requires family participation. The pre-school supervisors felt that specific budget allocations would help enhance family involvement in pre-schools. This chapter discusses need to enhance families as partners in pre-schools so as to find ways to build relationships between home, school and early childhood settings that are respectful, responsive and reciprocal by nature.

**Keywords:** Family involvement, School-family partnerships, Suburban schools

## Introduction

Family involvement is the foundation of good casework practice that promotes the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families in the child welfare system. Family engagement is a family-centered and strengths-based approach. Family and community engagement are increasingly seen as powerful tools for making schools more equitable, culturally responsive, and collaborative.

In earlier times parents were the educators of their children. Over the years, as society changed, major responsibility for the education of children shifted to schools. Since the 1960's, there have been important developments regarding the role of parents in the education of their children. In India during the past three decades, recognition of the changing role of families in their relationships to the school has been pointed out by many educators. As families become involved, they may assume one or more roles, as audience, learners, volunteers, decision makers or para-professionals.

The involvement of families in early childhood education attempts to provide opportunities for families to have more significant role in the development and education of their children and themselves. As the

process of parenting is improved, as parents grow in meaningful interaction with their children, the school achievement of children increases, and their daily lives are enriched. Families will be more involved and self-fulfilled as they discover and use their strengths and talents. White, Taylor and Moss (1992) found that family involvement in the first three years of life was critical not only for so-called disadvantaged children but for all children to be able to get the most from their early experiences.

The process of family involvement includes helping parents discover and develop their strengths, potentialities and talents and using them for the benefit of themselves and their children. According to Morrison (1980) the results of this process are evident in the school achievement of children whose families are involved. Research reports of the positive relationship between child achievement and family participation.

Teacher- family relationships are of utmost importance in the education of the young child. When a pre-school and home are closely united, the child will more likely to be able to reach fullest potentials. Each teacher wishes to build the most relevant program for each child. By getting to know each child's parents and home situation, the teacher can more accurately assess the experiences the child has had before coming to school. Using this background, the teacher builds stepping stone to new experiences.

By knowing families, the teacher can encourage parental efforts on behalf of the child's education. Through various techniques teachers can help families use the hour at home with the child to further education. When families are involved, less conflict will arise between the teacher and parent to cause confusion in the child's mind. A family cooperative pre-school will have a long and positive influence on families. Reporting to parents on the child's school experience initiates exchanges with families from which teachers gain valuable feedback regarding programs.

A high-quality early childhood school can be a tremendous support system for today's families. The school can supplement the time, energy, skills and ideas that parents have, enabling parents to manage their children more effectively. All parents have great hopes for their children and are eager to work with the school in any way that will benefit their children. A few parents may need help in learning to relate to the school and teachers; thus, teachers must devise strategies for getting them actively involved.

Many families need and want to be involved in young children's education. Early childhood professionals recognize the value and importance of having effective and meaningful partnerships with parents and families. Swick, 2003 viewed that there are many demands that society places on families of young children and that finding opportunities for meaningful and substantive involvement can be challenging. When families are involved in supporting children's learning - children do better in school therefore contact between families and teachers should be a two-way process, from home to school and from school to home. When schools and home enjoy understanding it is comparatively easy for one to approach the other in any individual or group situation that may exist. Therefore, we need to find ways to build relationships between home, school and early childhood settings that are respectful, responsive and reciprocal by nature.

## Objectives

The objectives of this research were:

1. To find out factors influencing family involvement,
2. To find out the means of communication schools use with families,
3. To study the barriers to family involvement and
4. To find out ways to reduce barriers to family involvement.

**Methodology**

**Sample Selection**

Convenient sampling technique was used to collect data. 12 suburban pre-schools participated in this study.

**Tool Used**

Self-structured questionnaire was used to get information on the various aspects of family involvement in the school

**Data Collection**

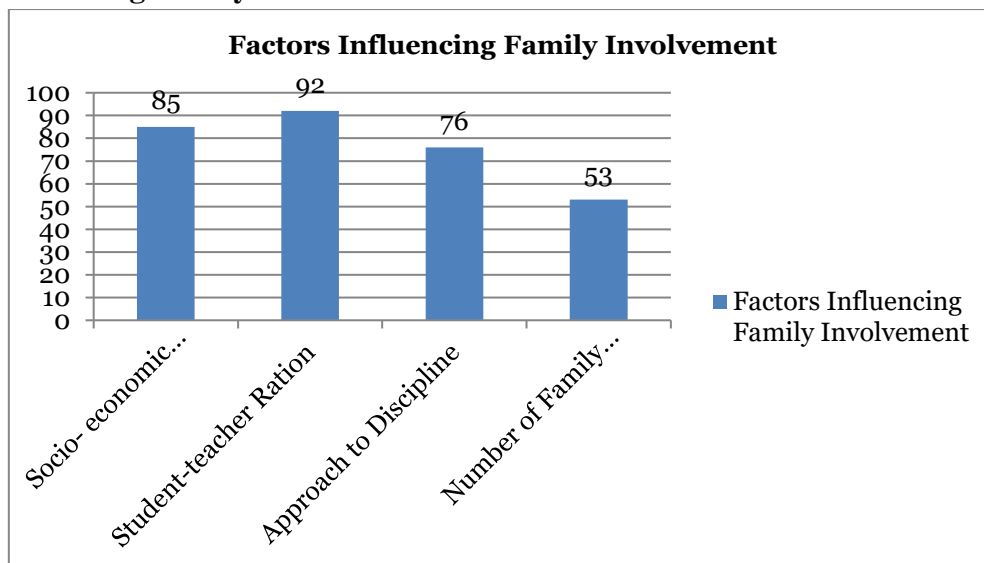
Self-structured questionnaire was used to get information. The supervisor of the pre-schools answered the questionnaire.

**Data Processing**

Data was calculated using percentages.

**Results and Discussion**

**1. Factors Influencing Family Involvement**



**Fig. 1. Factors influencing family involvement**

Family and community engagement are increasingly seen as powerful tools for making schools more equitable, culturally responsive, and collaborative. The commitment of school is vital to school-community connections. It was found that 85% of the pre-school supervisors felt that the socio-economic background of the teachers and family was an important factor influencing family involvement. 92% pre-school supervisors felt that the student-teacher ratio was an important factor influencing family involvement. 76% felt approach to discipline and 53% felt number of family contacts by the teacher were important factors influencing family involvement.

## 2. Ways In Which Schools Involve Families

Meaningful family involvement in children’s early learning supports school readiness and later academic success. Parental involvement is a critical element of high-quality early care and education. It was found that 87% pre-school supervisors felt that the teacher takes a lead in developing positive parent-teacher relationship; 76% pre-school supervisors felt that the teacher often communicates about the need for and importance of family involvement, 45% pre-school supervisors felt that the teacher accommodates the family needs. A majority (93%) of the pre-school supervisors felt that to involve families the teachers show case what students are learning and accomplishing, 64% felt that the teachers create opportunities to connect, 88% plan events and workshops that bring families into school and 93% assign homework that requires family participation.

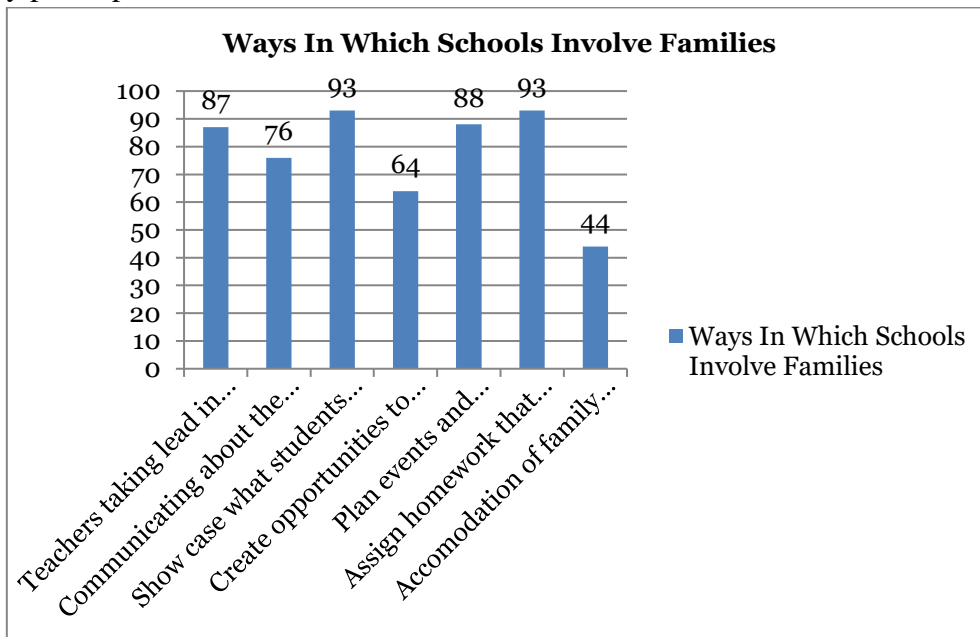


Fig. 2. Ways in which schools involve families

## 3. Means Of Communication Schools Use with Families

According to the pre-school supervisors the teachers in the pre-schools take lead in developing positive parent-teacher relationship by communicating the importance of family involvement, meetings to show case children’s progress, plan workshops and events to enhance family involvement in pre-schools. 90% of the supervisors felt that meetings are important means of communication with families, 72% of the supervisors felt that workshops were used to communicate, 43% use telephone for communication, a majority (92%) of teachers use letters for communication, 54% use emails for communication and only 38% use WhatsApp messages for communication.

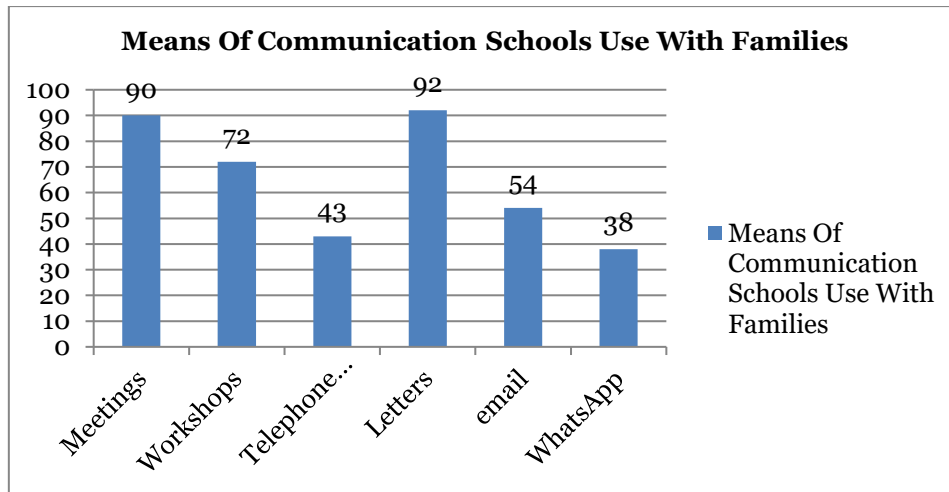


Fig. 3. Means of communication schools use with families

#### 4. Barriers to Family Involvement

In identifying the barriers to parental involvement, it is significant that the highest responses (98%) focused upon parents own previous negative experience of education, 90% of the pre-school supervisors felt that the parents’ low self-esteem created barriers and 87% pre-school supervisors felt that the parents’ apathy to becoming involved in their children’s education was a barrier. 67% pre-school supervisors felt that time constrains for both teachers and parents were a barrier.

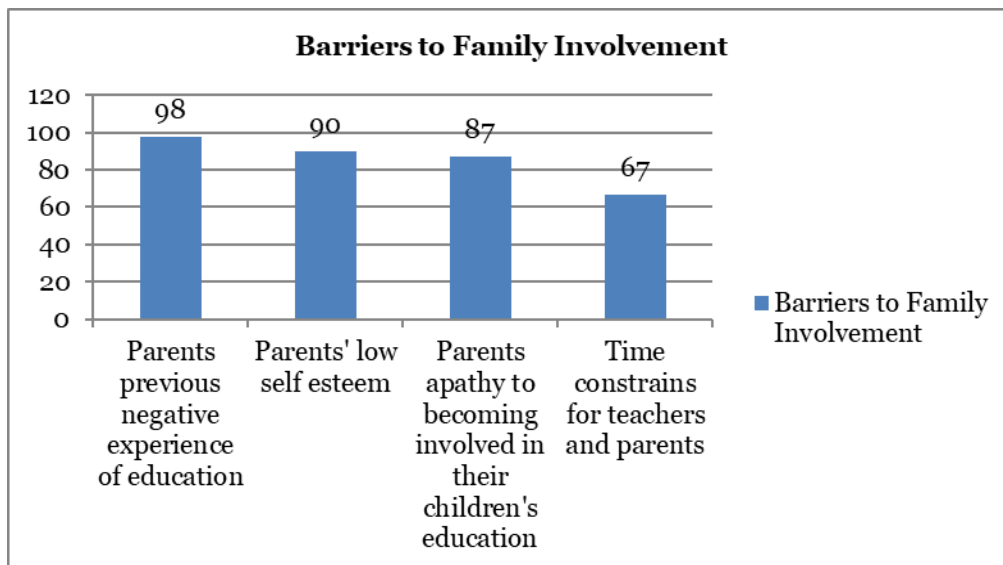
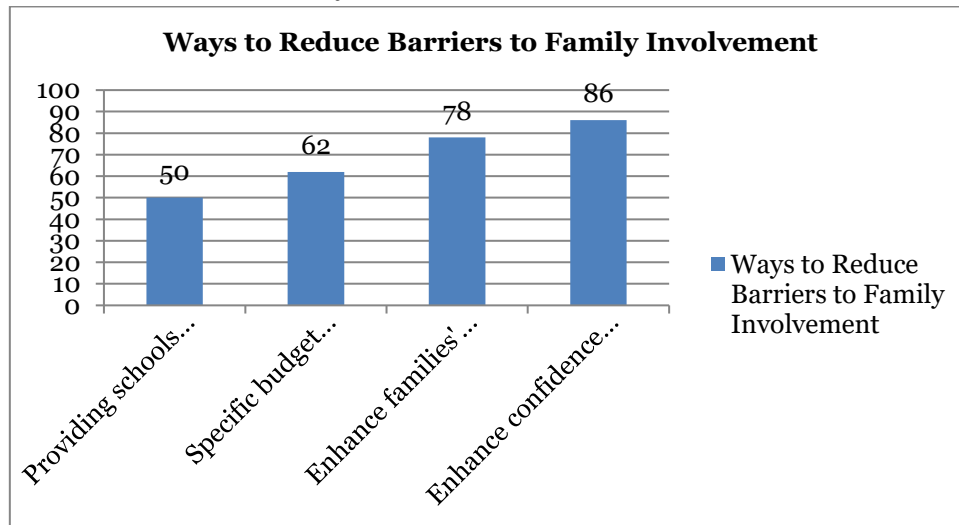


Fig. 4. Barriers to family involvement

Therefore, there is a need to enhance the personal development, confidence and skills of parents as individuals, before we can expect them to engage more fully and confidently in their children’s education. Pre-school supervisors expressed concern that increasing parent involvement was an extra burden on the teachers. Teachers need time to plan and organize parent activities. Although administrators may want to increase parents’ involvement, this is only possible if they provide teachers with the training and time to work with parents. Schools must consider the educational level, language, culture and home situations of their students’ parents.

### 5. Ways to Reduce Barriers to Family Involvement



**Fig. 5. Ways to reduce barriers to family involvement**

It is noted that schools were creative in identifying a multiple range of approaches to reducing barriers. 50% pre-school supervisors felt that providing schools with funding to develop work with families could reduce barriers to family involvement. 62% pre-school supervisors felt that specific budget allocations would help enhance family involvement in pre-schools. 78% pre-school supervisors felt that enhancing families’ personal development and 86% pre-school supervisors felt that enhancing confidence and skills of families were ways of reducing barriers to family involvement.

### Conclusion

Involving families as partners in the pre-school program for educating the child is an important goal of early childhood education. This goal can best be met by ensuring families for a larger role in determining and carrying out opportunities for educational experiences for their young children. When families are involved, there is a communication to children about the value of their families. Early childhood programs are places to foster supportive relationships that help build stronger families because there is a close relationship between teachers and families of very young children. Early childhood programs offer opportunities for teachers to observe and learn with families. Families interact with early childhood programs as empowered consumers rather than as clients or recipients of a service.

Results indicate that socio-economic background of the teachers and family, student-teacher ratio, approach to discipline, number of family contacts by the teacher are some of the factors influencing family involvement. The school involves the family by the teachers taking lead in developing positive parent-teacher relationship; communicating often about the need for and importance of family involvement, accommodation of family needs, show case what students are learning and accomplishing, create opportunities to connect, plan events and workshops that bring families into school and assign homework that requires family participation. The teachers and families felt that specific budget allocations would help enhance family involvement in pre-schools.

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