**Parental Involvement in the Secondary Schools in Bangladesh:
Challenges and a Way Forward**

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Abstract

Parental involvement with secondary schools is a relatively new concept in the Bangladeshi education perspective. The formation of School Management Committee (SMC) and various programs carried out by the secondary schools have created opportunities for parents as community members to be involved in secondary schools in Bangladesh. This article reports the processes of parental involvement in the secondary schools in Bangladesh. Consequently, we aimed to access to the perceptions and experiences of different stakeholders in Bangladesh to explore how parents' are being involved in children's education, and how secondary schools are using different strategies to form partnerships with parents'. A qualitative approach was used in which data were collected through in-depth interview from seven different stakeholders of the society and policy documents. We used thematic analysis to analyse the data. The result suggested parents experience different issues related to students learning and success, and contributing to school improvement. To build a relationship with parents, schools used limited strategies like organise parents' convention and form parents committee. The school also often used telephone and email to communicate with parents. The lack of awareness of both parents and schools and overloaded teaching stuff are found as the major challenges of involving parents at secondary level. It also identified different areas of parental involvement including introducing progress report, notebook system, consultation program, home visit, and annual gathering and cultural program need to be developed further in order to build strong partnerships between parents' and schools.

Keywords: partnerships; parental involvement; challenges; secondary school; Bangladesh

Introduction

In a learning community grounded in constructivism, learners mediate knowledge within the social context. Learners move forward through stages of cognitive development through socially mediated situations. Culture is the product of social life and human social activity (Vygosky, 1986, cited in Hedges, 2012). Therefore, when learners actively construct knowledge in a social context, they mediate through language situated in a framework of problem posing. It provides not only an optimal learning environment, but the potential for cultural reality (Vygotsky, 1986, cited in Hirtle, 1996). Often parental involvement with the school helps learners to understand the social context to construct knowledge based on the social values and norms. Macfarlane (2007) argues that neither home nor school can operate to the optimum isolation in the context of education and therefore, school and home must work together for a healthy environment of learning for students. Parental engagement in educational activities allows students from diverse backgrounds to feel more comfortable with their own identities in the school, which contributes to better educational outcomes (Macfarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh & Bateman, 2007). Thus, the value of home-school relationships is that they can help the educators to understand family perspectives of the students and reduce the gaps between students, parents and teachers (Macfarlane, 2004).

Over the last few decades, reforms have been made in schools worldwide in order to consolidate the different views of significant players – students, teachers, principals, board of trustees, parents and the community – in the school setting (Baker, 2002). Likewise, partnerships between schools and their communities have strengthened the school activities, and helped to create spaces for stakeholders to understand each other, particularly to understand the key aspects of partners' views (Timperley & Robinson, 2002). In this context, schools are not just made up of teachers and students; parents and the wider community are also significant actors. Consequently, students have the opportunity to develop their skills and talents by forming partnerships with different stakeholders of the schools, particularly by parental involvement (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

Parental involvement in secondary schools is a relatively new concept in the Bangladeshi education perspective. In order to oversee the non-governmental secondary schools, the government of Bangladesh brought out an act supporting the formation of the Non-governmental Secondary School Management Committees (SMC) in 1977 (Ministry of Education, 1977). SMC comprises four parents and two teachers' representatives, one founder, one donor, one person interested in education nominated by the Deputy Director of the respective Intermediate and Secondary Education Board (ISEB), the head teacher, and the Chairman (Ministry of Education, 1977; Ministry of Education, 2008). The salient feature of SMC is to look after the management issues of the non-governmental secondary school except academic activities (Dewan, Ahmed, Maleque & Ashrafunnessa, 2004). However, the formation of SMC created an opportunity for parents as community members to be involved in managing the secondary schools in Bangladesh. Given the importance of partnership, over the few years various projects and programs have been implemented in the secondary schools where partnerships between parents and schools have been recognized as significant way of achieving overall objectives of education (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Against this backdrop, in this article, we developed an overarching research question: how are parents involved in secondary school education in Bangladesh? We responded to this

broader question by looking at three specific research questions: How do parents become involved in their children's education? What are the different strategies being used by secondary schools in Bangladesh to form partnerships with parents'? What are the areas of parental involvement in the secondary schools need to be further developed?

In this article we address key notions of community partnerships and parental involvement in the schools after this brief introduction. Then we offer methodological procedures used in this article. We outline the states of parental involvement within policy documents and parental involvement in the secondary schools in Bangladesh following methodological discussion. We then identify further areas of parental involvement need to be improved in the Bangladeshi context. Finally, we provide policy implications of the findings and a conclusion in relation to the findings and discussions.

Concept of Community Partnerships and Parent Involvement in Schools

The concept of 'partnerships' is commonly described in academia as "the policy makers' obsession" as a British author points out (Rhodes, 1997, cited in Timperley & Robinson, 2002, p.41). Partnerships are often seen as highly situational in nature (Bainer, 1997, cited in Edens & Gilsinan, 2005), but they need time to happen (Styles, 2000). The meaning of partnerships is not confined to building relationships between home and school. Rather, it refers to the relationships between teachers, parents, board of trustees, educators, and government. Baker (2002) identifies two different ways that build partnerships between parents and community with schools. Firstly, partnerships are born through a governance role where parents are elected to the school board. Secondly, they develop through mutual collaboration of teachers with families and communities members where their involvement in different activities promotes learning. Based on particular goals and tasks, partnerships are formed to achieve, for instance, students' success. However, the success depends on how equally the partners share their power (Timperley & Robinson, 2002).

The concept of community partnerships refers to groups of peoples, including parents, working together with the school to create "school-like opportunities, events, and programs that reinforce, recognize, and reward students for good progress, creativity, contributions, and excellence" (Epstein, 1995, p. 702). Epstein and Salinas (2004) distinguish between professional learning community and school learning community partnerships. Based on the teamwork of principals, teachers, and staff, a professional learning community identifies school goals, develops curriculum and instruction, and assesses students' progress. However, it fails to develop a true community partner of learners. Conversely, a school learning community partnership includes different stakeholders of the society in the school e.g. educators, students, parents, and community partners who are engaged in improving the school's climate and students' success. School learning communities' partnerships tend to create family-like settings, services, and events where family can provide better support for their children.

The concept of a community school refers to a place where different programs and services are offered for students, parents, and others before, during, and after regular school hours (Epstein, 1995).The trustee board is also treated as the community representative and the role of the members is seen as improving the school as parents (Wylie, 1999, cited in Baker, 2002). Often the school board is categorised as the "elite" or "arena" according to their decision making behaviour (Holowinsky, 1997, p. 65). Elite boards contain few people, and they make decisions as a guardian of the school, whereas arena boards comprise a large numbers of people

who see themselves as a community, and tend to reach a decision with great participation and debate (ibid).

A collective system and community participation makes a school strong. Community partnerships can be used as resources for schools and students. Dewey (1938) points out that education occurs as a result of the empowerment of the learners in a social situation. The learners see themselves as members of a community. School is one form of a community which helps learners to construct knowledge socially so that they fully participate in the "social consciousness of the race" (cited in Hirtle, 1996, p. 91). Dorfman and Fisher (2002) argue for different communities' partnerships in the school setting for the overall improvement of students. Cavanagh (2008) also emphasizes creating a culture of care for students' happiness through community partnerships. Caring relationships can make happy students and help them to flourish.

Parental involvement in the school, like many other forms of community partnerships, helps to improve students' success. It has been considered as part of the shortcoming of the children's education for at least 40 years (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Various aspects of parental involvement have differential effects on students' academic outcomes (Domina, 2005; Fan, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005, cited in Fan & Williams 2010). Regardless of ages, such involvement contributes to children success (Cox, 2005; Epstein, 2001, cited in Hornby & Lafaele, 2008). Epstein (1995) identifies six types of parental involvement in the school – parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community – to help educators to develop comprehensive programs for school and families. *Parenting* assists families to apprehend child development and learn families' cultures. The *communicating* involvement helps the family to know about the school activities and overall progress of the student. The *volunteering* involvement encourages families to be involved in different activities at the school or other places voluntarily. The involvement of *learning at home* and *decision making* assist families to involve themselves in child's learning at home and encourages teachers to develop homework for students, and to participate in the decision making process in different committees in the school. The involvement of *collaborating* with the community organises resources and services for stakeholders of the society and enables them to offer services to the community.

Epstein (1995) also identifies challenges and redefinitions of the six types of parental involvement. He points out that each type of particular challenge should be met to ensure all families involvement in the school activities. In order to clarify some basic principles of parental involvement, redefinitions are needed. Each type carries different outcomes for the students, teaching practices, and the school.

Methodology

We used a qualitative approach to collect information from seven in-depth interviews with different stakeholders in Bangladesh. We used a 'generic purposeful approach' in which we set up some criteria for selecting the participants (Bryman, 2013). Therefore, the participants were selected to reflect a range of demographic and geographical locations, diverse working experiences, and participants' roles as parents in children's educational development. These criteria helped us to identify the appropriate participants to enable us to answer the research questions. The participants included head teachers, an education officer, a government officer, a non-government officer, and women involved in home duties. Some participants, particularly head teachers, played dual roles and therefore they provided information on the processes they

used to involve parents in their own schools and the roles they played as parents for their children's education. We also used document analysis to explore the states of parental involvement at the secondary schools in Bangladesh within various education policies and commissions' reports. The documents included different national education policies and commission reports including National Education Policy 2000, National Education Commission 2003, and National Education Policy 2010 formulated by different governments since the 1973. The stakeholders whose experiences and perceptions were reported here are summarized in the following Table 1.

Table 1
Participants of the study

Pseudonym	Current position	Gender	Age (in years)	Geographical location	Experiences
Abul	Education officer	Male	45	Rural	Worked as district education officer for about six years
Alim	Head teacher	Male	55	Rural	Worked as head teacher in a rural secondary school for about ten years
Azad	Head teacher	Male	52	Urban	Worked as head teacher in a urban secondary school for about eight years
Ashif	Govt. officer	Male	45	Urban	Worked as a government officer for about seventeen years
Nahar	N/A	Female	38	Urban	Involved in households duties
Nuri	N/A	Female	43	Rural	Involved in households duties
Nira	Program officer	Female	40	Urban	Worked as program officer in a Non-government Organisation (NGO) for about ten years

We developed interview checklists for participants. In the checklists, we covered some domains related to the research questions. For example, we wanted to know more about participants' overall activities with their children, participants' experiences with the schools as parents', the useful and effectiveness of parental involvement in children's learning, the mechanisms used by school authority to contact parents', the challenges faced by both parents' and schools to build up partnerships between them and further development areas of parental involvement. We used the 'cooperative style' to gain access to participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In accordance with the underlying principles of 'cooperative style' we explained the reasons of research and offered cooperation to each other. We obtained consent from the participants and arranged a time schedule three days prior to the interview. We also preserved anonymity for the participants.

The interviews, which each lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, were conducted by the first author over a two-month period in four different areas – Dhaka, Sylhet, Dinajpur and Jessore. In order to ensure the reliability of the data collection, we did face-to-face open-ended interview and tape recorded all interviews with the permission of the participants, transcribed all tapes ourselves and presented long extracts of the data in the article (Silverman, 2001). Furthermore we adopted an 'auditing approach' during different phases of data collection (Lincoln and Guba,

1985). The first author conducted all interviews in Bangla as the participants preferred to speak in Bangla and transcribed them. We shared transcribed data with the participants and made changes on the transcription suggested by the participants. Then the second author translated the transcription into English. After that the first author acted as 'auditor' to ensure the views expressed by the participants were not misinterpreted. Consequently, the exact choice of English words was ours, but we endeavoured to stay true to the participants' intentions. By returning the material we quote to them for their scrutiny we have been able to validate it for accuracy of intention.

We used thematic analysis to analyse the data. In order to develop themes, we categorized each interview into three areas: general category, intermediate category, and specific category (Coffee & Atkinson, 1996). In the general category we developed data under broader headings. For example, if participants spoke about their overall activities with their children we noted this down as 'Parental activities with their children'. Such broader categorizing contributed to segment data further into intermediate category. For example, by using 'parental activities with their children' we developed different subthemes – 'parental involvement at home' and 'parental involvement at school'. Using intermediate categories we segmented data again and narrowed down the information into specific. For example, from 'parental involvement at home' we developed 'parental academic involvement at home' and 'parental non-academic involvement at home'. The purpose of such specific categories was to break down the general themes into more detailed and specific codes. For the purpose of the grouping the same code we counted same code under a specific code. Finally we developed themes such as 'key experiences as parents' at home and at school'.

Results

The findings are presented in three broad areas. In presenting the findings we first explore the states of parental involvement within different education policies and programs. Then we present the data gathered from the participants to explore processes of parental involvement in the secondary schools.

States of Parental Involvement within Different Education Policies and Programs

Over the last four decades, Bangladesh has set up six national education commissions and committees to address how to ensure quality education, overall educational achievement, and reduce dropout rates. However, little attention has been paid in these commissions' reports and policies to how to address these educational issues by engaging parents in the secondary school activities. None of the commissions' reports until 2000 gave priority on involving parents' in child's education. Rather these commissions were more concerned about how to make SMC more functional and accountable (see Ministry of Education, 1974, 1988, & 2003 for details). In the National Education Policy 2000, emphasis was given to societal involvement in the school settings in a view to improve the education quality. This policy also suggested forming 'guardian-teacher' committee to encourage parents to be involved in their children's education at home and at school (Ministry of Education, 2000a). In the same way, the latest National Education Policy 2010 emphasised the community and parents' engagement in the secondary schools setting in order to ensure quality education, resolve dropout rates and promote educational achievement. Therefore it proposed to form a 'working committee' comprising the

students, community members, parents and teachers to improve the school environment at the secondary level (Ministry of Education, 2010). In addition, in order to improve the secondary school climate and overall success of the students, over the years various projects and programs have also been undertaken at the state level, in which parental involvement in education has been identified as a strategy to improve school settings. There are two ongoing comprehensive projects now – Teaching Quality Improvement – Secondary Education Program (TQI-SEP, phase I and phase II) and Secondary Education Sector Development Project (SESDP) – in the secondary education sector (Titumir and Hossain, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2012). These programs have acknowledged parental involvement as part of creating a safe learning environment for the students at school and at home. Under TQI-SEP project head teachers of secondary schools have been trained up to acquire the skills into how the community support can be ensured in the schools to achieve academic success (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Parental Involvement in Students' Learning

Key Experiences as Parents' at Home and at School

All participants had some key experiences in their child's education as parents' at home and at school. Some participants acknowledged that although mothers have core responsibility for children's education, fathers also try to be involved in their children's development in many ways. As one of the participants, Abul, an education officer, said, "I try to support my sons' education in many ways; however, my wife has sole responsibility for their education. I manage sometime to take them to school, but it is unusual because my job makes me busy with other activities". Parental involvement in the rural areas also differed from urban areas in Bangladesh. In the rural areas, mother mostly plays a role in children's home activities. Nuri, a mother of a son living in a rural area, stated, "I look at my son's home activities. My husband looks after his school matters: pays tuition fees, and visits school once the head teacher calls him. Once my son is back home I ask him what he did at school and about his homework". On the other hand, an urban mother plays multiple roles in her children's education. In most cases urban mothers take their children's to school, take care of children's homework and engage in children's other education related problems. Nahar, a mother of a daughter who lives in an urban area, commented identically:

> My husband is extremely busy with his business. He has little time to take care of our daughter's education. I am the sole person in my family to arrange everything for our daughter's education. I take her to school. I spend time at her school premises and bring her back home after school hours. Then I feed her. I also take care of her other learning e.g. play with her, support her homework, and manage a tutor for her.

However, some participants, particularly male, those who are extremely engaged in outside activities, tried to manage sometime to look after their children's education matters related with school. Ashif, a government officer, said, "Once I enter into the school I would like to talk to my son's subject teachers first to know how my child is doing, and about his progress. After getting ideas about his progress, I sit with the head teacher". Some participants were

involved in children's learning activities on a regular basis at home. As one of the participants, Alim, a head teacher of a rural secondary school, stated:

> I have three children: two daughters and one son, and they are studying at class eight, five and nursery level respectively. I would like to sit with them at night to help their education since I am working as a head teacher in a secondary school in my locality ... I help them to prepare homework and tell them about modern education.

One of the important aspects of parents' engagement in children's education is to ensure good academic achievement for their children. As a participant, Nira, who works in an NGO, said:

> I would like to see my children's examinations' results which are supposed to be published in each four-month period. It is very important to see their progress report regularly to ensure the best result in the class. They are the best in their respective classes. I sign their progress reports which have to be submitted with parents' signature.

Parental Involvement and Students' Motivation and Development

Participants believed that parental involvement in children's learning at home and at school helps in motivating children to keep study regularly that ultimately helps children to improve their academic results. As a participant, Abul, an education officer, stated:

> At least two teachers informed me about poor class performance of my children. They kept silent to respond the classes and often did not complete the homework. … I was sure there is something wrong that is hampering their study. I observed their daily activities. Finally, I found that they are involved in watching cartoons. They spent significant hours a day watching cartoons on television. I talked to them about their problems. I told them why it is important for them to get ready study and secure good results in their academic lives along with other activities. I assisted them to reschedule their daily activities and helped them to overcome that situation. I also requested their teachers to check their homework and provide homework regularly. Thus, they improved gradually.

Some participants acknowledged that students spend few hours a day in the school whereas they spend significant hours with their parents', family, community and society. So, parental involvement with children not only can help children's education learning, but also help them to be a good citizen. As a participant, Azad, a head teacher of an urban secondary school, asserted, "No school can change students' behaviour if family does not help them. If you want to see your child as a good citizen, you have to educate your children by yourselves. Family, community, religious institutions, society are the parts of the children's education". In doing so, parents' are very much interested to teach their children's social norms and values. The participants believed that children gradually would become a social human being through social learning. They also believed that learning global norms and values are also important aspects of global citizen. As another participant, Alim, commented:

I don't just want to see my children simply doing better in the classrooms; rather they have to learn social norms, values, and Bengali culture and customs. They also need to know about global trends. Therefore, they need to know a lot. School always cannot ensure that kind of education. Often they want to just follow curriculum that is not enough for children's overall development. I teach them on social and cultural issues. I tell them different stories. He is a little one, and thus I play games that help to his physical and mental development. I want to teach my children to become global citizen so that they can compete in the global market.

Ways of Involving Parents' in School and Challenges of Building Partnerships between Parents' and School

To build strong relationships with parents', various researchers have argued that schools should incorporate different strategies, for example, to arrange informal gatherings and cultural activities. Those kinds of activity help teachers to understand stakeholders' views (Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998). However, parental involvement in school in Bangladesh is confined to a limited number of activities. As a participant, Alim, a head teacher of a rural school, said, "Our school arranges a parents' convention from the beginning of each academic year. During the parents' convention, we inform parents' about our school's visions and goals and students' progress. There is no other activity for parents' except this". In most cases, urban schools also organised a limited number of programs and participants believed that activities help parents' to be involved in children's education to some extent. As another participant, Nahar, an urban mother, commented, "We, parents', often meet together, talk to each other and meet our teacher if there is any problem arises related to our children and school. Teachers encourage us to be involved in the school development program and help us to form a parents' committee". Through parents' meetings schools establish relationships with the parents'. During parents' meetings, they discuss their education visions and goals and how parents' can be involved in achieving these goals. As another participant, Azad, a head teacher of an urban school, commented, "We call a parents' meeting each year that is helpful for all. In this meeting, we ask parents' about their expectations from the school and tell them our expectations from them. So parents' get a chance to talk about their child's education through this program".

Participants mentioned that informal relationships have been developed between individual parents' and individual teachers and both of them often used that kind of relationship in individual student learning. As one of the participants, Abul, commented, "The relationships I developed with head teacher since the 1994 help me to build up a continue relationships with school. I see him as an elder brother. He reports me about my children's progress and he even reports about my children's bad habits".

To communicate with parents', schools used different technological devices. In most cases teachers communicate with parents' in order to deal with different issues related to students' problems and school improvement. Some participants mentioned that the telephone, particularly the mobile phone, is one of the best instruments used by teachers to contact parents', as Abul said, "Our head teacher called on my mobile phone if anything happens to my son". Apart from using the telephone, some participants mentioned schools sometimes used other media to contact parents'. As one of the participants, Azad, a head teacher of an urban secondary school, stated, "Our school uses both email and telephone to organize a parents' meeting in each three-month period in order to ensure parents' involvement in our school setting". But other participants

mentioned that such email communication is not very prominent in secondary school. They believed a few urban schools might use this email communication.

Participants in this research also identified some challenges from both school and parents' perspectives. Geographical location of the school is perceived as potential barrier to form school-parents' relations. Rural schools are far behind urban schools in building such relations between school and parents'. Moreover, often both rural teachers and parents' are struggling to understand the concept of parental involvement in the school and its benefits for both students and schools. As one of the participants, Nuri, a rural mother, commented, "I do not know what it means by parental involvement in school … I do not know if there is any parental program in my son's school". Some participants mentioned often schools are not willing to contact them first unless students fall into difficulties at school. They hardly got an opportunity to involve with the decision making process in the school. "No one from the school communicate us. Sometimes they call my husband once there is a problem with my children at school", said Nuri, a rural mother. On the other hand, some participants mentioned that parents' in the rural Bangladesh are not enough aware about their children's education and their involvement in children's education at school. As a result, school authority often does not get respond from the parents' about students' education and school related problems. This situation discourages school to take initiative to engage parents' in school. As one of the participants, Alim, a head teacher of a rural secondary school, stated, "Our school have arranged some programs with the support of the SMC for parents', but have got a few responses from them. Only a few parents' and some SMC members attended in the programs. A lot of parents' would like to think that it is enough for them to send their children to the school. Now it is up to teacher to educate their children". Again Alim continued:

> What I got an impression of from some parents' was that they have been very reluctant and only a maximum of 40 out of 900 parents' have been in the parents' meeting. In my locality, a good number of parents', particularly fathers, are living abroad and women are very conservative. Women do not like to go outside of home. Thus, it is very difficult to gather parents' in the school activities.

But some participants pointed out the secondary schools in Bangladesh have been involved in a lot of activities hampering parental involvement in school. As a participant, Azad, a head teacher of an urban secondary school, stated:

> Sometimes it's very difficult for schools to arrange parental activities since teachers are overloaded with their teaching and other administrative tasks. Sometimes teachers are being involved in doing government assignments like working in regional and national elections. Most of the schools in Dhaka city operate two shifts: morning and evening. Large number of class size also constraints other activities of the schools.

Parental Involvement and Further Development Areas

Considering Bangladeshi schools and societal context, the participants addressed different areas of parental involvement need to be developed for ensuring a better school climate and improve students' success. Rural parents' emphasised on those activities and they believed

that particularly activities can help students' success in education. As one of the participants, Abul, a rural parent, commented:

> School can develop and introduce progress reports. It can be weekly, fortnightly or monthly. If they can introduce such progress report, parents' will be well informed about their children's education. School can also introduce a notebook system where teachers will put notes on all the student's activities at school.

Often rural parents' emphasized the need to organize more programs for mothers in order to encourage them to be involved with the children's learning at school. For example, they mentioned a 'mother consultation program' would be helpful to share school and student related issues with parents'. Again a participant, Abul, continued, "School can introduce mother consultation program. Mothers, who are not involved in outside activities, can attend this program easily. They can attend anytime if school authority calls them. It can also be weekly or fortnightly". Some participants also were of the view that some programs could be arranged during weekend in order to ensure working parents' could attend, particularly for working fathers in the school settings. Participants believed such kind of activities would also create an opportunity for parents' to be involved in the decision making process in the school. Therefore, both teachers and parents' together would have the opportunity to solve the students' problems. As another participant, Ashif, continued:

> Otherwise they can arrange consultation program for working parents' during weekend or public holiday or any off day. Working parents' often cannot manage time to consult with teachers about their children's education during weekdays. Thus, consultation program in weekend will help working parents' to provide views on children's education and their problems if arise.

Some participants emphasized home visits in order to shape home as a school environment. They identified schools as the key agent and actor to take such an initiative. Participants believed lack of awareness often meant parents' are not willing to contact the school. Therefore, the school should take the initiative first to form home-school communication. Such activity will not only strengthen home-school relationships, but also will create parents' awareness to be involved in children's learning. During teachers home visits parents' can share their own problems and students problems privately. As a participant, Alim, said, "School can use teacher teams to visit students' home that can help students' education too. Such activity can also help to make parents' aware of the need to be involved with children's education. It's also a good way to establish home-school relationships".

Similarly, some participants advocated organising an 'annual gathering and cultural program of parents' for creating a family environment in school and creating wider scope for parents' to get to know each other. They anticipated such a program would help both teachers and parents' to understand three aspects: to help in becoming familiar with both expectations, to know to each other and their social and cultural issues, and to exchange views how to improve teaching-learning activities. As another participant, Nira, said, "School can also organise an annual gathering and cultural program for us from the beginning of the year. It will help us to know each other between school, families and students". Some participants mentioned establishing a particular division by the school to deal with parents'. They believed introducing

such a new division in school can help to improve parents' involvement in the school. As a participant, Azad, a head teacher of an urban school, said, "We are thinking to introduce a public relations division to make contact with parents'. As teachers are so much involved with academic and other administrative activities, they do not have enough time to communicate with parents'. Public relation division can handle everything with parents'".

Discussion

Regardless of socioeconomic and demographic background, parents' have been considered to be the best teachers of their children. Extensive research and adequate evidence has documented the relationship between parental involvement and students' academic achievement across the world (Rogers, Theule, Ryan, Adams, & Keating, 2009). The findings in this study also indicated that the parents' contributed to students' learning and development at the secondary level in Bangladesh. Parents' gathered diverse experiences with children's learning both at home and at school.

The findings suggested that generally what Epstein (1995) called 'parenting' and 'learning at home' have been used at secondary level in Bangladesh. Often secondary schools in Bangladesh are facing difficulties to ensure academic facilities for students e.g. shortage of qualified teachers, high level of teachers students ratio, lack of classroom facilities, which often hamper academic success of students (Mazumder, 2013). In such a difficult situation parenting and learning at home helped to motivate students' in studying regularly and helped to students' social and academic development.

Ashdown (2010) identified some ways of involving parents' in the children's education. This research found that schools were using limited ways of involving parents' in the school settings. Schools often organised a parents' convention and parents' meeting in a certain-period in which they discussed about the schools vision, goals and progress of the students. One of the significant findings of this research is that of informal relationships has been developed between individual teachers and individual parents'. In the urban schools such informal relationships also developed among individual parents'. Parents' used these relations if any problem arises to their children's education. The findings also indicated that school sometimes used various technological devices, for example, telephone, email, to contact parents'. In most cases such communication happened once students fall in difficulties in the schools.

The findings of this research also revealed some of the factors what Hornby and Lafaele (2011) called 'individual parents' and family factors' and 'societal factors' were identified as major challenges to be involved parents' in children's education. Both parents' and schools were unaware about the value of parental involvement in children's education. This research found that particularly rural parents' were too much reluctant to be involved in schools. Often the rural parents' believed that they have nothing more to do with their children except send them to school and thus they often did not attend in the programs organised by the school for them. In the same way, schools did not also have enough strategies how to involve parents' in children's education at home and at school. The 'social class and gender' factors were also identified as barriers for parents' to be engaged in children's education. Working fathers in this research mentioned that they were very much busy with their own jobs and they could hardly manage time to look after their children's education. On the other hand, both working and non-working mothers in this research were played very active roles in their children's education. The other

two major factors – 'child factors' and 'parent-teacher factors' – identified by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) were not discussed profoundly by the participants in this research.

This research found another potential barrier to parental involvement was that teachers were overloaded with their teaching and administrative tasks. Both urban and rural teachers were spending too much time on managing too many and large class size. Side by side they carried out some other tasks assigned by the government. Such internal and external factors are becoming profound barrier in involving parents' in the secondary schools in Bangladesh.

Linking home, community, and school are areas and responsive objectives identified in New Zealand to build better relationships between parents' and family of the *Māori,* the indigenous community and the school (Ministry of Education, 2000b). Findings of this study also found that 'home-school communication' needs to be developed to create awareness of the parents' engagement in children's education. The findings suggested that some other programs like parental consultation program can extend students worldview with the link to their own cultural norms and values. In the same way, the research indicated that through the annual gathering and cultural program, parents' not only will develop positive views about the schools activities but also will get idea about their children's progress. Such program will also be helpful for the teachers to introduce students' family and learn cultural practices of that family. Teachers can use this learning to motivate students and improve the overall teaching-learning process in the classroom.

Implications of the Findings

Based on the research findings and consideration of international literatures, the following steps could be taken by the school authority, teachers, and teacher educators and policy makers to build up 'home-school partnerships'.

First, the school authority needs to introduce range of policies to make parents' aware about the benefit of their involvement in education. In considering social context of Bangladesh the school authority can develop some activities in the school, for example regular student progress reports, home-school diaries, systematic telephone call, creates parents' data base, family fun days and school-parents' day. Though a lot of schools, particularly urban schools have already introduced some activities like students' progress reports and home-school diaries but it seems that such activities are very much irregular. Therefore these activities need to be continued on a regular basis. In the same way, other activities like school-parents' day can be considered as one of the most significant strategies by the school. On the school-parents' day school can shape this program in a festive mood by organising parents' rally, parents' consultation, food sharing and cultural program. As the teachers are busier with their teaching and other task, it would be difficult for school to introduce 'home visit' program. But our own experienced suggested that such 'home visit' program was informally happened in our rural culture long years ago. All teachers in a rural school were recruited from the local community and therefore they knew each other and helped them to establish such 'home visit' at a very informal level. Such kind of 'home visit' is no more existed in school now-a-days. Therefore, school authority needs to think about how home-visit program can be reintroduced in the school setting. One probable way could be that grouping students into various zones and organise one parents' meeting for each zone each month.

Secondly, the teacher also needs to enhance their knowledge how to parental involvement can be ensured in the school. In most cases student has a direct contact with their subjects'

teachers and therefore parents' become more or less familiar with children's subject teachers. If teacher plays active role then home-school communication can be made strong. In that case teacher can do some activities like sharing the progress of the students with their parents', organise parents' meeting at school, and listening and give value parents' voices about their children. Again as the findings indicated that the teachers at secondary level in Bangladesh are overloaded with their teaching, it might be difficult for teachers to do such activities. However, such activities might be helpful to reduce their teaching pressure too if they really can convince parents' to be involved in their children's education. Teacher in Bangladesh is considered as a respected person in the society and society gives more value to teacher's norms and values. Parents' always welcome teachers' comments on their children's progress. Therefore, if a teacher can create a friendly environment with parents' and can involve parents' in solving students' problems teacher would not need to invest too much time on the students' problem in the classrooms. The teachers always should keep something in their mind that they have much of learn from parents' about their children because parents' are seen as the main expert on children whereas teachers are seen as expert on curriculum, personalised learning, resources and teaching (Ashdown, 2010). So both teachers and parents' will be benefitted once they work together. Such joint-work can be effective if they will honest each other, willing to learn from each other, treat each other with respect and dignity, willing to admit their own mistakes and willing to work collaboratively and cooperatively (Carpenter, cited in Ashdown, 2010).

Thirdly, there is no straightforward policy strategy about parental involvement in education at the state level in Bangladesh. This research provided an indication of implications for policy and practices in parental involvement in the secondary schools in Bangladesh. Though some programs meanwhile have been launched by the government to ensure parental involvement in the students' academic, however, parental involvement in the secondary schools is still underdeveloped and undervalued. As a result, policy makers and teacher educators in Bangladesh need to (re)think into how the parental involvement can be developed and ensured in the secondary schools in order to make sure students' development and school improvement. In doing so, the government can develop a national policy strategy of parental engagement in the secondary schools in Bangladesh in which it needs to be outlined the importance of parental involvement, the ways of involving, possible challenges and the government support to the schools and parents'. Based on this policy strategy the teacher educators will develop various programs for both schools and parents'. Like other countries, a 'National Academy for Parenting Practitioners' (NAPP) can also be established in Bangladesh to support the teacher educators and practitioners who work with parents' and schools (Ashdown, 2010). Such national institute will also responsible to develop the parental involvement toolkits and programs.

Conclusion

In this article, we reported the processes of parental involvement in children's education at secondary schools in Bangladesh. The participants identified various areas of parental involvement and how parents' had been engaged in the children's learning. Based on the stakeholders' perceptions and experiences this article also identified some areas that need to be developed to build partnerships between school and parents' for students' development.

The SMC is identified as a formal governing system that has created opportunity for parents' or guardian of a student as community members to be involved in managing the secondary school. However, many secondary schools are using different strategies to form

partnerships with parents', but such programs were not well organised and effective in terms of students learning and school improvement. This paper also identified the further areas of parental involvement which need to be developed to build strong partnerships between parents' and schools.

Learners, parents', peers, providers, communities, enterprises and the government are important parties in children's education. Each has a positive and distinctive contribution to make and a range of talents, skills, knowledge, and resources that are essential to support quality education outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2009). Therefore, parental involvement with the school activities can contribute to build strong relationships between different stakeholders of the society and can lead to effective motivation of students at secondary schools in Bangladesh.

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