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**Parents' Involvement in Distance Learning  
During the Covid-19 Pandemic in the South  
Region of Saudi Arabia**

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# Parents' Involvement in Distance Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic in the South Region of Saudi Arabia

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## Abstract

During 2020, in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the majority of schools, including those in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), temporarily closed their doors. This led to a rapid shift towards distance learning, placing considerable responsibility on parents and guardians. The current study examines the experience of parents, employing a questionnaire distributed through the social media platform WhatsApp. The research used purposive sampling with parents with children aged between three and six.

The study reveals the challenges experienced by parents during the pandemic, including concerns for their children's behavioral, emotional, social and cognitive development, and isolation from peers. Parents also emphasized the importance of blended education, i.e. combining school-based and distance education. In addition, this study supports Sui-Chu and Willms' (1996) conclusion that parents of a higher socioeconomic status tend to become more involved in their children's education.

This research offers a number of recommendations, including combining distance education with school-based learning to strengthen the communication skills of students and enhance behavioral and social development, as well as to provide training courses for parents and students on the use of various educational platforms, i.e. Zoom.

**Keywords:** Online teaching, challenges, communication skills

## المخلص

خلال عام ٢٠٢٠، واستجابة لتفشي جائحة كوفيد-١٩ العالمي، أغلقت غالبية المدارس أبوابه مؤقتاً، بما في ذلك المدارس في المملكة العربية السعودية وقد أدى ذلك إلى تحول سريع نحو التعلم عن بعد، ووضعت مسؤولية كبيرة على عاتق أولياء أمور الطلبة. تبحث الدراسة الحالية في تجربة الوالدين باستخدام استبيان وزع إلكترونياً على عينة هادفة من آباء لديهم أطفال تتراوح أعمارهم بين ثلاثة وستة أعوام.

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تكشف الدراسة عن التحديات التي واجهها الآباء أثناء الوباء، بما في ذلك المخاوف المتعلقة بنمو أطفالهم السلوكي والعاطفي والاجتماعي والمعرفي، والعزلة عن أقرانهم. كما أكد أولياء الأمور على أهمية التعليم المختلط، أي الجمع بين التعليم المدرسي والتعليم عن بعد. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تدعم هذه الدراسة استنتاج (Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) بأن الآباء ذوي الوضع الاجتماعي والاقتصادي العالي يميلون إلى المشاركة بشكل أكبر في تعليم أطفالهم.

يقدم هذا البحث أيضاً عدداً من التوصيات، بما في ذلك الجمع بين التعليم عن بعد والتعلم المدرسي لتقوية مهارات الاتصال لدى الطلاب وتعزيز التنمية السلوكية والاجتماعية، وكذلك تقديم دورات تدريبية لأولياء الأمور والطلاب على استخدام المنصات التعليمية المختلفة، مثل برنامج زوم وغيره.

*الكلمات الرئيسية: التدريس عن بعد، التحديات، مهارات الاتصال*

## **Introduction and literature review**

There is now general agreement that education should include aspects of life beyond academic subjects, i.e. participation and self-control. This requires teachers and parents to work closely together (Wolfendale, 1983). Munn (1993) considered that schools should not be the main unit of education, nor a solution to social problems, indicating that the family remains the domestic locus of primary education (Wolfendale, 1983).

It is therefore essential to create strong links between parents and teachers, particularly as the former have a uniquely intimate knowledge of their children, with Fullan (2001, p.199) noting that: "they have a vested and committed interest in their children's success, and they also have valuable knowledge and skills to contribute that spring from their interests, hobbies, occupations, and place in the community". Long (1986) stated that parental involvement is important for several reasons, including that parent are already involved in educating their children prior to them reaching school age. In addition, Wolfendale, (1983) noted that the concept of parental involvement is a national and political issue carried through by professionals in education and parent representatives.

## **Definition and modes of parental involvement**

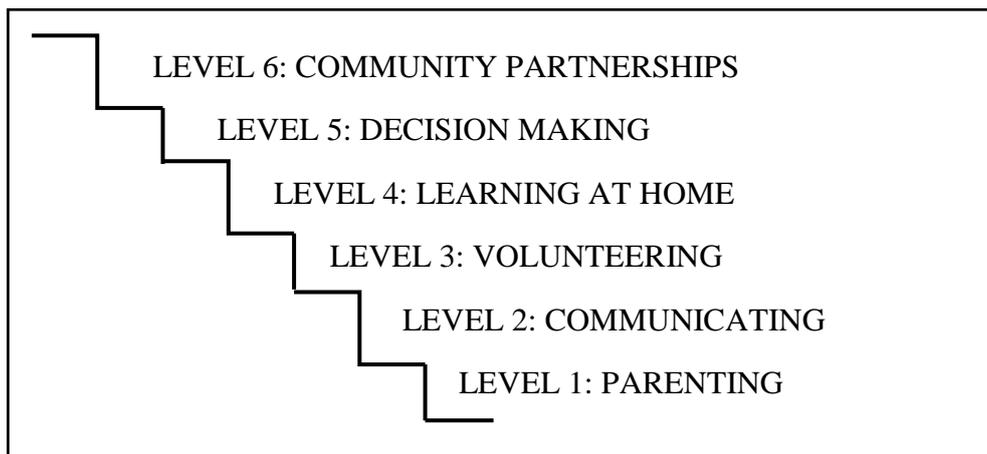
There are several definitions of the terms 'parental involvement' and 'parental participation', which tend to be used interchangeably (Wolfendale, 1983). Munn (1993) claimed that involvement can indicate many activities, ranging from attending school open days to helping in the classroom. Additionally, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) stated that the concept covers a wide range of parental activities, both in and outside school.

*Home-based activities related to children's learning at school - for example reviewing the child's work and monitoring child progress, helping with homework, discussing school events or course issues with the child, providing enrichment activities pertinent to school success,*

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*and talking by phone with the teacher...School-based involvement focuses on such activities as driving on a field trip, staffing a concession booth at school games, coming to school for scheduled conferences or informal conversations, volunteering at school, serving on a parent-teacher advisory board. (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997. p.6)*

Epstein (2001) identified six levels of involvement. Firstly, parenting (i.e. the basic obligations of child parenting and rearing). Secondly, communicating (i.e. the obligation for schools to inform parents of children's progress and the content of school programs). Thirdly, volunteering (i.e. family members assisting teachers in or outside of the classroom). Fourthly, learning at home (i.e. parents being involved in assisting their children with activities such as homework). Fifthly, decision-making, (i.e. parents being included in decision making activities and school governance. Fifthly, working together with the community to reinforce school programs (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Six Levels of Parental Involvement. (Source: Epstein, 2001)**

There are a variety of interpretations of the concept of parental involvement, including issues relating to time and place. According to Sui-Chu and Willms (1996), early studies indicated that parental participation referred to the involvement of parents in school activities, while more recent studies have emphasized that it includes home-based activities. Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) identified two aspects of involvement: firstly, home (i.e. "discussing school activities" and "monitoring a child's out-of-school

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activities") and secondly, school (i.e. "contact between parents and school personnel" and "volunteering in school and attending parent-teacher conferences").

Fullan (1991) identified four main classifications of parental involvement: (1) at school; (2) during learning activities at home; (3) undertaking communication between school and home; and (4) governance. He indicated that the first two types tend to exert a greater impact on instruction. Furthermore, Epstein (1988, as cited in Fullan, 2001) viewed school governance as the least important form of involvement, due to a lack of interest from parents. Additionally, Wolfendale (1983) stated that parents generally prefer increased communication, particularly in writing (Wolfendale, 1983, p58).

### **Background to parental involvement in schools**

The subject of parental involvement in their children's education can be traced back to pre-historic times (Berger, 1991). Parents are, by nature, nurturers and caregivers, modeling and supporting their children, and remaining responsible for their livelihood. In addition, they impart skills, moral standards, and operate under the assumption that their role is to bring up the family.

This subject has been widely discussed in the literature. Topping (1986) highlighted a series of studies focusing on significant aspects of parental involvement, commencing in the United States (US) during the early nineteenth century. A survey conducted by Wall (1947) formed one of the earliest studies undertaken in the United Kingdom (UK), with the publication of the Plowden Report (1967) also considered a major development in parental involvement. The report collected the views of 3,000 UK parents concerning their children's education, concluding the existence of a relationship between parental encouragement and children's educational performance. Topping (1986) also referred to the Taylor Report (1977), which made a strong recommendation for involving parents in governance of schools, i.e. that half of the governing body should be elected from parents and other members of the local community.

### **The importance of parental involvement**

Parental involvement is important due to a profound interest in their children's progress and a wish to see them achieve success in the future. This engagement is now well recognized, with many parents wishing to become involved in their children's education.

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In addition, there is a considerable body of research highlighting the benefits of parental involvement. According to Epstein (1988):

*There is consistent evidence that parents' encouragement, activities, interest at home and their participation at school affect their children's achievement, even after the students' ability and family socioeconomic status is taken into account. Students gain in personal and academic development if their families emphasize schooling, let their children know they do, and do so continually over the years. (Epstein, 1988, cited in Fullan, 2001, p.202)*

Epstein (1988) stated that helping children at home is essential for the development of their academic skills, regardless of a family's socioeconomic status. Researchers such as Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) have claimed that parents of high socioeconomic status tend to become more closely involved in their children's education. However, it is generally accepted that parents, students and teachers are all responsible for improvements in education, with Coleman (1998) noting that, in order to develop, teachers need to: (1) believe in the benefits of parental involvement; (2) consider their students' capabilities; and (3) deeply consider their responsibilities in relation to classroom teaching. This results in a need for teachers discuss schooling with parents, in order to clarify the value of education, while students should be: (1) given confidence in their abilities; (2) able to communicate with their parents about school; (3) encouraged to value the importance of school for their future development; and (4) able to collaborate with teachers. Mortimore et al. (1988, as cited in Fullan, 2001) identified the importance of headteacher accessibility. In addition, a survey in England and Wales of 1,700 schools supported the benefits of parents being welcomed into school (Wolfendale, 1983), with 52% percent of headteachers wishing parents to take part in many different kinds of activities.

Corner and Haynes (1991) argued strongly for parental participation being essential for enhancing the educational process and benefiting schools, parents and students. In addition, Hobart and Frankel (2003) indicated that many studies in the US, Canada and the UK have demonstrated the necessity for parent and community involvement in classroom and for school improvement, with Epstein (2001) claiming that this partnership can ensure make schools achieve a more family-orientated environment.

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Furthermore, parents have been found to experience considerable benefits from becoming involved in their children's education, with Hobart and Frankel (2003) stating that this allows them to understand the events taking place in the classroom and how teachers deal with large numbers of pupils. This can also overcome the lack of confidence experienced by many parents when it comes to helping their children, although Cotton and Wikelund (1998) stated that they may need some form of training, orientation and direction. This is particularly important as active involvement (i.e. supporting school activities at home) has been found to produce higher levels of achievement than passive involvement (i.e. receiving information from the school or attending parent-teacher meetings).

In addition, Long (1986) found that some types of parental involvement tend to prove more effective than others. Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) noted that discussing school activities with children at home and helping them in planning their programs have shown the strongest association with academic achievement. There are also a number of further benefits from involving parents in their children's education, particularly in the areas of reading and mathematics, which Bastiani (1993) found to remain a major concern for pupils, parents and teachers. Furthermore, Mortimore et al. (1988, cited in Fullan, 2001), identified that parents can have a positive impact on their children's learning if they read to them, listen to their reading, and provide appropriate reading material.

On the other hand, some studies have suggested that not all kinds of parental involvement are successful when it comes to reading and mathematics. While Sui Chu and Willms (1996) noted that parent-teacher organizations have identified that spending 10 minutes every day hearing children read can improve their performance (Long, 1986), they also identified that many parents tend to be nervous of mathematics. This may indicate the need for a consultation between parents and teachers in order to create a more effective curriculum (Merttens et al., 1996).

However, some types of parental involvement have been found to exert a negative impact. Milne et al. (1986) found this to be the case when it came to assistance offered to White elementary school children with their homework, particularly as this is normally offered by parents to children who are experiencing problems at school. Madigan (1994 cited in Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996), also found that helping children with their homework (including insisting it is completed and offering rewards for good grades) tended to have a negative influence on performance. Moreover, Muller

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(1993) identified a negative impact of parents being in frequent contact with the school or involved in PA conferences. By contrast, Stevenson and David (1987) found this kind of involvement to have a positive outcome, although their study was criticized by Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) for including only data concerning the educational level of mothers as a measure of socioeconomic status, suggesting that the causal relationship between parental involvement and student performance can be problematic.

Various studies have revealed that some teachers and administrators have no wish for parents to have any kind of involvement. Fullan (1991) noted the point made by Rosenholtz's (1989) study that some teachers felt there was no benefit to be gained from such involvement. However, teachers from progressive schools have generally been found to focus on involving parents in assisting with academic aspects of their children's education. In addition, a survey of 3,700 elementary schools undertaken by Becker (1981) asking teachers whether they used specific techniques to involve parents found that:

*Very few appear to devote any systematic effort to making sure that parental involvement at home accomplishes particular learning goals in a particular way.* (Becker (1981, cited in Fullan, 1991, p. 232)

Cotton and Wikelund (1998) found that, although administrators considered parental involvement to be essential, they believed parents required appropriate training to achieve a positive impact, and that such inclusion was inappropriate when it came to aspects such as teacher evaluation or the selection of texts. In addition, Cotton and Wikelund (1998) believed that parental involvement in preschools and primary schools to be greater than in middle or secondary schools, particularly as children wish to become more independent as they develop, while their parents may have returned to placing a greater emphasis on their own careers. Furthermore, the curriculum tends to become more complex, and each student has more than one teacher.

This section has demonstrated the benefits and drawbacks of parental involvement in their children's education. The following section presents an overview of parental involvement in practice.

### **Parental involvement in practice**

Parental involvement is not a new concept, having, since the Plowden Report (1967), been promoted as standard. Epstein (2001,1986) found no evidence to suggest the need for a closer involvement between parents and

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schools. However, Hobart and Frankel (2003) suggested the following steps to encourage parental involvement. Firstly, the building itself needs to be well furnished and welcoming, as well safe and secure; secondly, the rooms should be attractive, with welcome signs in many languages; thirdly, parents should have easy access to photographs and names of staff; fourthly, they may require chairs to sit on when waiting for their children and a private space in which to talk to staff; and finally, it is essential that their views are respected. Hobart and Frankel (2003) also suggested the importance of informal social gatherings, i.e. annual fetes and international evenings.

A further significant aspect concerns Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), most of which are registered charities working in primary schools, meeting annually to discuss the school's performance. However, it can prove problematic to ensure this is successful for preschools and nurseries, particularly as children tend to rapidly transfer to primary school. In addition, not all schools welcome PTAs, particularly as parents may demand considerable reforms (Hobart and Frankel, 2003).

In the UK, parents are provided with written documents concerning their children, while all schools and nurseries have booklets providing parents with information on school procedures as well as academic work. Most establishments also employ 'book bags' to encourage children to read with their parents and many encourage parents to help their children in classrooms. Furthermore, parents of families arriving from outside the country are offered literacy and numeracy classes, while written information in several languages can be available for those unfamiliar with English. Hobart and Frankel (2003) highlighted a report in *The Independent* newspaper on 5 December, 2002, stating that:

*An inner city primary school had recently achieved a 400% improvement in its test results after offering classes for parents to help them improve their children's academic performance.* (Frankel, 2003, p. 79)

By comparison, many aspects of the educational field have remained at a primitive level in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The current researcher has found only one kind of parental involvement, i.e. being invited three times a year to a formal meeting to discuss a pupil's performance or any issues that may have arisen. Due to a lack of resources in this area, the current researcher telephoned three headteachers in the southern region of KSA during November 2020, in order to determine the

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level of parental involvement in their schools prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. One responded:

*There is nothing new in this regard. We do encourage parents to supervise their children's achievement and help them with reading and homework. We also invite parents three times a year. This is what we usually do. I think it is difficult to involve parents in other form. Parents in this school are not confident in discussing issues with teachers or headteachers; I think the reason is that many parents are not well educated.*

The researcher also contacted a middle manager in the General Directorate of Measurement and Evaluation in the Ministry of Education in KSA, to discuss the ministry's interest in parental involvement in schools. However, when asked whether there was any written policy on this matter, the response was negative, with the manager stating the most common form of involvement took place in the form of parent-teacher meetings, and helping students at home. The researcher's own experience suggests that there is some level of parental involvement in children's education, but that this tends to be implicit. However, despite the limitations, many Saudi families are closely involved in assisting their children's progress. This research therefore examines the issue of parental involvement during the closure of schools in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Parental involvement during the Covid-19 pandemic**

The challenges related to parental involvement have, until recently, been studied in relation to conventional classroom settings. This current study focuses on the context of virtual or online education (Liu et al., 2010) or distant learning (Black, 2009; Kavanaugh et al., 2009; Rice, 2009), examining in particular the action undertaken by parents, including their expertise and the factors promoting parental involvement in distance learning settings.

The previous ten years have witnessed a considerable transformation towards the use of online educational settings (Watson et al., 2011). To the best of the current researcher's knowledge, no previous studies have investigated the experiences of parents during the lockdown in force in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, when physical classrooms in KSA were highly limited. This study investigated parents' experiences during this time, in order to propose solutions and extend support. Moreover, this data will be beneficial in devising appropriate programs and plans for encouraging parents to take an active role in students' academic development. This study

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therefore assessed the requirements reported by parents that could have assisted in the transition of academic sessions from conventional classroom settings to online settings, in order to draw up solutions for addressing these challenges.

Furthermore, the uncertainty regarding the current global pandemic has had a considerable impact on the mental health of students, particularly those who are younger, resulting in depression, anxiety and compromised mental health. This calls for the monitoring of children by parents to detect any signs of depression and anxiety, in order to implement appropriate action (UNICEF, 2020).

During 2020, education was rapidly transformed to online learning worldwide. Online learning involves conducting educational and learning activities remotely, by means of internet-based platforms, so allowing continuity of learning without any social exposure of students and teachers. However, this also has the potential to lead to a loss of engagement in learning activities, as well as lessons becoming monotonous for students, parents and teachers. This highlights the need for parents to participate in these online sessions in order to ensure these sessions become more appealing to their children.

This demands that parent need to fulfil students' psychosocial requirements, including their mental, social, emotional and age-related demands (Rohayani, 2020). This is particularly important as students (particularly those at the pre-school or kindergarten level) are dependent on parental guidance when learning by means of distant learning programs. The pandemic placed a particular responsibility on parents to assume the role of a mentor during distance learning, requiring them to assume various roles, i.e. providing access to online platforms and offering assistance to ensure continuous learning, despite the physical detachment from school. This clearly highlights the significance of parents' role in the success of distance learning.

However, there are also a number of additional challenges associated with distance learning, including: (1) a lack familiarity with academic content on the part of parents; (2) a lack of interest; (2) low levels of motivation; (3) shortage of time due to the demands of work; (4) parents' disapproval of remote learning methods; and (5) a lack of access to the Internet, and/or little familiarity with IT. These factors can result in parental exhaustion. In addition, while students have generally acknowledged the importance of online learning during the pandemic, this was also dependent on their personality [19,20,21]. Thus, students with a self-regulatory

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personality demonstrated more control over their perceptions, decisions and responses and were more willing to accept the transition to online learning in the face of the pandemic. A self-regulatory personality also allows an individual to identify his/her goals and work towards their accomplishment through time management, problem solving, and timely guidance.

Lilawati (2020) investigated the contribution of parents to distance learning implemented worldwide to replace traditional classroom learning in response to Covid-19. He revealed that some parents considered that, despite their own involvement, physical classrooms were more effective than online settings. The current study highlights the role of parents in extending support and help to their children while taking classes online. It is important to note that, as the pandemic has provided an opportunity to investigate the benefits of online learning, it is imperative to exploit this situation to analyze the prospects of online education once the pandemic is over. This will offer the potential to foster additional parental involvement and effective online educational delivery.

This study found that students can obtain considerable academic advantages from parental involvement, particularly as this emphasizes the value and significance of learning. Thus, irrespective of their mode of education, children's academic performance is generally positively influenced by their parents' involvement and interest. This is evident in the form of improved academic grades and good conduct. However, although the current pandemic has given increased weight to parental involvement, it has also given them additional responsibility to ensure continuous participation and learning of children in online learning sessions.

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) noted that various factors tend to be at play when it comes to the involvement of parents in academic learning of their children. Firstly, there is the role assumed by parents, depending on their own views and experiences. Secondly, there is the request of schools and teachers for the cooperation of parents in ensuring the smooth and effective functioning of online classes. Thirdly, parents experiencing a more stable financial position and a less hectic schedule have been found to become more closely engaged in students' learning. The involvement of parents generally creates a sense of confidence which motivates further involvement. Research has established that parental involvement has a number of positive outcomes for a child's academic progress, including: (1) his/her academic achievements; (2) improved performance at school; and (3) his/her general productive development (Mapp and Handerson, 2002).

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As with many countries throughout the world, education in KSA was transformed by the onset of the pandemic. Classrooms went online, which was a significant change in education from kindergartens to Grade 12, and also resulted in a rapid transformation of parents' involvement, with each family having to decide whether they could cope with remote learning.

**This research addressed the following questions:**

1. To what extent were parents involved with their children's online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. What resources did the school provide as support to supervise children?
3. How were parents involved in support their children's learning during school closures?
4. What were the difficulties and challenges experienced by parents during the pandemic?
5. What were the positive and negative effects of distance learning during the Covid-19 period from parents' point of view?
6. Was there any relationship between parental involvement during distance learning and demographic variables during the period of Covid-19?

**Methodology**

This study investigated parents' involvement and struggles during the period of school closures using a survey method, distributing research questionnaires using Google Forms. The sampling technique employed purposive sampling, with the sample criteria being parents who have children aged between 3 and 6. The questionnaire was distributed online through the application WhatsApp.

Permission was granted to distribute 600 questionnaires to parents in eight schools from different areas of Abha City (North, South, East and West). Of these, 410 questionnaires were returned, and 370 were deemed useful. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS. The questionnaires included the following eight sections. (1) Demographic variables (9 statements); (2) supervision of children during school hours (6 statements); (3) support provided by the school in terms of resources (7 statements); (4) support for children's learning during the period of the school's closure (21 statements); (5) difficulties and possibilities arising during the pandemic (15 statements); (6) positive outcomes (11 statements); (7) negative outcomes (8 statements); and (8) an open-ended question for further comments and suggestions. This study employed a 5-point Likert type scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The SERVQUAL instrument

was reviewed with a pilot sample of 50 respondents. The questioners' sections and statements were based on the researcher's reading, experience and the literature review.

This research evaluates the distance learning experience during the Covid-19 pandemic through a questionnaire distributed to parents (N= 40), to identify the available resources, methods of communication with teachers, the positives and negatives, and the level of support provided by parents to students. The analytical approach focused on the analysis of frequencies and descriptive statistics (mean - standard deviation - coefficient of variation\* ) to analyze parents' opinions and answer the research questions. The sample was also divided into sub-samples according to the demographic variables of the parents (i.e. gender, age, educational level, type of school and number of children), in order to establish the relationship between demographic variables and the level of support provided by parents during distance learning, using descriptive statistics analysis (mean – standard deviation- coefficient of variation).

### **Presentation of Findings**

Statistical Analysis for Evaluating Online Education:

#### **1- Statistical Analysis for Demographic variables**

Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate that the proportion of fathers involved in their children's education (65%) was higher than that of mothers (35%). It should be noted that all of the students were living with both parents.

**Table 1**

<b>Parent</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	Father	26	65.0	65.0	65.0
	Mother	14	35.0	35.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

**Table 2**

<b>With whom does the child live?</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	Father and mother	40	100.0	100.0	100.0

Tables 3 and 4 show that most of the students attended government schools (87.5%), while a small number studied at international schools (5%). Students are distributed symmetrically between the school years from Kindergarten to sixth grade

**Table 3**

Which of the following types of school do your children currently attend?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Government	35	87.5	87.5	87.5
	Private	3	7.5	7.5	95.0
	International	2	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4**

Which school years are your children currently in?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Kindergarten	3	7.5	7.5	7.5
	first	4	10.0	10.0	17.5
	second	6	15.0	15.0	32.5
	third	2	5.0	5.0	37.5
	fourth	7	17.5	17.5	55.0
	fifth	10	25.0	25.0	80.0
	sixth	8	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 shows that most of the parents had higher education degrees and that 42.5% held master's and PhD degrees.

**Table 5**

Parents' educational background					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High school diploma	6	15.0	15.0	15.0
	Diploma	1	2.5	2.5	17.5
	Bachelor's	16	40.0	40.0	57.5
	Master's	6	15.0	15.0	72.5
	PhD	11	27.5	27.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 demonstrates that the majority of parents were aged between 35 and 49.

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**Table 6**

<b>Parents' ages</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	18 – 34	5	12.5	12.5	12.5
	35 – 49	33	82.5	82.5	95.0
	+ 50	2	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 shows that many parents (45%) were responsible for a large number of children (i.e. more than 3), which may have impacted on their ability to support their children when it came to online learning.

**Table 7**

<b>Number of children for whom parents are responsible</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	1	4	10.0	10.0	10.0
	2	10	25.0	25.0	35.0
	3	8	20.0	20.0	55.0
	More of 3	18	45.0	45.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

2- Statistical Analysis for Parental supervision

Table 8 shows that most of the parents (88.5%) moved towards following and supported students in the online learning experience during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Table 8**

<b>Parental supervision during school hours</b>					
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	Never	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Never almost	6	15.0	15.0	17.5
	Always almost	24	60.0	60.0	77.5
	Always	9	22.5	22.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

### 3- Statistical Analysis of Communication methods

Table 9 shows that the schools relied on communicating with parents mainly through text messages, followed by personal phone calls with the teachers.

**Table 9**

What resources did your child's school provide as support to supervise your child?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Messages	19	47.5	47.5	47.5
	Phone calls	12	30.0	30.0	77.5
	Other	9	22.5	22.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

### 4- Statistical Analysis of Parent support for students

**Table 10: Parental support for students**

Item	Frequencies					Descriptive Statistics		
	S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Mean	S. Dev.	Variance
1. Be calm and proactive	7 (17.5%)	22(55%)	7(17.5%)	4(10%)	0	3.80	.853	22.45%
2. Stick to a routine	13(32.5%)	13(32.5%)	8(20%)	4(10%)	2(5%)	3.78	1.165	30.82%
3. Let your child experience their responsibility	20(50%)	17(42.5%)	2(5%)	1(2.5%)	0	4.40	.709	16.11%
4. Check in with them about what they are hearing	11(27.5%)	15(37.5%)	11(27.5%)	3(7.5%)	0	3.85	.921	23.92%
5. Motivate them by taking an interest	23(57.5%)	16(40%)	1(2.5%)	0	0	4.55	.552	12.13%
6. Help them organize the home learning environment	22(55%)	15(37.5%)	1(2.5%)	2(5%)	0	4.42	.781	17.67%
7. Encourage children and their self-regulation	21(52.5%)	16(40%)	1(2.5%)	1(2.5%)	1(2.5%)	4.37	.868	19.86%
8. Maintain home-school communication	23(57.5%)	13(32.5%)	2(5%)	1(2.5%)	1(2.5%)	4.40	.900	20.45%
9. Teaching them to use their textbooks effectively	22(55%)	13(32.5%)	2(5%)	2(5%)	1(2.5%)	4.32	.971	22.48%

Item	Frequencies					Descriptive Statistics		
	S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Mean	S. Dev.	Variance
10. Teaching them independently	19(47.5%)	19(47.5%)	1(2.5%)	1(2.5%)	0	4.40	.672	15.27%
11. Siblings teaching one another as school follow-up	17(42.5%)	17(42.5%)	4(10%)	2(5%)	0	4.22	.832	19.72%
12. Attending online classes with my children	10(25%)	14(35%)	10(25%)	4(10%)	2(5%)	3.65	1.122	30.74%
13. Improvised teaching using entertainment tools	13(32.5%)	13(32.5%)	9(22.5%)	5(12.5%)	0	3.85	1.027	26.68%
14. I get someone else to teach them	2(5%)	9(22.5%)	9(22.5%)	12(30%)	8(20%)	2.63	1.192	45.32%
15. Encouraging them to read Non-classroom books	11(27.5%)	24(60%)	5(12.5%)	0	0	4.15	.622	14.99%
16. Encouraging them to listen to educational downloads and online educational materials	16(40%)	19(47.5%)	5(12.5%)	0	0	4.28	.679	15.86%
17. I help my child carry out their school assignments	3(32.5%)	18(45.5%)	7(17.5%)	5(12.5%)	0	4.05	.846	20.89%
18. I need the help of other people to ensure that my child continues to engage in distance learning	8(20%)	13(32.5%)	7(17.5%)	7(17.5%)	5(12.5%)	3.30	1.324	40.12%
19. I encourage my child to work independently and access online materials and knowledge	16(40%)	18(45%)	4(10%)	2(5%)	0	4.20	.823	19.60%
20. I communicate continuously with the teacher through an educational platform	9(22.5%)	16(40%)	13(32.5%)	0	2(5%)	3.75	.981	26.16%
Total	286(34.8%)	340(41.5%)	119(14.4%)	54(6.6%)	22(2.7%)			

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**Table 10 reveals the following observations:**

- Parents provided support for students, particularly through: (1) promoting motivation by taking an interest; (2) encouraging them to read non-classroom books; (3) encouraging them to listen to downloaded educational materials; and (4) encouraging them to work independently and access online materials and knowledge.
- Most parents did not reply to questions concerning private courses to support students.
- A large number of parents said they helped their children carry out their school assignments.
- The final total frequencies row emphasized significant support from parents (76.3%).
- When calculating the mean, standard deviation, and coefficient of variation, the most common variables agreed upon by most parents when providing support and assistance to students consisted of: (1) motivating them by taking an interest (12.13%); (2) encouraging them to read non-classroom books (14.99%); (3) teaching them independently (15.27%); and (4) encouraging them to listen to downloaded online educational materials (15.86%).
- Using the mean and standard deviation to compute the coefficient of variation, the variables least likely to be indicated by parents as means of supporting students were: (1) getting someone else to teach them (45.32%) and (2) needing help from other people to ensure that their child continued to engage in distance learning (40.1%).

5 - Statistical Analysis for online learning difficulties - resources

**Table 11: Frequencies of online learning difficulties - resources**

Item	Frequencies					Descriptive Statistics		
	S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Mean	S. Dev.	Variance
1. My children had the opportunity to complete a distance education like other students	20(50%)	18(45%)	1(2.5%)	0	1(2.5%)	4.40	.778	17.68%
2. Internet service is available for attending classes remotely	19(47.5%)	19(47.5%)	2(5%)	0	0	4.42	.594	13.44%
3. I need financial support from the government to meet the requirements for my children to study at a distance	8(20%)	5(12.5%)	18(45%)	7(17.5%)	2(5%)	3.25	1.127	34.68%
4. The electricity service is always available	23(57.5%)	15(37.5%)	1(2.5%)	1(2.5%)	0	4.50	.679	15.09%
5. My children have access to facilities and infrastructure in the form of mobile phones	13(32.5%)	19(47.5%)	6(15%)	1(2.5%)	1(2.5%)	4.05	.904	22.32%
6. I obtained the school's approval to give students time to play outside the home during the distance study period	5(12.5%)	3(7.5%)	12(30%)	14(35%)	6(15%)	2.68	1.207	45.04%
7. I have enough time to accompany my children during the distance learning	6(15%)	7(17.5%)	11(27.5%)	12(30%)	4(10%)	2.98	1.230	41.28%
8. I work on developing my child's skills in learning at home simultaneously with distance education	8(20%)	26(65%)	5(12.5%)	1(2.5%)	0	4.03	.660	16.38%
9. I have hard copies of working papers, textbooks, and other educational materials	11(27.5%)	12(30%)	4(10%)	13(32.5%)	0	3.53	1.219	34.53%
10. I get ongoing support from the school to keep the educational process efficient	7(17.5%)	10(25%)	17(42.5%)	5(12.5%)	1(2.5%)	3.43	1.010	29.45%

Item	Frequencies					Descriptive Statistics		
	S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Mean	S. Dev.	Variance
11. I suffer from an inability to motivate my child to learn during a pandemic	3(7.5%)	5(15%)	12(30%)	14(35%)	5(12.5%)	2.70	1.114	41.26%
12. I suffer from the school's limitations organizing online resources	5(12.5%)	5(12.5%)	17(42.5%)	11(27.5%)	2(5%)	3.00	1.062	35.40%
13. I find it difficult to obtain the required online resources because I do not know how to access them	3(7.5%)	5(15%)	12(30%)	17(42.5%)	3(7.5%)	2.70	1.043	38.63%
14. I can understand and interact with the educational materials used for my child's stage of learning	12(30%)	18(45%)	5(15%)	5(15%)	0	3.92	.971	24.77%

**Table 11 reveals the following observations:**

- The necessary resources were available to facilitate the online learning process, particularly: (1) availability of electricity services; (2) a reliable Internet service; (3) additional facilities and infrastructure in the form of mobile phones; (4) access to databases and knowledge provided by the school; and (5) various educational materials.
- Parents did not suffer from: (1) a lack of financial resources; (2) government support; (3) the school's limitations in organizing online resources; or (4) access to educational materials by means of e-learning platforms.
- When calculating the mean, standard deviation, and coefficient of variation, the most common variables agreed upon by most parents as difficulties and resources of distance learning were found to consist of: (1) the availability of an efficient Internet service (13.4%); (2) electricity provision (15%); and (3) equal opportunities for students to obtain a quality education by means of distance learning (17.6%).
- Using the mean and standard deviation to compute the coefficient of variation, the variables least likely to be highlighted by parents as resources or difficulties were: (1) obtaining the school's approval to give students time to play outside the home during the distance study period (45%) and (2) an ability to have sufficient time to be with their children during distance learning (41.28%).

**Table 12: Frequencies of online learning Positives**

Item	Frequencies					Descriptive Statistics			
	S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Mean	S. Dev.	Variance	
1. Distance education has closed the cognitive and emotional distance between myself and my children	6(15%)	12(30%)	14(35%)	6(15%)	2(5%)	3.35	1.075	32.09%	
2. Distance education has helped me build better relationships with teachers	9(22.5%)	10(25%)	12(30%)	8(20%)	1(2.5%)	3.45	1.131	32.78%	
3. Distance education during the pandemic has helped me develop my technological skills	11(27.5%)	20(50%)	7(17.5%)	1(2.5%)	1(2.5%)	3.98	.891	22.39%	
4. Distance education has increased my ability to manage my time effectively	9(22.5%)	15(37.5%)	8(20%)	8(20%)	0	3.62	1.055	29.14%	
5. Distance education has helped me save money and reduce school related costs	13(32.5%)	12(30%)	6(15%)	7(17.5%)	2(5%)	3.68	1.248	33.91%	
6. During my home schooling experience, I feel that the quality of the curriculum is much better now than I did before	6(15%)	10(25%)	12(30%)	8(20%)	4(10%)	3.15	1.210	38.41%	
7. During the homeschooling experience, parental involvement in distance learning is better than a regular school day	11(27.5%)	19(47.5%)	7(17.5%)	2(5%)	1(2.5%)	3.93	.944	24.02%	
8. During my distance education experience, I can balance the requirements of my job with the educational needs of my children	5(12.5%)	15(37.5%)	8(20%)	9(22.5%)	3(7.5%)	3.25	1.171	36.03%	
9. Throughout my distance education experience, I can balance the requirements of my household chores with the educational needs of my children	7(17.5%)	13(32.55%)	8(20%)	6(15%)	6(15%)	3.23	1.330	41.18%	
10. During my homeschooling experience, I feel that teachers are more effective in distance education	10(25%)	11(27.5%)	10(25%)	8(20%)	1(2.5%)	3.53	1.154	32.69%	
Other suggested positives	Knowledge development, and Improving the skill of searching for information								

6 - Statistical Analysis for positive effects from distance learning

Table 12 shows the following observations:

- Parents recognized that distance education can have many advantages in relation to the level of the student's skill, parental involvement, or the quality of education, especially in: (1) helping parents to build better relationships with teachers; (2) developing their technological skills; (3) reducing school related costs; and (4) enhancing parental involvement.
- Some parents suggested that distance education contributed to developing knowledge and improving students' ability to search a variety of sources.
- Using the mean, standard deviation and variance, this study found that parents agreed that the greatest positive outcomes of distance education were: (1) helping parents to develop technological skills (22.4%) and (2) that the experience was more beneficial than a usual school day (24%).
- The least unanimous views of the advantages of distance education among parents were: (1) balancing the requirements of household chores with the educational needs of their children (41%) and (2) an improvement in the curriculum (38.4%).

6 - Statistical Analysis of the negative effects from distance learning

Table 13: Frequencies of online learning negatives

Item	Frequencies					Descriptive Statistics		
	S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Mean	St. Dev.	Variance
1. Distance education caused health problems for my children	1(2.5%)	6(15%)	18(45%)	11(27.5%)	4(10%)	2.73	.933	34.18%
2. Distance education caused psychological problems for my children	1(2.5%)	12(30%)	14(35%)	9(22.5%)	4(10%)	2.93	1.023	34.91%
3. Distance education reduced the chances of regular meetings in school and enabled teachers to develop students' academic performance	9(22.5%)	19(47.5%)	5(12.5%)	7(17.5%)	0	3.75	1.006	26.83%
4. I am concerned about my child's social and emotional development	8(20%)	16(40%)	6(15%)	7(17.5%)	3(7.5%)	3.47	1.219	35.13%

Item	Frequencies					Descriptive Statistics		
	S. Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	S. Disagree	Mean	St. Dev.	Variance
5. Distance education during the pandemic has caused me constant stress and exhaustion (more so than before)	6(15%)	13(32.5%)	7(17.5%)	10(25%)	4(10%)	3.18	1.259	39.59%
6. During the homeschooling experience, I feel that learning outcomes and cognitive advancement are much lower than before	9(22.5%)	16(40%)	7(17.5%)	5(12.5%)	3(7.5%)	3.58	1.196	33.41%
7. While studying at home, my child generally learns less than usual	11(27.5%)	12(30%)	9(22.5%)	5(12.5%)	3(7.5%)	3.58	1.238	34.58%
Other negatives	The student feels isolated from his peers, the spread of cheating among students, and distance education is less effective and serious.							

Table 13 reveals the following observations:

- Parents feared some of the negative impact of distance education, in particular: (1) the lack of school meetings and (2) the impact on the behavioral, emotional, social and cognitive development of students.
- Some parents suggested a number of further negative impacts, including: (1) students felt isolated from their peers; (2) the spread of cheating among students; and (3) distance education was found to be less effective and serious.
- Some parents provided general suggestions, emphasizing the importance of blended education by combining school education with distance learning.
- No agreement was found among parents that these variables were negative aspects of distance education because of the low mean and the high coefficient of variation.

### Summary and conclusion

Many scholars, including Fullan (2001, p.199), Long (1986) and Wolfendale (1983), have stated that parental involvement is essential in order to enhance the educational process. This current study concurs with many researchers that a high proportion of parents were involved in their children's education during the Covid-19 pandemic, with the majority of parents (88.5%) supporting students with the online learning experience.

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This research also shows that the schools tended to place more reliance on communicating with parents with text messages and personal telephone conversations with teachers. It also indicates that, during this exceptional period, it was vital schools should open several channels for communication. Wolfendale (1983, p58) stated that, during normal times, parents show little desire to be involved in the school curriculum or policy issues, preferring increased access to teachers and more written communication (Wolfendale, 1983, p58). Furthermore, Cotton and Wiklund (1998) stated that parents may need training, orientation and direction to be effectively involved in school activities, an aspect that was not found to have taken place during the period covered by this current research.

Munn (1993) claimed that involvement can include many activities (i.e. attending school open days and helping in the classroom), while Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) stated that this can cover a wide range of parental activities, both in and outside school.

*Home-based activities related to children's learning at school - for example reviewing the child's work and monitoring child progress, helping with homework, discussing school events or course issues with the child, providing enrichment activities pertinent to school success, and talking by phone with the teacher...School-based involvement focuses on such activities as driving on a field trip, staffing a concession booth at school games, coming to school for scheduled conferences or informal conversations, volunteering at school, serving on a parent-teacher advisory board. (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997. p.6)*

As discussed above, Epstein (2001) identified six levels of involvement, while Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) identified two types of home involvement and two types of school involvement and Fullan (1991) classified the modes of parental involvement into four main forms. Moreover, Epstein (1988, as cited in Fullan, 2001), considered that parents have little interest in school governance, being focused primarily on their children's academic success.

This research found that, during the closure of physical classrooms in response to the Covid-19 global pandemic, parents generally took on the role of helping their children while taking online classes from home. It also identified the importance of such parental guidance, particularly for those children at the pre-school or kindergarten level. This support was found to

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include the following: (1) Motivating children by taking an interest; (2) encouraging them to read non-classroom books; (3) encouraging them to listen to downloaded online educational materials; and (4) encouraging them to work independently and access online materials and knowledge. In addition, the study also found that most parents did not rely on private courses to assist students while at the same time offering them significant support.

The current study has highlighted some of the difficulties and challenges experienced by parents during the pandemic, despite the availability of the necessary resources to facilitate the online learning process (i.e. availability of continuous Internet services, mobile phones, access to educational materials and government support). It has also identified a number of positive outcomes, including, as also noted by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), Mapp and Handerson (2002) and Hobart and Frankel (2003), i.e. that parental involvement tends to create a strong relationship between family and school. It also supported Epstein's (2001) claim that this partnership can award schools with a more family-friendly environment. However, it has also confirmed the need identified by Cotton and Wikelund (1998) for parents to be supported by training, orientation and direction, which can lead to higher student achievement.

The current research concludes that parents experienced many advantages to distance learning, including improving students' skills, as well as their quality of education, particularly through: (1) helping parents to build better relationships with teachers; (2) developing parents' technological skills; (3) reducing school related costs; and (4) enhancing parental involvement. However, this research also identified a number of negative aspects, including the need to balance the requirements of household chores with the educational needs of their children, as well as supporting Lilawati's (2020) finding that the classroom setting was still seen as more effective than the online settings. Furthermore, parents were concerned about the lack of school meetings, and issues surrounding the behavioral, emotional, social and cognitive development of students, including potential feelings of isolation from peers.

It is significant that this current research supports the conclusions of Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) that parents of high socioeconomic status tend to be more closely involved in their children's education, with the proportion of fathers (65%) found to be greater than that of mothers (35%). In addition, responsibility for a large number of children (i.e. more than 3) was found to

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impact parents' ability to support their children when it came to online learning.

Finally, this study has found that the uncertainty regarding the Covid-19 global pandemic has had a considerable impact on pupils' mental health, particularly those who are younger, requiring parents to monitor their children to detect any signs of depression and anxiety and take appropriate action to address these issues (UNICEF, 2020).

This study found that the online and distance learning measures taken by schools and parents during 2020 to prevent the spread of Covid-19 generally led to positive outcomes, including continuity of the learning process without the need for the social exposure of students and teachers. However, this also had the potential to result in a loss of the interest in learning activities and so become monotonous for students, parents and teachers.

### **Recommendations**

- There is a need to combine distance education with school learning to strengthen communication skills among students, and to enhance behavioral and social development.
- There is a need to activate the role of school psychological and educational guidance.
- There is a need to ensure final examinations are taken at the school, in order to limit potential cheating.

There is a need to provide training courses for parents and students on the use of various educational platforms, including Zoom, Google Meet, and blackboard

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