

Between Involvement and Intervention: Perceptions, Difficulties and Parents' Coping in the Distance Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Raed Zedan¹

Academic Arab College for Education in Israel - Haifa

Abstract: The outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic brought about a significant transformation in the education landscape, leading to the widespread adoption of distance education as the primary mode of learning. Due to legal restrictions imposed, students were unable to attend school and study in traditional settings such as classrooms. Instead, they had to remain at home with their parents, resulting in a greater need for parental involvement in their children's education. This involvement took on diverse forms and held various meanings. The objectives of this study were to describe the attitudes and perceptions of parents towards distance learning and to examine the extent and nature of parental involvement. The research employed a mixed-method design, with 461 Arab and Jewish parents participating by completing a structured questionnaire, while an additional 139 parents took part in semi-structured interviews. The research findings revealed a prevalent negative attitude towards distance learning, as experienced during the COVID-19 period, with parents expressing dissatisfaction and disappointment regarding its implementation. While some parents reported a high degree of involvement, others chose not to be involved at all. The study also highlighted various challenges encountered by parents, including didactic-pedagogical, technological, economic, and other difficulties. Additionally, some parents exhibited interventionist behavior, disrupting Zoom classroom meetings by making comments, expressing reservations, or offering suggestions. On a positive note, a positive relationship was identified between parents' involvement and their attitudes towards distance learning. The research findings have valuable implications for the education system, as they shed light on the attitudes, perceptions, and difficulties surrounding distance learning. These insights can help identify the barriers that hinder parental involvement in their children's learning processes, thereby reducing its effectiveness. By understanding these challenges, the education system can strive to find methods and solutions to enhance the learning process for students and increase parental involvement.

Keywords: Parents involvement, parents coping, distance Learning.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 necessitated the closure of educational institutions worldwide, resulting in millions of students being confined to their homes for an extended period. Consequently, the traditional classroom-based learning shifted to distance learning, where the teaching and learning processes were conducted online (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021; Domina et al., 2021). Distance learning, facilitated by digital-technological tools, enabled communication between teachers and students who were not physically present

¹ Corresponding Author: Lecturer and researcher in education, teaching and learning, administration and leadership at the Academic Arab College for Education in Haifa, Israel. E-Mail: raedzedan248@gmail.com

in the same location. This mode of learning required students to take greater responsibility for their education compared to traditional in-person learning with a teacher present (Tzviran & Morgenstern, 2020). As a result, parents found themselves in the unique position of remaining at home with their children and assisting them in their learning process, facing unexpected challenges without prior preparation (Erlam et al., 2021; Horowitz, 2020). In addition to the educational aspect, parents and children encountered additional difficulties, including physical distance, social isolation, occupational and economic hardships, and an extended period of being at home (Borup et al., 2019; Siachpazidou et al., 2021). These circumstances led to heightened feelings of loneliness and negatively impacted parental emotions, with reported instances of increased Internet addiction (Karakose et al., 2022; Franco & D'Abundo, 2024).

Parents had to adapt to new roles and responsibilities, contributing to heightened involvement in their children's education, which they were not accustomed to before. Consequently, conflicts and difficulties arose in parental interactions with their children. While some parents experienced frustration, their attitudes toward distance learning varied, with some perceiving it as ineffective and their involvement as insignificant (Haisraeli & Fogiel-Bijaouib, 2021; Panaoura, 2021).

It is important to note that Uğraş et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive systematic literature review of 33 articles published between 2020 and 2023, utilizing the Web of Science (WOS), ERIC, and Google Scholar databases. Their review highlighted a significant increase in early childhood learning losses during the pandemic, which is likely to have long-term implications on children's educational attainment and exacerbate inequality, with certain demographic groups experiencing more severe learning setbacks than others.

Given these circumstances, it is crucial to examine the learning experiences during the online learning period and the role of parents. Thus, the objectives of this study are to explore parents' attitudes and perceptions regarding distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and to investigate the extent and areas of parental involvement during this period. Additionally, the study aims to examine how parental involvement is influenced by attitudes towards distance learning.

Distance Learning Design

The field of teaching has witnessed significant advancements in distance or online learning in recent years. Online learning, as defined by Tzviran and Morgenstern (2020), utilizes the internet for teaching, learning, and accessing study materials and activities. With the aid of digital tools such as computers, cameras, and microphones, distance learning allows teachers and students to engage in education from anywhere and at flexible times (Weissblai, 2020).

The implementation of distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, both in Israel and worldwide, was an unprecedented and hastily adopted measure, lacking proper planning and preparation (Keynan, 2020). Consequently, the execution of distance learning was accompanied by numerous challenges that remained largely unresolved. Weissblai (2020) cited a UNESCO report highlighting the various challenges faced by students and parents during distance learning. These challenges included disruptions to the educational process, concerns of increased student dropout rates and disengagement, socioeconomic disparities, particularly among parents with lower educational backgrounds, and issues related to digital accessibility, such as limited technological resources and stable internet connections.

Garbe et al. (2020) further discussed the difficulties experienced by parents in engaging with distance learning. Furthermore, the study presented that previous studies have identified several key challenges that hinder parental involvement, including financial limitations, limited internet access, lack of interest in technology usage, and low technological proficiency. Hasler-Waters and Leong (2014) explored teachers' perspectives on parents' involvement in their

children's distance learning and identified challenges related to organizing and managing student schedules, fostering teacher-student relationships, monitoring and motivating student engagement, and providing necessary guidance. Poulain et al. (2021) found that the loss of the traditional educational framework, as experienced during pandemic-related closures, resulted in increased screen time and reduced motivation for completing homework and school assignments. These findings support the notion that distance learning is not a suitable substitute for pre-primary and elementary education, and parents may struggle to provide educational and pedagogical support for their children.

Hasler-Waters (2012) identified four roles that parents of children studying online in elementary and middle schools can play to enhance their children's learning outcomes. These roles include serving as organizers responsible for planning learning schedules and gathering necessary resources, acting as guides to assist children in building knowledge, acting as motivators by using learning challenges and providing support, and functioning as managers by adapting learning approaches to individual needs and utilizing available resources.

Curtis (2013) also found similar results in a survey conducted with parents of children engaged in distance learning. According to Curtis (2013), parents have three main responsibilities: providing motivation, which involves encouraging and maintaining children's engagement in learning activities; supervising, which includes establishing learning schedules, preparing materials, communicating with teachers, and assessing children's performance through learning management systems; and guiding, by expressing interest in children's learning efforts and providing guidance and support in online learning activities.

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated measures, such as isolation, quarantine, and curfews, have significantly impacted individuals, including parents. These circumstances have led to increased feelings of loneliness, negative emotional experiences, and a notable rise in internet addiction (Karakose, Ozdemir, Papadakis, Yirci, Ozkayran, & Polat, 2022).

Panaoura (2021) examined parents' attitudes and beliefs regarding their role in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings revealed that due to the unique circumstances, teachers and parents had to collaborate closely to ensure the delivery of high-quality learning content, diverse learning activities, and positive learning outcomes. As a result, parents became more involved in their children's homework and engaged in informal teaching processes to accommodate their children's individual needs and provide support.

A survey conducted by the Hila Organization (2020) in Israel indicated mixed attitudes among parents regarding the significance of distance learning. Approximately half of the parents considered it meaningful, while the other half viewed it as a way to keep their children occupied. The survey also revealed that many parents lacked interest in distance learning due to limited computer availability, poor internet connectivity, and challenges faced by both parents and children in coping with educational materials. However, over half of the parents believed that distance learning facilitated their own work schedules. These findings and parental attitudes suggest that the existing format of distance learning did not adequately address the difficulties faced by children and parents at home (Hila Organization, 2020).

The shift to remote learning and its consequences have raised numerous questions and concerns, including how to support struggling students, identify essential subjects, and effectively implement distance learning. Taubin (2020) asserts that the COVID-19 pandemic offers an opportunity to examine these questions from a new perspective. The crisis has underscored the potential for parental involvement in education and highlighted the shared responsibility between the education system and parents. Parents themselves have experienced the significant burdens imposed on their children by the educational system.

Parents' Involvement During Distance Learning

The involvement of parents in distance learning significantly differs from their role in traditional learning settings (Uğraş et al., 2023). Unlike traditional learning, distance learning takes place at home, allowing parents to have direct access to lessons, intervene during explanations, and gain a comprehensive understanding of the content and teaching methods employed by teachers. This exposure to the entire learning process empowers parents to actively participate (online) during lessons. Moreover, parents are expected to supplement teachers' educational efforts by assisting with assignments, homework, practice sessions, and clarifying lesson concepts (Fishman et al., 2020).

Although parental involvement has been recognized as contributing to the success of children in virtual learning environments (Garbe et al., 2020; Makrooni, 2019), the unprecedented circumstances imposed significant challenges for parents. Without prior preparation, most parents had to assume new responsibilities during the trial-and-error process initiated by the Israel Ministry of Education and the Government. The abrupt transition of their children to distance learning, for which no one was adequately prepared, caused immense stress for parents and teachers alike. Communication with parents and students during this period generated anxiety, leading to increased levels of burnout and work-related stress among teachers (Karakose, Yirci, & Papadakis, 2022).

Many parents found that their involvement in their children's learning process became burdensome as they had to mediate between their children and teachers who exhibited reluctance to utilize available platforms for communication (Tzavara et al., 2023). Additionally, parents often faced the responsibility of ensuring their children's timely attendance in classes, completion of assigned tasks, and had to navigate technological and educational challenges (Logan et al., 2021). A report by Ramah (2020) highlighted the complex situation in which parents found themselves as instructors or teaching supporters. It revealed that parents encountered difficulties in handling technical challenges and faced strict disciplinary expectations imposed by teachers, such as timely class entry and camera and microphone usage. Conversely, parents also voiced concerns about the lack of order and organization in teachers' approaches to the school day. In certain instances, long breaks between classes necessitated parents to seek alternative activities for their children. In light of these factors, it becomes imperative to examine parents' attitudes toward distance education and their perceptions of their role in their children's distance learning.

Research Objectives and Questions

Despite the extensive body of research on parental involvement in traditional classroom settings, limited studies exist that specifically address parental involvement within the context of distance learning. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine parental involvement in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and investigate the relationship between parental involvement, attitudes, and coping mechanisms. The research contributes by enhancing the education system's understanding of parental attitudes, perceptions, and challenges associated with distance learning, ultimately improving parental involvement and its effectiveness. To address these objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the attitudes and perceptions of parents towards distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic? Is there a relationship between parents' attitudes towards distance learning and their involvement in their children's learning?
2. To what extent are parents of elementary school students involved in their children's learning process? What is the degree of parental involvement? What specific areas of

involvement emerged during the period of distance learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic?

Methodology

Study Design

An explanatory mixed-methods design was employed to integrate quantitative and qualitative data, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the research phenomenon. This design encompasses dimensions such as triangulation (quantitative and qualitative methods measuring distinct yet overlapping components of the phenomenon), complementarity (results from one method informing the development of the other), initiation (identifying paradoxes or contradictions and offering new perspectives by combining results or questions from different methods), and expansion (using different methods in various research components to broaden the investigation's scope) (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Population and Participants

The research population comprises all parents of elementary school students in the State of Israel. This population is characterized by its heterogeneous and diverse nature, encompassing various subcultures and denominations.

Elementary school students were chosen as participants due to their relatively lower level of independence in learning compared to students in higher grade levels. They require more visual aids and demonstrations to comprehend study materials, as well as greater proximity, warmth, and teacher support. Thus, their disconnection and physical distance from school and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic may adversely affect their learning process. Consequently, the involvement of parents in their children's learning becomes crucial in this new educational context.

A request was made to elementary school principals from different localities in Israel using the quota sampling method. The principals provided lists of parents' phone numbers, ensuring the exclusion of any identifying information that could compromise participants' anonymity. Preliminary telephone conversations were conducted with the parents, during which they received a comprehensive explanation of the study's objectives and the questionnaire. They were invited to participate in the study and complete the questionnaire, emphasizing the significance and contribution of their involvement. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with the understanding that their provided data would be used solely for research purposes.

Parents who agreed to participate were sent a link to the questionnaire via text messages and WhatsApp. The message containing the link was distributed to several hundred parents, yet only 461 parents consented to participate and complete the questionnaire.

The sample comprised both mothers and fathers of boys and girls studying in grades 1-6 of elementary schools. The participants represented diverse Arab and Jewish communities, encompassing individuals from different religions and ethnicities, such as Bedouins, Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Jews. Moreover, the sample included individuals with various marital statuses (married, separated, or divorced) and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (low, medium, and high).

Procedure

Data collection was conducted during the COVID-19 period in the 2019/2020 school year when parents and their children were staying at home. A qualitative measurement tool, a questionnaire, was utilized for data collection. The questionnaire was uploaded to the Google Forms platform, and the link to access and complete the questionnaire online was sent to parents via WhatsApp and/or social networks.

As the COVID-19 period ended and normalcy resumed, specifically at the start of the 2020/2021 school year, visits to schools were arranged in coordination with the principals. Parents' meetings were scheduled in the first month of the school year. Additionally, an invitation was extended to parents to participate in interviews concerning their attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and the challenges they encountered during the COVID-19 period and distance learning. A total of 139 mothers agreed to participate in the interviews, while a few fathers, whose children studied from home during the COVID-19 period using Zoom software also took part. Ethical considerations were upheld through coordination with the principals.

Research Tools

For the quantitative aspect of the study, a structured questionnaire was employed to measure parental involvement. This questionnaire, consisting of 20 items, was adapted from the work of Zedan (2012, 2021) and describes parents' involvement in their children's studies. The response scale employed a 5-point Likert format. The internal consistency reliability, as assessed by Cronbach's alpha, was found to be 0.85.

Furthermore, a questionnaire measuring parents' attitudes toward distance learning was administered. This questionnaire consisted of 10 items selected from a parent survey on teaching and distance learning conducted by the National Measurement and Evaluation Authority of the Israel Ministry of Education (RAMA) in 2020. The response scale for this questionnaire also utilized a 5-point Likert format, and the internal consistency reliability, as assessed by Cronbach's alpha, was determined to be 0.73.

In the qualitative phase of the study, a semi-structured interview protocol with four questions was developed. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents to provide them with an opportunity to express their values, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, perceptions, needs, difficulties, and provide feedback on distance education.

A data collection protocol was implemented to guide the organization of the interviews. Open-ended questions were utilized to encourage participants to express themselves fully, as open-ended responses allow for creativity in participants' statements, as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2017). Adequate notification procedures were followed to ensure informed participation in the research.

Qualitative Data Analysis Procedures

Upon completion of the interviews with all participants, data analysis commenced. Reflective notes were documented alongside the interviews, and discussions were recorded and transcribed. The analysis process began by thoroughly examining the collected interview data. A color-coding method known as Lean Coding was employed to aid in data categorization (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned, providing some information about the individuals involved in the study. Additionally, background information was provided and discussed to highlight the study's relevance, significance, and impact. The recorded data were subjected to data reduction during analysis. Punch and Oancea (2014) emphasized that data reduction involves editing, grouping, and

summarizing and occurs in the preliminary stages of the study to achieve reduction without sacrificing essential information.

Categories aligned with Epstein's conceptual framework were determined following the process of data reduction. Themes and patterns were developed to facilitate analysis of the participants' responses and identify commonalities across the interviews. Keywords and pivotal responses from the interviews were coded with corresponding themes and patterns. According to Hatch (2002), data analysis establishes a format for organizing and utilizing the data, identifying themes, exploring communications, and interpreting findings. Thus, themes and data were cross-referenced with the research findings. Pattern codes, such as significant short phrases or symbolic word patterns, were employed to aid in data interpretation (Saldaña, 2015).

Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness

Creswell's six-step model (2017) was utilized to analyze the data in this study, ensuring its validity and credibility. The model encompasses developing the research paradigm, selecting appropriate sampling techniques, recruiting participants, collecting data through interviews, observing, and recording, as well as transcribing any field notes obtained from parents and school personnel. Throughout the study, I assumed the role of an impartial researcher committed to fairness, support, and objectivity and consciously guarded against any implicit or explicit biases. Striving for an objective and equitable perspective, I welcomed diverse ideas and ideals from individuals, granting them a platform to express their personal accounts and experiences as parents, as well as their perspectives on what they deem crucial in their children's lives.

Findings

The following section presents the findings derived from both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study, addressing the research questions. The quantitative findings, including means, standard deviations, and the Pearson correlation coefficient between Attitudes towards distance learning and Parents' involvement in learning, are presented in Table 1. The table provides information based on the participants' responses to the questionnaire (n=461).

Table 1

Averages, Standard Deviations, and Minimum and Maximum Values for Parental Involvement in Distance Learning and Parents' Attitudes Toward Distance Learning

Variable	M (5-1)	SD	Min	Max	r _p
Attitudes towards distance learning	2.67	0.52	2.21	3.80	0.329***
Parents' involvement in learning	3.71	0.61	2.00	4.93	

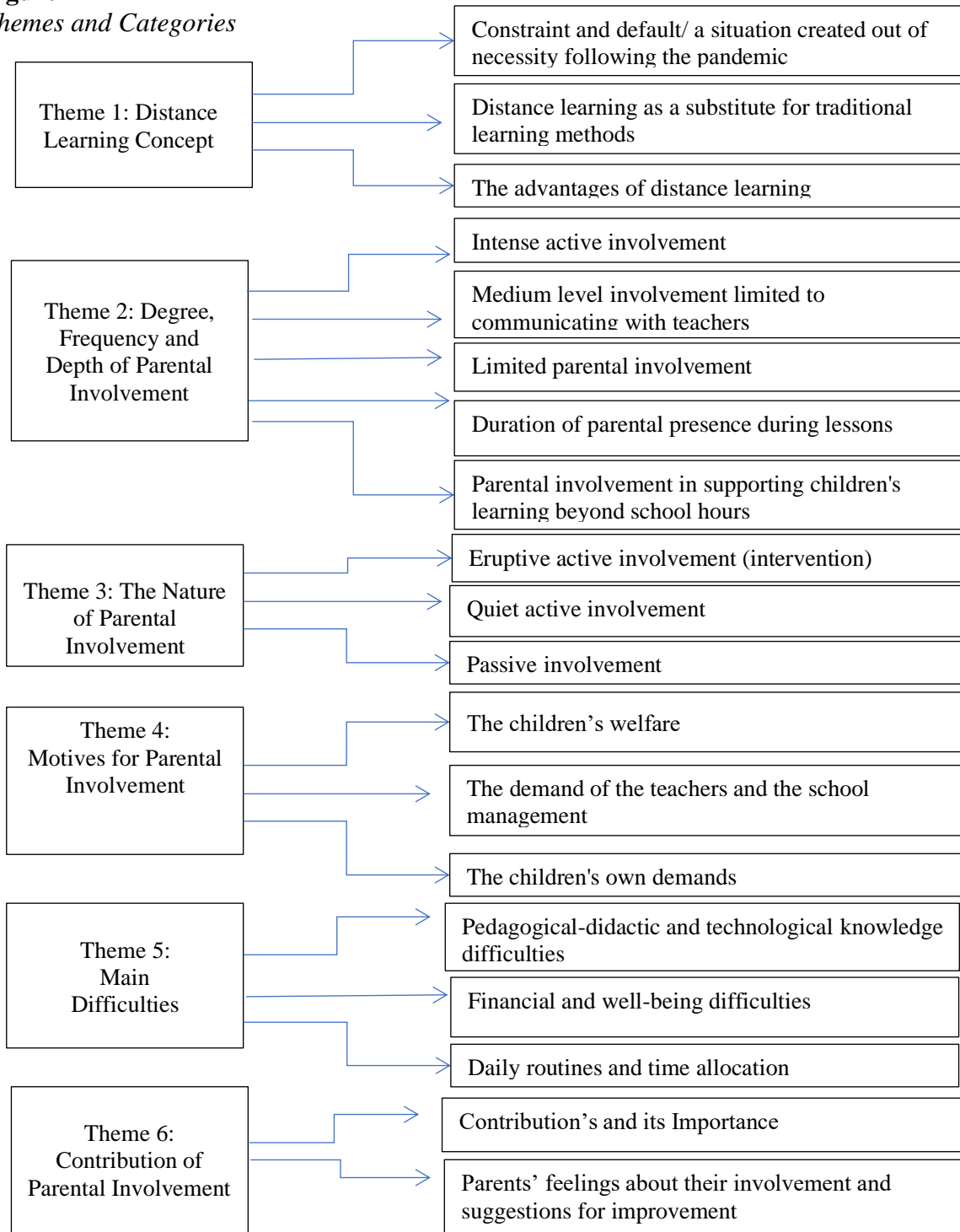
Note. ***p<0.001

The findings indicate that parents report an above-average level of involvement (M=3.71) and a below-average level of attitudes towards distance learning (M=2.67). A correlation analysis using Pearson's correlation coefficient revealed a significant positive relationship between parents' level of involvement in their children's learning process during the COVID-19 period and their attitudes toward distance learning (r=0.329, p<0.001). This suggests that higher levels of parental involvement correspond to more positive and supportive attitudes towards distance learning.

Quantitative Findings

The qualitative findings from the interviews aimed to describe parents’ attitudes and perceptions towards distance learning, as well as their degree and areas of involvement in their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collected from the 139 interviewees were organized into categories, encompassing a wide range of issues and perspectives. The following figure presents the themes and categories that emerged from the analysis of the interviews:

Figure 1
Themes and Categories



First Theme: Distance Learning Concept

This theme explores parents' perceptions of distance learning across three aspects: constraint and necessity, a substitute for traditional learning, and the advantages of distance learning. Constraint and default, or a situation created out of necessity following the pandemic: Within this category, the study describes parents' views, positions, and perceptions regarding distance learning. It examines the effectiveness of distance learning as implemented during the quarantine period due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the extent to which parents were involved as partners. The majority of parents expressed complete dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of distance learning as it was actually implemented. Their positions uniformly conveyed disappointment and distinct dissatisfaction with the approach taken. Parents reported that distance learning was not sufficiently effective for several practical reasons, resulting in a lack of sufficient understanding of academic content for students. For instance, interviewee Hadil expressed, "It's a flawed method; it has no value for the students." Similarly, Samer stated, "Many aspects need improvement; the method didn't help, but it was the only partially suitable option available." Another reason cited was that children did not receive the complete learning content they were supposed to cover during the learning period. According to parents, the required educational material was insufficiently provided. Safa mentioned, "The children did not receive the necessary educational material they were supposed to... not even half, maybe barely a quarter." Numerous mothers echoed this sentiment.

Additionally, parents attributed the ineffectiveness of distance learning to teachers' lack of control during lessons. According to them, teachers did not pay attention to student attendance, failed to monitor students' engagement, and were unable to manage disruptions during virtual classes. Amira expressed, "It did not work; the teachers did not pay attention to what was happening in the class, did not take attendance, and failed to maintain discipline among the children." Both Iman and Mayson stated, "The teacher had no control over the children due to the excessive talking among students on Zoom. Sometimes, the teachers muted all participants in the class and continued teaching, unable to manage the situation amidst the noise and distractions."

Despite widespread dissatisfaction with the implementation of distance learning, many parents acknowledged it as the default method necessitated by the circumstances and conditions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. They viewed it as a preferable alternative to leaving children without studies or disconnecting them from school. Odná remarked, "As an alternative method during COVID-19, this is the most suitable approach; there is no other choice." Similarly, Anwar stated, "Distance learning is not sufficiently effective, but it is a solution for the situation; there was no other option, and it is much better than nothing."

Category 1: Distance Learning as a Substitute for Traditional Learning Methods

This category explores parents' perspectives and the extent to which they agree that distance learning could become the primary method of education, replacing traditional face-to-face learning. Many parents believe that this transition is possible and could potentially be more successful than the current learning method, provided that it is not executed in the same manner as in 2020. However, they emphasize the importance of organizational, student, and parental readiness, as well as adequate preparations for such a shift. Without these conditions in place, distance learning will not succeed. As Salwa and other mothers expressed, "Distance learning is a complete failure."

It is worth noting that some parents completely dismiss the possibility of implementing distance learning in the future. They argue that this method is characterized by numerous flaws, rendering it inefficient and incapable of providing meaningful learning to children. Safa stated, "The method is very poor; the children did not grasp the lesson content." Similarly, Saleh

remarked, “I have no faith in this learning method whatsoever.” Other parents who ruled out distance learning as a future alternative pointed out that it is unsuitable for elementary school-age children who struggle to maintain the necessary level of focus and concentration for a full lesson. Mayson explained, “At the elementary school age, it is difficult to concentrate throughout the entire lesson compared to face-to-face learning, where the teacher consistently engages with the children and keeps them focused on the lesson.”

Category 2: Advantages of Distance Learning

Despite the reservations, challenges, and negative attitudes expressed by parents regarding distance learning, and their belief that it should not be expanded or continued in the future, a few parents recognized some positive aspects of the method. For instance, they viewed it as a safe space and an opportunity for shy students who were previously hesitant to speak in front of their peers in a traditional classroom. In the online setting, these students gained self-confidence, spoke up, and expressed themselves without fear or shyness. Additionally, the level of aggression and bullying decreased during distance learning. Moreover, children were able to attend to their personal needs (such as food, drink, restroom breaks, and rest) while learning from the comfort of their own homes, which is not feasible in traditional face-to-face learning. Firas shared, “My son was always shy and afraid to speak in front of the class, but during distance learning, I noticed that he began to speak and express himself.” Similarly, Amal stated, “Every day, my daughter used to come home angry and disappointed due to aggression or violence she encountered, but this does not happen during distance learning.”

Second Theme: Degree, Frequency and Depth of Parental Involvement in Distance Learning

This theme explores the various levels of parental involvement in distance learning, including intensive active involvement, moderate involvement in communication with teachers, lack of involvement, duration of parental presence during lessons, and parental involvement in assisting with homework and assignments.

Category 1: Intensive Active Involvement

Some interviewees expressed a high level of involvement on a daily basis, even at the expense of their work and personal interests. These individuals, primarily mothers, prioritized their children's well-being and willingly sacrificed their own pursuits. Fathers, on the other hand, demonstrated increased involvement on days when they were not occupied with work. One mother stated, “I am present with my daughter throughout all the learning hours.” Another mother mentioned, “I supervise my son's activities and assignments and try to assist him in completing them.” A third mother explained, “Every day, I wake up my daughter before 8 o'clock, turn on the computer, and join the Zoom meeting.”

Category 2: Medium Level Involvement Limited to Communicating with Teachers

Some interviewees reported engaging in intentional and informed involvement, primarily focusing on communication with teachers. They actively participated in WhatsApp groups, shared instructions, assignments, activity worksheets, and Zoom lesson schedules with their children. However, their involvement was limited to these interactions. Wafaa mentioned, “I participate in the WhatsApp group for various subjects with my child's classmates, and I follow instructions and assignments closely.” Another mother stated, “I share the meeting times

with my child and encourage their participation, but I am unable to assist with understanding the material.”

Category 3: Limited Parental Involvement

Certain interviewees admitted to a complete lack of involvement due to various reasons, such as time constraints, technological difficulties, and a lack of patience. They cited their busy schedules or lack of familiarity with technology as barriers to active participation. Rona attributed her lack of involvement to a “lack of time,” while another mother stated, “We are busy with work.” Some parents expressed a lack of knowledge and skills to operate computers and Zoom, hindering their ability to engage effectively. One parent remarked, “I lack the necessary knowledge and skills to operate a computer and Zoom; it is not something I can manage.” Another mother shared, “We face difficulties in providing a computer and internet access for our children.” The father, Salim, mentioned, “I lack the ability and patience; it is not my nature to sit and guide my child.”

Regarding the duration of parents’ presence during classes, it is evident that parents with multiple children were unable to remain with one child for entire lessons, as they had to attend to other children and ensure overall household functioning. This prevented them from staying for the entire duration of a single lesson. Amira explained, “As I mentioned before, I am not always able to stay throughout the entire lesson. It is challenging for me as I have numerous tasks to attend to at home.” Kanar stated, “In reality, I wasn’t able to be present for all the lessons and didn’t sit with the children throughout the entire duration. At times, I had to attend to other responsibilities.” Some parents also indicated that they could not complete full lessons with their children due to various domestic and external commitments. Nardin mentioned, “Typically, I could only be present during parts of the lessons alongside my son, as I also had to manage daily household tasks.” Sami also shared, “I initially sat with my daughter for the beginning of each lesson as she was unfamiliar with operating the computer and joining Zoom. However, I periodically checked on my other child to ensure their attentiveness and learning.”

Category 4: Duration of Parental Presence During Lessons

Most parents reported being present at home during the school day. However, some parents had to attend to other tasks at home, which prevented them from being present with their children throughout the entire school day. Amira mentioned, “I cannot be present for all the lessons throughout the day; it’s very challenging.” Furthermore, some parents had to leave the house either for work or other obligations, resulting in their absence for a portion of the learning day. It is important to note that parents who reported being present for the entire school day were typically those who did not work. For example, Abir stated, “I was present next to my child for all the Zoom lessons, and I would sit with them to help with their assignments for approximately 5-6 hours per day, at best.” Azmi also shared, “I was often present with my son for a full 45 minutes to an hour.”

Category 5: Parental Involvement in Supporting Children’s Learning Beyond School Hours

Many parents mentioned their continued involvement in their children’s learning process even after the school day, conducted through Zoom, despite the challenges and fatigue associated with supporting their children’s studies. Parents extended educational activities beyond regular school hours and assisted their children in preparing homework and assignments during the afternoon and evening. For instance, Samer said, “I had to be closely engaged with my daughter, listening and following the teacher’s instructions. Then, I would practice the

lessons with her to ensure her comprehension.” Abir also mentioned, “I remained with my son throughout all the Zoom lessons, and then I sat next to him to help with his homework.”

Third Theme: The Nature of Parental Involvement

In this theme, the nature of parents’ involvement in their children’s educational activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning within the lockdown period is explored. The focus was on the ways in which parents preferred to intervene in their children’s learning, categorized as follows:

Category 1: Eruptive Active Involvement (Intervention)

This category involves parents expressing their involvement by actively participating in the classroom. They may raise their voice to make comments or voice opinions, primarily to correct the teacher’s errors or add additional insights to the discussion. This type of involvement may come across as rather blunt, as it involves making comments to the teacher while everyone present is listening. However, it is important to note that these instances were not intended to be offensive or confrontational towards the teachers. Instead, they were aimed at addressing obvious mistakes that required immediate attention in order to ensure accuracy. For instance, Azmi mentioned intervening politely during the lesson and later addressing the teacher’s mistakes privately. Parents engaging in this type of involvement emphasize being polite and kind without creating a debate or confrontation with the teacher. Anwar expressed, “The truth is that in the cases in which I intervened, I was not blunt, and I did not attack, I gave comments politely and kindly.” Canar also expressed, “There were no debates. Sometimes I only gave short and to-the-point interim comments, especially when the mistakes the teachers made were obvious.”

While most outbursts aimed to rectify noticeable mistakes, some parents also interrupted lessons to request changes in teaching methods, such as involving and engaging students, diversifying means of illustration, providing examples, enhancing explanations, and employing additional pedagogical skills. For example, Amirah said, “I broke into the lesson to request the teacher to ask questions and involve the children, ensuring their comprehension.” Similarly, Verda intervened when the teacher’s statements were inaccurate or lacked examples and explanations. Additionally, Lamis suggested requesting a change in the teacher’s tone of voice to improve student concentration.

Category 2: Quiet Active Involvement

Quiet active involvement refers to behind-the-scenes actions taken by parents to address their concerns or seek clarifications from specific teachers. Rather than interfering during lessons, parents patiently wait for the opportune moment to contact teachers via phone calls, text messages, or face-to-face meetings to seek clarifications, express concerns, and engage in consultations regarding their children’s learning experiences. This type of involvement was prevalent among parents, with many seeking explanations, presenting claims, and consulting on the quality of their children’s education. For instance, Alma called the principal to present claims and difficulties in studies, requesting a reduction in post-learning day homework. Parents frequently contacted teachers to comment on ineffective teaching methods that hindered student understanding, urging adjustments, and corrections in the learning process. Safa felt that teachers were placing a heavy burden on parents and contacted the principal, while another mother mentioned, “Instead of the teachers teach the required material, they preferred to give the children homework that they would learn alone with their parents.” Sami shared his experience of contacting the school principal to complain about excessive homework, citing

time constraints as a major challenge. The research findings indicate that this pattern of intervention was prevalent among many parents.

Category 3: Passive Involvement

Passive involvement occurs when parents focus their involvement solely on their child without engaging with teachers or the school. In this category, parents provide learning support to their children without referring to classroom activities or making any contact with teachers or the school. The research findings suggest that this pattern of involvement is uncommon among parents. However, some examples of passive involvement were observed. For instance, Saleh stated, "I did not make any contact with the school or with the teachers, I just concentrated on learning with my children only." Similarly, Soley expressed personal opinions about content and teaching methods but refrained from interfering or making any claims. These parents acknowledged the situation and chose to deal with it independently without involving external parties.

Fourth Theme: Motives for Parental Involvement

In this theme, three subcategories emerged, namely the children's welfare, the demands of the teachers and the school management, and the children's own demands. These subcategories shed light on the motives that drive parents to actively engage in their children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning.

Category 1: The Children's Welfare

Mothers emphasized that their main motivation for being involved is their children's well-being. They view parental involvement as a means to empower their children, enhance their self-confidence, and foster their social development alongside their education. For instance, Sanaa expressed, "I believe it contributes to my children, and I enjoy being active and involved." Similarly, Yasmin stated, "I am involved in everything for my child. Ultimately, I am there because he is there. I believe it empowers him." Another mother highlighted, "The primary motive is to provide security for my children." Ahlam added, "Establishing a direct relationship and my active and intensive involvement can make it easier for my daughter to understand the school material; it is highly beneficial for her."

Category 2: The Demand of Teachers and School Management

Mothers acknowledged that the encouragement, support, and expectations from teachers and school management play a significant role in motivating their involvement. Teachers have emphasized the importance of parental participation for the success of their children's learning. Rasha shared, "My son's teacher personally called me at the beginning of the period and emphasized the significance of my active involvement for successful learning." Ahlam also mentioned, "Teachers always demand our participation, involvement, and continuous follow-up."

Category 3: The Children's Own Demands

Many mothers indicated that their children's demands and insistence play a pivotal role in their involvement. They felt that by being actively involved, they could support, assist, encourage, and satisfy their children's desire to participate in distance learning. This was a predominant motivator for many mothers. For example, Salwa explained, "I am involved,

follow, and participate solely because my child asks and insists on it, solely for my child's sake." Salam expressed, "My daughter enjoys having me by her side." Lauren also shared, "My children feel highly motivated and happy when I'm involved; they always ask me to watch their learning using Zoom."

Fifth Theme: Main Difficulties

This theme explores the primary difficulties encountered by parents during distance learning. It is divided into three subcategories: pedagogical-didactic and technological knowledge difficulties, financial and well-being difficulties, and difficulties with daily routines and time allocation.

Category 1: Didactic-Pedagogical and Technological Knowledge Difficulties

This category encompasses the challenges related to pedagogical-didactic aspects and the operation of technological equipment, which were essential for distance learning. Parents faced various pedagogical difficulties, including a lack of knowledge about study content and limited experience in the field of education, as they were not professional teachers or lacked academic education. Consequently, they found it challenging to follow their children's distance learning. Notably, the level of parents' education did not solely determine their ability to engage with the academic content. For instance, Faiza expressed, "My problem lies in understanding the study material. Sometimes, I had to comprehend the material my child was learning and explain it to them, but I didn't always have the knowledge." Similarly, Azmi stated, "My main difficulty as a parent primarily lies in the didactic-pedagogical field. I am not a teacher and struggle to comprehend teaching materials and methods." Regarding technological difficulties, most parents reported being proficient in operating technological devices such as computers, tablets, communication tools, and the Internet. However, some parents lacked this knowledge and had to seek assistance from private technicians or their partners. Hadil, like other mothers, mentioned, "I don't know how to operate a computer, connect to the internet, or use Zoom." Likewise, Samer expressed, "Operating the devices is challenging for me. A technician came to my house and set everything up. Personally, I lack knowledge in operating this equipment."

Category 2: Financial Difficulties and Well-being

Parents encountered difficulties stemming from financial limitations, including a lack of resources, devices, as well as an unsuitable learning environment at home. While many parents did not face significant issues in these areas, some experienced serious challenges. Families with multiple children struggled to acquire sufficient devices and relied on partial assistance from the Israel Ministry of Education or local authorities. This assistance primarily involved lending suitable laptops or tablets to families in need to facilitate their participation in distance learning. However, the support received was often insufficient, leading some families to bear the financial burden of purchasing additional equipment. Amal explained,

We are blessed with four children who are still studying at school. Initially, we had only one computer at home. Initially, we only had one computer at home, so my husband reached out to the school principal, who loaned us a laptop. However, it wasn't enough, so we bought a tablet, and I gave my smartphone to our middle daughter.

Similarly, Odna shared, “We lacked many things... We had to purchase another small computer, and our internet speed wasn’t adequate, so we upgraded it, which placed a financial burden on us.” On the other hand, some parents did not receive assistance from the Israel Ministry of Education or the school despite their needs. Dina expressed, “Despite our situation and repeated requests, we did not receive any support.”

In terms of a suitable learning environment at home, some parents reported the lack of adequate space, resulting in their children studying together in pairs or sharing a room with all the children. This arrangement led to disturbance, disorder, noise, and ultimately hindered the success of distance learning. For example, Saleh explained, “My house is small, and with three children, it was challenging to find a quiet space for everyone. Everyone studied together, and it wasn’t successful.”

Category 3: Time Allocation and Daily Routines

This category focuses on parents’ ability to dedicate time to their children’s learning and integrate distance learning into their daily routines, which encompassed work, household responsibilities, and learning. Almost all participants responded negatively to this aspect, stating that distance learning disrupted their daily routines and significantly impacted their lives. Various instances of this disruption were evident throughout the interviews. Canar mentioned, “I had to work part-time to be available for my children during school days.” Another mother expressed, “My attention was solely focused on my children’s studies, and it consumed most of my time. Finding time for other tasks became difficult as long as the children were studying at home, which also had financial implications for the family.” However, some non-working mothers indicated that distance learning did not disrupt their routines, as they were able to dedicate their time solely to their children’s learning. Samer stated, “I had ample free time to spend with my daughter. It didn’t bother me at all.” Similarly, Nardin mentioned, “Since I don’t work, distance learning didn’t significantly affect my schedule.”

Sixth Theme: Contribution of Parental Involvement

This theme consists of two subcategories: contribution’s manners and its importance, and parents’ feelings about their involvement and suggestions for improvement.

Category 1: Manner of Contribution and its Importance

Mothers articulated the significance and advantages of their involvement in their children’s learning process during the COVID-19 period. Their contributions included strengthening their children’s self-confidence, enhancing their academic self-image, serving as personal role models, and fostering responsibility, cooperation, and empathy among their children. Additionally, parental involvement increased motivation, enjoyment, and social-academic development. It also contributed to improving the parent-teacher relationship. For instance, Afnan stated, “My involvement boosts my son’s self-confidence,” and Walaa emphasized the sense of belonging it creates in her child. Another mother noted, “My involvement will increase my son’s participation in academic and social activities,” while Ansam expressed that her daughter would have more fun and feel secure, recognizing the importance of academic and social aspects through her involvement.

Category 2: Parents' Feelings about Their Involvement and Suggestions for Improvement

Mothers acknowledged the importance of their involvement and participation, but also expressed the significant burden it placed on them. While they found satisfaction in their contributions, they felt exhausted, drained of energy, and overwhelmed. They witnessed positive outcomes from their involvement and believed that without it, their children's academic progress would have been significantly impacted. They suggested that both mothers and other families should increase their involvement and emphasized the importance of raising awareness about the value and impact of parental involvement. Ragda shared, "Despite all the stress, I am content because without my involvement, my children would not have thrived during this period." Ayelet stressed the need to raise awareness and encourage more parents to actively participate.

Summary of the Findings

The research findings revealed a predominantly negative perception of distance learning during the COVID-19 period, along with an above-average level of parental involvement in their children's education. These findings were derived from both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study, resulting in six themes.

The first theme highlighted the negative attitudes of parents towards the actual implementation of distance learning during the quarantine period. Parents expressed widespread dissatisfaction, disappointment, and a sense that distance learning was ineffective and insufficient in providing a comprehensive understanding of academic content. Subsequently, the second theme focused on the degree, frequency, and depth of parental involvement. Most parents indicated their presence alongside their children during remote learning, either voluntarily or out of necessity. Then, the third theme explored the nature of parental involvement, which varied among parents. While some chose not to be involved at all, others engaged in various forms of involvement, such as assisting with learning activities or establishing communication with teachers.

On the one hand, the fourth theme examined the challenges faced by parents in distance learning, including pedagogical difficulties, technological issues, and economic constraints. However, a few parents acknowledged the positive aspects of distance learning, such as providing a safe space for shy students and reducing instances of aggression and bullying. On the second hand, the fifth theme highlighted the motives for parental involvement, which encompassed the welfare of their children, demands from teachers and school management, and the requests and needs of the children themselves. Many parents reported a high level of daily involvement, prioritizing their children's well-being over personal matters. Some focused on their relationship with teachers, participating in communication platforms and sharing instructions, assignments, and Zoom schedules. Certain parents displayed interventionist behavior by joining Zoom meetings to voice comments, reservations, or suggestions. Others preferred direct contact with teachers via phone calls, text messages, or face-to-face meetings, while some solely concentrated on their own children without reference to classroom activities. Motivations for parental involvement encompassed their children's welfare, the demands of teachers and school management, and the needs expressed by the children themselves. Finally, the sixth theme focused on the contribution of parental involvement and its importance. It was found that parental involvement had positive effects, such as increasing motivation, enhancing self-confidence, facilitating comprehension of educational materials, fostering responsibility, cooperation, and care among children, and improving the virtual classroom environment.

Overall, parents perceived their involvement and participation as vital, although it came at a considerable burden. The study also revealed a positive correlation between parental involvement and more supportive attitudes towards distance learning.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm the negative attitudes expressed by parents towards distance learning and the disagreements regarding its effectiveness as the primary mode of education. These findings align with a previous study conducted by the Israel Ministry of Education (2020), which highlighted parents' complaints about the quality of distance learning for younger children. Other studies have also indicated significant learning loss during distance learning, with a high percentage of children in low- and middle-income countries at risk of not reaching their developmental potential (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Uğraş et al., 2023). Additionally, Donnelly and Patrinos (2022) found that students face the risk of losing one-third of the knowledge they had acquired in one year.

However, the study also found that parents considered distance learning as a potential future option if implemented with clear, strict, and well-defined guidelines. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Shaked (2020) and the Israel Ministry of Education (2020), which suggests that distance learning may become a preferred method of education. The current crisis has necessitated the adoption of distance learning as the primary mode of instruction, underscoring the importance of addressing its shortcomings and learning from this experience to overcome future challenges. Keynan (2020) similarly argues that the transition to distance learning was a default option due to the lack of suitable alternatives, emphasizing that it was the only way to ensure continued learning during the pandemic.

Parents reported that their experience with distance learning disrupted their normal daily routines, requiring them to devote significant time and effort to their children's education. Additionally, parents expressed concerns that their children did not fully comprehend the content conveyed by teachers and lacked access to adequate learning materials. These findings are supported by the critical analysis of the education system by Keynan (2020), who argues that the sudden shift to distance learning caught the system unprepared at various levels, including the lack of teacher training in delivering distance education and parents' limited pedagogical knowledge. Consequently, distance learning, as implemented, was largely ineffective and can be considered a failure.

The findings also support previous studies (Zedan, 2012) that emphasize the positive impact of parental involvement in education. Mothers, in particular, viewed their involvement as instrumental in enhancing their children's self-confidence, social skills, and educational development. Similar to the research by Fan and Williams (2010), parents perceived their involvement as improving self-image, motivation to learn, and overall behavior. The study also identified various factors that hindered parental involvement, particularly among parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds or those with multiple children. These parents often find it challenging to allocate time for involvement due to their busy schedules and competing priorities. Some parents may have been involved in the past but have lost interest, while others may exhibit a lack of motivation or engagement. Negative feelings stemming from the lockdown, isolation, and the unfamiliarity of the situation further contribute to the reduced involvement (Karakose, Ozdemir, Papadakis, Yirci, Ozkayran, & Polat, 2022).

Research by Fisher and Friedman (2009) supports these findings, suggesting that families with low socioeconomic status are less likely to engage in school-related activities due to their focus on earning a living to support the family. Similarly, Sperling (2019) found that the socioeconomic background of families affects the level of parental involvement, with disadvantaged families facing challenges in dedicating time and attention to school involvement due to occupational demands. Siachpazidou et al. (2021) claimed that parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds encounter difficulties in supporting their children's studies during the COVID-19 crisis due to limited access to educational resources, exacerbating hidden dropout rates among these disadvantaged families.

Furthermore, parents faced challenges in organizing their resources appropriately, particularly in terms of computing devices such as computers, tablets, and reliable internet connections. This issue was particularly prevalent in families with multiple children, each needing a separate device for remote learning. The lack of access to computers and internet connectivity for thousands of students further contributed to the difficulties faced by parents (Garbe et al., 2020). Balancing work demands with the educational needs of their children during the COVID-19 crisis also presented challenges for parents, resulting in reduced parental involvement (Poulain et al., 2021).

The vast majority of parents indicated that they were present with their children at home during remote learning, with some parents alternating shifts and others devoting their entire day to supporting their children's education. Horowitz (2020) also highlights that parents found themselves becoming involved in their children's learning, which required them to stay at home, disrupting their daily routines. This new pattern resulting from distance learning presented challenges for parents, as the close proximity to their children throughout the learning day led to increased stress among the children, aligning with the findings reported by Siachpazidou et al. (2021) regarding heightened stress levels and poor eating habits among children during quarantine.

Additionally, the Hila organization (2020) found that the format of distance learning did not adequately consider the difficulties faced by parents in supporting their children, as they had to continue assisting with educational tasks and homework even beyond the designated learning hours.

Mothers specifically emphasized the use of the WhatsApp application as the primary means of communication between them and educators during the COVID-19 period. This fast and preferred method facilitated current and accessible contact with parents. These findings align with the research conducted by Karakose, Yirci, and Papadakis(2022), which notes that the use of WhatsApp groups has created an effective communication network among students, teachers, parents, and school administrators. The increased utilization of WhatsApp groups between schools and parents has the potential to deepen parental involvement in school/kindergarten life and even reshape the roles of teachers and parents in the educational process for the younger generation.

The research findings reveal that parents faced difficulties simultaneously at various levels. Regarding the first challenge, pedagogical knowledge and technological proficiency, parents reported that despite the difficulties, they were able to overcome them without negatively impacting the performance of distance learning. The same applies to the third challenge, time management, scheduling, and work integration. Some parents reported having to adjust their work shifts, while others had to accept part-time jobs to accommodate their children's learning. Parents also encountered problems and challenges in finding a quiet and conducive learning environment at home. It is crucial for authorities to address the need for designated spaces and facilities that provide all the necessary resources for effective distance learning. Importantly, Pinson's statement specifically refers to economically disadvantaged families who lack the required conditions and resources for successful distance learning at home.

Recommendations

During the COVID-19 crisis, the implementation of distance learning and the increased involvement of parents with their children have presented an opportunity to establish a shared pedagogical vision. This vision should position parents as force multipliers and teaching supporters, strengthening their involvement and participation in school activities. The transition to distance learning blurred the boundaries between the school and home spaces, exposing parents to the work and teaching methods of teachers and facilitating communication with

students. This heightened involvement of parents during remote learning necessitates their inclusion in discussions and examinations related to promoting pedagogical innovation in schools.

To address this, it is necessary to answer several important points. First, it is crucial to define the role of parents and their integration in promoting innovation in learning within schools. Understanding the preferences of the teaching staff, parents, and students regarding the type of learning they wish to promote, including styles, subjects, qualifications, skills, and practices, is essential. By considering these preferences, schools can create a learning environment that aligns with the expectations and needs of all stakeholders.

To achieve this, the Israel Ministry of Education and its representatives, such as supervisors, managers, instructors, and teachers, should maintain continuous and relevant contact with parents. They should address the challenges that emerged during the COVID-19 period, assist families in overcoming difficulties, and increase parents' awareness of their contribution to their children's behavior and achievements. The Israel Ministry of Education must significantly strengthen parents' involvement in educational activities. Building on the findings of this study, which indicate above-moderate to high parental involvement in various aspects of their children's academic, social, and educational lives, it is recommended to maintain a similar level of involvement even after the pandemic. Furthermore, the positive relationships formed between parents and teachers should be leveraged to sustain this level of involvement.

Moreover, it is advisable to provide additional training in information and communication technology (ICT) for parents to prepare for an ambiguous and unpredictable future. Schools should foster strong relationships with parents, maintaining and strengthening them, while continuing to coordinate efforts in all areas and aspects of children's lives.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the significant findings regarding the relationships between parental involvement and attitudes toward distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the research was conducted solely with an elementary school population. It is worth noting that difficulties during the coronavirus period were reported among high school-age students, and parents of high school students may have shown different levels of involvement. Therefore, it is important to examine this issue among parents of high school students to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the subject.

Additionally, another limitation of the current study pertains to the period in which the data were collected. The study relied on participants' self-reports during and after the quarantine and restrictions. The extended duration of this situation may have led to participants presenting a distorted image of their recollections. To address this limitation, future research could employ a longitudinal research approach to examine the relationships between different variables in more detail over an extended period of time.

It is recommended that future studies address these limitations and further investigate the role of parental involvement and attitudes toward distance learning, particularly among high school parents. Longitudinal research designs would provide valuable insights into the dynamics and changes in parental involvement and attitudes over time. Such studies could enhance our understanding of the complexities and variations in parental involvement during crisis situations and inform the development of effective strategies for promoting parental engagement in education.

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Notes on Contributor

Dr. Raed Zedan, head of the advanced learning department at the Academic Arab College for Education in Israel – Haifa, Lecturer and researcher in the fields of education, teaching and learning, administration and leadership. interested in effective topics related to the cultural context of the students, parents and teachers, such as parents involvement, classroom climate in science classes, integration and implementation of innovative teaching methods, motivation and self-proficiency among teachers and students, measurement and evaluation of science programs.

ORCID

Dr. Raed Zedan, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2823-2140>