Investigating the Barriers of Parents' Participation in Schools' Affairs from the Viewpoint of Principals and Parents of Students and Presenting practical Strategies for its Increase

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A B S T R A C T

One of the most basic activities of Ministry of Education and Parents and Teachers Association is the fulfillment of objectives related to increase in the participation of parents in schools' affairs. The present study is to investigate the amount of participation of parents in the educational process of students and present practical strategies for increasing through which the reasons of decreasing parents' participation in their children's education of affairs will be identified. Therefore, the population of this research includes all principals and parents of students of Malekan city. From the population of parents, 360 participants and from the population of principals, 173 participants were selected based on the cluster random sampling. The collecting data instrument of this study were two separate questionnaires for investigating principals' and parents' ideas and beliefs regarding participation in schools' affairs and two open questions for collecting attitudes of principals and parents concerning the reasons of decreasing participation and strategies for increasing it. To analyze the data, the methods of Student t and chi square were employed. The results obtained from this study indicate that: There is a correlation between parents' demographic information (except gender factor) and lack of their awareness of the advantages of participation, parents' lack of awareness of their rights concerning their children and schools, principals' traditional attitudes to managing schools, performance of headquarter and school officials and the amount of their participation in educational affairs of their children. According to the obtained results, the Ministry of Education and Parents and Teachers Association can improve their relationship with parents by enriching family training courses using trained and skillful forces, putting into practice the parents' attitudes in schools, friendly and respectful treatment with parents and paying attention to audiences' needs.

INTRODUCTION

In different societies, participation has been considered more and more as one of the necessary elements in social life and its necessity has been considered as important; in such a way that in many texts and various fields, it has been paid attention to and its importance has been signified and emphasized. In fact this word (participation) has been applied in different forms and has had many positive and vast reflections and has been indicative of this fact that social life is not possible but by mutual participation, consultation and cooperation. Participation is a kind of constructive and suitable multidimensional link among some of individuals in order to supply some of their needs which are beyond individuals' abilities while it has considers the principle of human equality as well [33].

What give sense to participation in the society are peoples' wills and wants and beliefs and these are fulfilled when two element of awareness of the issue of participation and guarantee of the mode of participation as a serious and continuous issue will be considered. If people ensure the mode of participations and its need, and know that their participations is a serious process and on the other hand concerned authorities and administrative and educational officials welcome these participations appropriately and adopt constructive and executable ideas regarding participators, it can be believed that people certainly will not neglect to do them,
provided that the required ground for doing this work and required motivation for public belief to participate are present [28].

Because Iran's educational system is the most expanded and at the same time the most important institution of the country, it has the most appropriate ground for public participation. Nowadays, because of increasing needs of societies to education, Statesmen's, officials' and planners' attentions have been attracted to education. Quick growth of population and severe demand for education have caused that the society attributes some of its income to this section and on the other hand improvement of different technology and science as well as the country's need to advancement and development in all fields, recommend more resources for education. Educational issues are not confined in material problems and supplying financial resources, but because of the existence of multiple defects in intellectual, planning, structural, principal fields and also bureaucracies have caused many problems and made scholars and officials interested in the density of education search some strategies for resolving these challenges. Among these strategies, thinking for ways of people's participations in educational affairs can be named. Although this way cannot be considered as the only resolution for solving all of educational problems, as in the history of education of other countries can be observed, there are resolved issues of education by the help and cooperation of people [28].

Now, in Iran, the issue of participation is being applied in different forms and in different levels and people, government and non-government organizations and agenciesmore or less contribute to education; while Iran's education encountered problems and challenges and present participations, although have suitable variety, their performances are not satisfactory and some of them have not attained any success in achieving predicted objectives. People have not active and appropriate participations in educational affairs and educational system of Iran and principals and planners in different levels have not had significant successes in attracting people for participation. The conducted research in different countries indicate that parents participate in the issues related to educational affairs of their children and in addition to awareness of educational conditions of their children, they present issues like their emotional and social growths and on the other hand, the conducted research confirms the influence of schools, families and local relationships on students' successes and effective and positive relationship between families and students' achievements regardless of race and ethnicity as well as parents' level of education have become obvious for all (ibid). the high effect of school-centered decision making based on teachers', principals', parents' and social group members' participations have confirmed the improvement in students' learning environment [7].

Intimate and unofficial relationship between parents and staff, informing parents and creating a warm and welcoming environment in schools are considered as desired strategies to increase participation in the affairs of schools [33].

Regarding what mentioned, fulfillment of educational system in which the people's role play enjoy a high and significant status is one of the unfulfilled desires which now our society is encountered. Although people's participation and presence in the arena of education have been started from some time ago, for traversing the path of perfection many steps are taken. The thought of closeness of parents of the house and parents of the school has emerged in Iran form the first decades of shaping new education; however, always different factors have prevent form this urgent need. At the moment, the heavy burden of educational problems make the presence of parents in different aspects of the activities of schools inevitable. Therefore, access to suitable participation policies is not extracted from among administrative circular and needs national and fundamental research. Principally, students' parents should directly or indirectly participate in issues related to education and growth of their own children. Parents should not ignorantly send their children to schools, but they should understand the educational problems and take their responsibility of the education of children whom they born (ibid). 

Now, the question is how muchstudents' parents are familiar with the importance of these issues? And how much this familiarity can share those in the issues of their children's education? And which strategies can increase this participation?

Participation has different dimensions each of which has its own features, but generally the mode of practicality of participation, including participation in economy is dependent on some factors as the basics of participation. These basics have their origins in history and culture of every society and the lack of attention to these origins and apparently suitable and effective measures will not be consistent with improving the culture of participation [21].

a) The philosophical and religious basics of participation:

Philosophers, from the beginning of the existence of regular and systematic thinking about the existence, were to investigate the issue of human being, the universe and God and issues related to each of these affairs. The question "what is human being?" is among those questions which human being has been trying to answer during centuries. Accordingly, personal and social behaviors of human being has been always debated. Question such as is human being is a social creature? Does human being's altruism originate from his nature or it originates form acquisition or environment? Are cooperation and participation results of social needs or human
being instinctively is participation seeker? And other questions with which human being’s mind are concerned. In the thoughts of ancient intellectuals, particularly the ideas of promoting Zoroastrian religious in Iran, participation is emphasized. The basis of philosophy and religion of Zoroastrianism is founded on cooperation and contribution and with its own trainings grows in individuals' social responsibility. Plato in the fifth book of the Republic discusses that the best society is the one whose individuals as body organs so related to each other that the passions if an organ cause the passions of all the members of the society. According to the Quranic verses, the condition and destiny of a society are dependent on the condition of its people and their performances. And in the realm of the Holy Quran, the teachings such as charity, alms, Jihad, enjoining and forbidding the evil are considered as significant examples of participation and form the Quranic verses it is extracted that sending messengers and holy books, in line with promoting consultation, is the negation of monopolization people [29].

b) The psychological basics of participation:

The psychological dimension in all types of participation is directly or indirectly implicit. A dimension of participation is related to psychological aspects of participatory human being. Shared sense, responsibility, satisfaction with affairs, solution of problems, feeling needs to transcending and establishing psychological health and fleeing from loneliness and creating motivation in affairs which are accompanied with participation are observed [33].

c) The political basics of participation:

From the past to the present, participation in the political issues is one of the major participatory activities of human beings. In a democratic society, at least in appearance, governors demand people to have more effective role in political decisions. Some of the experts know participation in elections as inactive participation and some others believe that real participation is attainable through the activities of most of the people in different social and political decisions [29].

d) Sociological basics of participation:

In definitions of sociology we say that sociology is the science of investigating social phenomena or sociology of science of investigating and studying social institutions, the mode of their shaping and the mechanism of changes in them and the science of study of relations which are related to whole human beings. Considering each of these definitions, they include participation. It means that a social phenomenon, participation is an institution and participation is a kind of relation related to a collection of human beings. Therefore, participation is the issue which in the field of sociology are investigable. In other words, participation is a sociological issue. Participation can be studied sociologically by different examples which in traditional societies and modern societies [6].

e) Principal basics of participation:

A lot of experts of behaviorism believe that if in an organization there is democracy and hierarchy and relying on authority and power are less emphasized, that organization is more successful in attaining its own objectives. This group of experts consider the participation of staff in affairs and decisions related to many organizational issues including self-discovery, leadership, exploiting, communication, improvement and reconstruction of the organization. By participation in management, these experts mean that the members of the organization have the influence and effect in decisions made. However, participation in management means losing independence or responsibility or authority of principals, but in participation, managers get far from tyranny and despotism and they consult with staff in different affairs. In this case, staff psychologically and emotionally and with their heart and soul cooperate in and effort for fulfilling the objectives of the group (QassemiPuya, 2001).

f) The economic basics of participation:

The economic basics of participation is more studied form the viewpoint of development. In the discussion of development, different forms of participation such as constructive elements of development are considered. As the experts and scholars of development confirm correctly, the discussion of development are not only discussed in financial and economic dimension, but being developed in addition to economic improvement includes political, social and cultural dimensions and like these. Oakley and Marsus in relation to the development of participation believe that: participation, voluntary cooperation of people in public plans expected to have a role in national development. But necessarily they do not have any role in shaping by use of its content. In the most general form, participation means sensitizing people to increase and accept their own abilities for indicating appropriate response to development plans [21].

Multiple studies have been done on parents’ participation in schools in Iran and other countries which are as follows:
- QassemiPuya [28], in a study titled as "paths of attaining public participations of in the affairs of education" obtained the following results: participation in forms such as devotion, Parents and Teachers Association, the activities of public participation of Renovation, Expansion and Equipping of Schools organization, 15thKhordad Foundation, Jihad of School Construction, private schools, Water Councils, Houses of Culture is presented and it seems appropriate that in the status quo, such participations become reinforced. Since participation requires the suitable cultural and social ground, it necessitates that governments consider this issue in economic and social macro plans. Since the fulfilment or lack of fulfilment of participation in many cases are dependent to principals, it seems necessary that some plans be presented for informing principals. According to the importance of NGOs in preparing social and cultural grounds, it seems appropriate that the government provides the legal and practical grounds of forming and expanding these NGOs and supports them. Among other results of this research, the positive and constructive effects of participating students, teachers and parents in managing schools and decision makings can be referred to, which have significant roles in eliminating available defects and advancing the objectives of education.

- In the research conducted by Moazzenpoor (1997) to be aware of the elementary school teachers' expectations of parents using questionnaire participated by a 100 participant sample of elementary school teachers of education district 5, 7, 10, 11 of Tehran city, the conclusions of the ideas of this group of teachers indicate that they expect parents and particularly mothers to have regular and continuous relations with teachers of their children in order that they can know better their children and solve their educational problems. Parents in their everyday life and also in dealing with the educational state of their children follow a regular and particular plan, the education of children is not bound only to teachers and schools and parents use any opportunity to educate their children.

- AhangariFarahani (1996) in a study titled as "investigating the effect of training parents' participation on social growth and students' educational attainment" indicate that training of parents' participation have been able to be more effective in girls' educational achievement than that of boys and have resulted in enhancement in the discipline level of students and even parents' participation in students' practical health has been effective, however it was little in amount.

- In another study, Sheikhzadeh (1996), investigates the effect of families' and schools' trainings on elementary students' educational achievement in Orumiyeh and indicates that conducting training tests of families and schools results in creating interest in parents for attending in schools and directly influences students' educational achievement and appropriate behavior of schools and families in paying attention to the way of students' educational attainment.

- The results of a study done by Sobjani Nejad (2004) titled as "investigating the barriers of students' parents' participation in the affairs of high schools of Isfahan" indicate that in sum, family barriers, the concept of family economy and in general social barriers, the concept of political status of the society, in general principal barriers of schools, the concept of endeavor level for attracting and informing parents, in general structural barriers of education, the concept of structure and organization of Parents and Teachers Association are more effective than other studied concepts on the lack of parents' participation in affairs of schools.

- Arnold [5] in a study investigates the effective principal factors for parents' participation in the affairs of elementary schools. According to the results of this research, parents' participatory plans in a school is based on beliefs, decision makings and skills of the principal of that school in establishing relations.

- Cassello [7] in a study proves that if teachers, principals and members of social groups relatedly work with each other to improve training environments for their children in schools, the tendency of being prior will be created in education.

- Fenilli [11] indicates that factors such as leadership style of schools, the type of decision makings and family relationships are effective in attracting parents.

- Ma [19] in his research indicates that school principals should be aware of their effective roles in participating parents and know that principals' adaptions with customs, beliefs and ideas of parents, active participation of principals in doing different affairs and at last establishing positive relationships with parents including effective factors in expanding relationship of families and schools and active participation of parents in schools affairs. Regarding what have been mentioned, the present study is to eliminate the barriers of participation by presenting and investigating the following hypotheses:

1. There is a correlation between the lack of parents' awareness of the advantages of participation and the amount of their participation in educational affairs of their children.
2. There is a correlation between parents' demographic characteristics (gender, income, job, education level, age) and the amount of their participation in educational affairs of their children.
3. There is a correlation between the lack of parents' awareness of their rights to their children and schools and the amount of their participation in school affairs.
4. There is a correlation between principals' traditional attitudes toward managing schools and the amount of parents' participation in educational affairs of their children.
5. There is a correlation between school and administration of education officials’ performances and the amount of parents’ participation in educational affairs of their children.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology employed in the present study is a survey study regarding the nature of the subject and the objectives of the research and concerning the criterion, it is an applied one. Library research, interviews and two kinds of closed questionnaires based on Likert scale with a 4 choice scale were employed in order to collect principals’ data and those of students’ parents. At the end of each questionnaire, an open question was predicted. Questionnaires were investigated multiple times to check their reliability and validity before the final administration and necessary amendments were done; the mentioned primary list were submitted to experts and scholars of the district and also experts of educational, sociological and psychological sciences and they were demanded to share their ideas as well as to comment regarding the presented components. After receiving their comments and ideas, new forms were prepared and again submitted to them. The final comments indicated the desired validity of the questionnaire. To measure the amount of instruments’ reliability, Chronbach's alpha were used. The following table indicate the amount of reliability of used instruments in the present research.

Table 1: Chronbach's alpha for the reliability of questionnaires.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronbach's alpha</td>
<td>%78</td>
<td>%73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The population of the present study includes two separate groups:
- All students’ parents of schools in Malekan district including both state and private ones in the academic year 2009-2010 with the number of 5891 individuals (both mother and father are considered as a parent).
- All principals of primary, secondary and high schools of the district equal as 173 individuals except remote schools for whom management notifications were issued in the academic year 2009-2010.

To select the required samples, the following steps were taken:
1. Regarding that the population of the principals were not vast, therefore, all population of these group were selected as the sample.
2. To select the sample of the students’ parents, a number of 360 participants were selected using Chochrane formula. Concerning that this number includes two percent of all students; from each school, 2 percent of students were selected randomly and questionnaire were distributed to the parents.

Table 2: Parameters related to sample of students’ parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>d</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>q</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents number</td>
<td>5891</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conducting the study, dependent to the nature of variables, descriptive statistics like frequency, percentile, mean, mode, standard deviation and … were used. In addition, to test the hypotheses of the study, t-test and Chi square were used by SPSS.

Analysis of the research hypotheses:
1. There is a correlation between the lack of parents’ awareness of the advantages of participation and the amount of their participation in educational affairs of their children.

Table 3: Data related to the first research hypothesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of participant</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Standard error of the mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principals 173</td>
<td>2.5244</td>
<td>0.48276</td>
<td>0.03670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals 360</td>
<td>2.9870</td>
<td>0.440860</td>
<td>0.02324</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis Test for population mean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis 1 of principals</th>
<th>t-statistics</th>
<th>Degrees of freedom</th>
<th>Significant level</th>
<th>The mean difference</th>
<th>Confidence interval for the mean difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.286</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.52436</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.480</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.98704</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lower bound 0.4519
Upper bound 0.5968
Lower bound 0.9413
Upper bound 1.0327
In investigating the mentioned hypothesis, regarding the included information in above statistical tables, it can be found that doing two-sided hypothesis tests indicate that the mean is more than 2 and mean difference is positive; therefore, null hypothesis, i.e. the research hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, it can be concluded that both from the viewpoint of parents and those of principals, there is a correlation between the lack of parents' awareness of advantages of participation and the amount of their participation. In confirming the findings of the present study, Qassemi Puya [29] in a research refers to the positive and constructive effects of participating students, teachers and parents in managing school and decision makings which have significant roles in eliminating available defects and advancing education. Ahangari Farahani (1996) also in another study indicate that there is a correlation between training parents' participation and educational attainment and students' discipline level and responsibility.

2. There is a correlation between parents' demographic characteristics (gender, income, job, education level, age) and the amount of their participation in educational affairs of their children.

3. To investigate the third hypothesis claiming that "there is a correlation between the lack of parents' awareness of their rights to their children and schools and the amount of their participation in school affair". Regarding the included information in statistical tables of the present study, it can be found that doing two-sided hypothesis tests indicate that the mean is more than 2 and the mean difference is positive; therefore, the null hypothesis, i.e. the research hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, it can be concluded that both from the viewpoint of parents and those of principals, there is a correlation between the lack of parents' awareness of their rights to their children and schools and the amount of their participation in school affair. In confirmation of the findings of the present study, Ahangari Farahani (1996) in a research indicates that there is a correlation between parents' participation with students' educational achievements and their discipline level and responsibility.

4. To investigate the fourth hypothesis claiming "there is a correlation between principals' traditional attitudes toward managing schools and the amount of parents' participation in educational affairs of their children." Regarding the included information in statistical tables of the present study, it can be found that both from the viewpoint of parents and those of principals, there is a correlation between principals' traditional attitudes toward managing schools and the amount of parents' participation in educational affairs of their children. In confirmation of the findings of the present study, Sobhani Nejad [33] in a research indicates that the concepts of the endeavor level of school principals to attract and inform parents, principals' participatory spirit level, principals' management style and principals' human skills level influence the amount of participation of students' parents in school affairs. In addition, the findings of a study by Arnold [5] indicating that "participatory plans of parents in a school is based on beliefs, decision makings and principals' skills in establishing relationship" are consistent with the findings of the present study. In addition, Ma [19] in his research shows that school principals should be aware of their effective roles in parents' participation and know that principals' adaptation to parents' customs, thoughts and beliefs, active participation of principals in doing different affairs and at last establishing positive relationships with parents including factors effective in expanding the relationship of families and schools and parents' active participation in schools' affairs.

5. To investigate the fifth hypothesis claiming that "there is a correlation between school and administration of education officials' performances and the amount of parents' participation in educational affairs of their children." Regarding the included information in statistical tables of the present study, it can be found that both from the viewpoint of parents and those of principals, there is a correlation between school and administration of education officials' performances and the amount of parents' participation in educational affairs of their children. In confirmation of the findings of the present study, Casello [7] in a research indicates that if teachers, officials, principals, parents and members of social groups relatedly cooperate with each other to improve the learning environments of their children in schools, the desire of being prior in education is created. In addition Fennili [11] indicates that factors such as leadership style of schools, the type of decision makings and family relationships are effective in attracting parents. Qassemi Puya [28], in a study titled as "paths of attaining public participations of in the affairs of education" refers that because participation requires desired cultural and social ground, it seems necessary that governments consider this issue in major economic and social plans.

Conclusion:

By entering children school is the beginning of a new stage of education which accompanies many issues including flourishing of talents, familiarity with norms and societies values, socialization and other new situations for children. Along with this changes and upheavals, it is necessary that parents should have absolute participation in the field of education in order to be able to fulfil their educational needs and consequently trains deserved individuals for societies. Undoubtedly, the fulfilment of this issue is not possible except by expanding the relationship between families and schools. The results of the present study which investigate the reasons of the lack of parents' participation in their children's educational affairs indicates that the lack of parents' awareness of the advantages of participation and their rights regarding children and schools influence greatly the amount of their participations. This issue indicates that Ministry of Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran
should pay a special attention to training parents in these fields. In the present study, there is a significant correlation between parents' demographic characteristics (except gender) and the amount of their participation. It means that parents' age, the monthly income, education level and jobs influence their participation. In addition, the results of this research consider the traditional attitudes of principals and the type of performances of education officials involved in the amount of parents' participation in school affairs.

Furthermore, according to parents' evaluations, parents' little awareness of the advantages of participation, school principals' performances regarding attracting participation, parents' occupational concerns, lack of paying attention to parents' ideas in schools, embarrassment and feeling of lack of ability regarding helping schools are the most important barriers of parents' participation; therefore, the most important suggestions presented by them to eliminate these problems and improve parents' participation are as follows: improving performance of training families and its continuance, attentively informing by schools' officials, local councils, at last the performances of mass media, encouraging successful principals in attracting parents, paying attention to teachers and managers regarding respecting parents and using their ideas in school affairs and …

REFERENCES

[7] Casello, D.A., "A study of site-based decision-making based on perspectives of the participants"