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Parents' Perspectives on Home-School Collaboration:
At a Primary School in Finland and a Primary School in Sudan

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Home-school collaboration is an integral part of education. It has an effect on children's academic performance as well as their overall wellbeing and personal development. The concept has been a topic of interest and a subject of research for many years, while some argue that parental involvement can have a negative correlation to student academic achievement, the overall consensus supports the value of positive home-school collaboration.

This research explored home-school collaboration specifically from the parental standpoint, to explore their experiences, needs and arguments towards it and ultimately to seek any lessons which can be learned from their unique perspective which may serve as guidelines to be used in practice by both schools and teacher educators. The parents in this study had a wide range of experiences and attitudes on the matter due to the fact that one sample was in a developed country, Finland, while the other was in a developing country, Sudan.

Data was collected using individual and qualitative semi-structured interviews with a total of twelve parents of primary school aged children in the third grade or above in Finland and Sudan. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the transcribed interviews.

The results showed that, while differences do exist, parents share common basic needs and goals towards their children's education and upbringing regardless of culture, family structure or employment status. Details on what parents need from schools in order to best support their children were major findings from this research. Thus allowing for a set of practical implications to be inferred and constructed with these goals in mind. This may encourage key practitioners to seek more concrete regulations towards home-school collaborations and could inspire further research on a variety of related matters such as putting these recommendations into practice to develop them further.

Avainsanat – Keywords
Home-school collaboration, parental involvement, parents' perspective, Epstein's framework of the six types of involvement, qualitative research, content analysis, practical implications, teacher education, schools, primary school, Finland, Sudan.
Contents

List of Tables ........................................................................................................................................ V
List of Figures ......................................................................................................................................... V
1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................ 1
2 CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS ........................................................................................................ 3
3 AN INSIGHT INTO HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION ................................................................. 4
  3.1 What Home-School Collaboration Entails .................................................................................. 4
    3.1.1 The Effects of Home-School Collaboration on Children ......................................................... 7
    3.1.2 Parents and Home-School Collaboration ............................................................................. 8
    3.1.3 Challenges of Home-School Collaboration .................................................................... 9
  3.2 Home-School Collaboration in Finnish and Sudanese Primary Schools ................................. 11
    3.2.1 Home-School Collaboration in the Finnish Primary School ............................................. 11
    3.2.2 Home-School Collaboration at the Sudanese Primary School ...................................... 12
  3.3 Home-School Collaboration Practices .................................................................................... 13
4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS .................................................................................................................... 16
5 DATA AND METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................................... 17
  5.1 Research Design ......................................................................................................................... 17
  5.2 Research Data ............................................................................................................................. 18
    5.2.1 Data Collection Sample .................................................................................................. 19
    5.2.2 Data Collection Tool .................................................................................................... 21
  5.3 Qualitative Data Analysis .......................................................................................................... 28
  5.4 Research Ethics, Validity and Reliability ................................................................................. 33
6 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION .......................................................................................................... 36
  6.1 Parents' Experiences and Desires for Home-School Collaboration ........................................... 36
    6.1.1 Parents' Experiences of Home-School Collaboration ......................................................... 37
    6.1.2 Parents' Desires for Home-School Collaboration ............................................................... 50
    6.1.3 Summary and Discussion of Parents' Experiences and Desires for Home-School Collaboration .................................................................................................................. 52
  6.2 Parents' Arguments Towards the Value of Home-School Collaboration ................................ 53
    6.2.1 Benefits of Home-School Collaboration for Parents and Children .................................. 54
    6.2.2 Benefits of Home-School Collaboration for Schools ......................................................... 56
6.2.3 Summary and Discussion of Parents' Arguments Towards the Value of Home-School Collaboration ........................................................................................................... 57

6.3 Points of Similarity or Difference Between the Finnish and Sudanese Samples ................ 59

   6.3.1 Unique to Parents in Finland ....................................................................................... 59

   6.3.2 Unique to Parents in Sudan .......................................................................................... 60

   6.3.3 Summary and Discussion of the Distinct Difference and Key Similarities Between Parents in Finland and Sudan ................................................................. 61

6.4 Practical Implications for Primary Schools and the Field of Teacher Education .......... 65

   6.4.1 Practical Implications for Schools ................................................................................ 65

   6.4.2 Practical Implications for Teacher Education ............................................................. 69

   6.4.3 Summary and Discussion of Practical Implications ..................................................... 71

7 CONCLUSIONS .................................................................................................................. 75

   7.1 Reflective Summary ......................................................................................................... 75

   7.2 Evaluation of the Study .................................................................................................. 76

   7.3 Limitations and Strengths of the Study ......................................................................... 77

   7.4 Recommendations for Further Research ....................................................................... 78

REFERENCES ....................................................................................................................... 80

APPENDICES ....................................................................................................................... 83

   Appendix I English/Arabic version of interview questions .................................................. 83

   Appendix II English/Finnish version of interview questions ............................................... 87

   Appendix III Final English interview structure with codes correlating to research questions . 92

   Appendix IV Template of Participation request invitation to parents .................................. 95

   Appendix V Permission from school principal/administrator template ................................ 96

   Appendix VI Sections of interview structure ................................................................... 97

   Appendix VII Examples of coding clusters ....................................................................... 98
LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1 Individual Interview Lengths with Parents in Each Country.................................26
Table 5.2 Summary of the Implemented Stages of Qualitative Data Analysis.................................32
Table 6.1 Summary of Practical Implications in Connection to Research Findings..................74

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning - External Structure ........................................................................................................4
Figure 3.2 Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning - Internal Structure........................................................................................................5
Figure 5.1 Research Design .......................................................................................................18
Figure 5.2 Data Collection Sample - Six Parents from One Primary School in Finland and Six Parents from One Primary School in Sudan..........................................................................................19
Figure 5.3 Sample Ratio - The Number of Mothers Participating in Interviews was Double that of Fathers in Both Countries........................................................................................................20
Figure 5.4 Examples of Interview Questions in Correlation to Research Questions.................................................................................................................................23
Figure 5.5 Groups and Codes Attained Through Coding with Atlas.ti..............................29
Figure 5.6 Transcription software and accuracy checking.....................................................31
Figure 6.1 Summary of Similarities and Differences between the Parents in Finland and in Sudan.................................................................................................................................63
Figure 6.2 Summary of Recommended Home-School Collaboration Practices for Schools.................................................................................................................................69
Figure 7.1 Finland and Sudan: Continents Apart, yet Aligned in Parental Goal......................78
1 INTRODUCTION

There has always been a consensus that home-school collaboration is an invaluable asset to early years education (Bæck 2010, Christenson, Rounds and Gorney, 1992; Dauber and Epstein, 1991; Epstein and Sanders, 2000; Niehaus and Adelson, 2014). The holistic nature of modern early years education, with its emphasis on the welfare and happiness of children entails the accreditation of high calibre home-school collaboration. Accordingly, periodic amendments and even restructuring of its parameters is recommended (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, and Van Voorhis, 2002; Kristoffersson, Gu and Zhang, 2013) as dictated by regional variations, societal evolution and parental aspirations to ensure the standardisation and development of home-school collaboration practices.

Driven by my prior experiences of collaboration with parents as a teacher myself and seeing the impact such collaborative efforts have on children's success and wellbeing, I aim at learning more about how home-school collaboration can be best applied and the factors that come into play which may influence its' effectiveness. Thus, the research at hand explores the experiences and arguments parents have with regard to the value of home-school collaboration, their own role in this collaboration and what they expect from schools. The results raised from this qualitative investigation may vary due to the parents being from two cultures which are vastly different, Finnish and Sudanese. Twelve parents of primary school aged students from those two countries were interviewed using semi-structured interviews held in each respective country. An area of interest of this research was to see whether these two sets of parents, while continents apart, might have similar experiences and needs, face similar obstacles with home-school collaboration, or will their differing cultures lead to completely contradictory encounters.
Additionally, as the sample consists of parents from those two disparate cultures, lessons can be learned from each and possible practices inferred from the data may be applicable to a variety of schools and teacher education programmes. However, it must be taken into account that schools are affected by a wide array of factors such as funds, resources, cultures, norms, and the like, which could influence how these practices are applied.

In the following chapters, I will first introduce varied aspects of home-school collaboration then present the data and methodology used to explore the perspectives of these specific Finnish and Sudanese parents: what forms of home-school collaboration they have, or wish to have, what value they see in it, and what benefits they seek to garner from this collaboration. At the end of this journey I aim to deduce a set of practical guidelines which may serve to improve home-school collaboration where it may be applicable by practitioners in the field of Education.
2 CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

When referring to home-school collaboration in this work, what is meant by home are the child's guardians or caretakers, in this case I focus on parents, be it fathers or mothers. On the other hand, the term school covers all those working at the school from class teachers, subject teachers and administrative personnel. Collaboration in this research is defined within, but not limited to, specific parameters set by Epstein et al.'s (2002) framework of the six types of parental involvement, I will explain this in detail in the following chapter. Home-school collaboration as a whole will be initially examined within the scope of those parameters and, as the work progresses, it will also be elaborated upon through the experiences and needs of the parents being interviewed. To clarify the concept further as it is seen in this study, Christenson, et al. (1992) defines collaboration as a shared responsibility between home and school for student learning.

The parents at hand are mothers or fathers of primary school aged children ranging from the first grade to the seventh grade at two primary schools, one in Finland and the other in Sudan. In Finland, primary school ranges from the first to the sixth grade (FNBE¹, 2016a). Primary school in Sudan, on the other hand, ranges from the first to the eighth grade (Basic Education Curriculum, n. d.). However, in this research, the specific Sudanese school from which parents were interviewed follows the English system and has six years of primary education ².

Lastly, when referring to the child/children in later chapters, by that I mean children who are students within the above mentioned primary school years. In Finland children begin the first grade at seven years of age (FNBE, 2016b) and in the Sudanese school at hand the children begin the first grade at six years of age².

¹Finnish National Board of Education
²Information given by Sudanese school administrator - contacts can be provided if needed for verification.
**3 AN INSIGHT INTO HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION**

In this chapter an overview is presented of previous research and the relevant preceding findings in relation to the present research. This is done firstly by exploring how previous research views home-school collaboration, the benefits or effects that positive home-school collaboration and parental involvement have on children, as well as the existing or possible challenges faced by home-school collaboration. Furthermore, current regulations with regard to home-school collaboration are covered both in the Finnish and the Sudanese educational systems and in the primary schools involved in this research specifically. Finally, the chapter delves into the practices deemed positive within the scope of this collaboration and what some research suggests as the best course of action.

**3.1 WHAT HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION ENTAILS**

Home-School collaboration is complex (Kristoffersson, Gu and Zhang, 2013) and multi-faceted, many factors influence it and it can be viewed from differing perspectives. Epstein et al. (2002) state that at the centre of the home-school collaboration are the children. They go on to depict a child’s world as the core of three overlapping spheres; home, school and the community (see Figure 3.1).

![Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning - External Structure](image)

*Figure 3.1 Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning - External Structure (from Epstein et al. 2002, p. 163)*
In the present research, the focus is on the interaction and collaboration between two of those three environments; home and school. These interactions can occur between the institutions of family and school or between the individuals within them such as the child and the parent, or the child and the teacher and so on (Epstein et al., 2002) (see Figure 3.2). To go even deeper into focus, this research looks at home-school collaboration from the perspective of parents in the primary school context and how it can be best practiced.

**Key:** interaction between the main players in the two main environments of children

\[F=\text{Family}, \ S=\text{School}, \ C=\text{Child}, \ T=\text{Teacher}, \ P=\text{Parent}\]

*Figure 3.2 Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning - Internal Structure (from Epstein et al., 2002, p. 164)*

When considering primary school aged children, the vast majority of their time is spent in the first two spheres; home and school. Bridgemohan, van Wyk, and van Staden (2005) argue that the biggest overlap between those two spheres occurs during the early years of the child's educational experience. Consequently, constructive and positive interaction and collaboration between those two spheres at that stage is crucial for the child's overall wellbeing (Bæck, 2010, Christenson et al., 1992; Dauber and Epstein, 1991; Epstein et al., 2002; Epstein and Sanders, 2000; Niehaus and Adelson, 2014).

Bridgemohan, et al. (2005) sets three factors, "time, experience and practices of educators and parents" (p. 62) as the main controllers of the extent of overlap occurring between home and
school. As the third factor suggests, both the actions of parents and those of educators are of the utmost importance, this is the aspect which will be broached in this research.

Furthermore, Cuttance and Stokes (2000) had a set of characteristics for the best collaboration including shared goals and responsibilities between parents and teachers, equal roles, both parties being open to what the other has to say leading to mutual understanding, and working hand in hand towards the benefit of the child. Bæck (2010, p. 549) also sets a range of activities for this collaboration such as parents attending meetings with teachers, creating good home conditions for learning, assisting with homework and emphasizing the value they as parents put in education through displaying interest in their children's school life.

Through years of studies, Epstein et al. (2002) investigated parental involvement at length and their framework illustrating the six types of parental involvement brings forth a clear structure on which I based my definition of home-school collaboration.

The framework is as follows: **Type 1:** Parenting, in this type the school assists parents with parenting skills, understanding child development and advising them on ways to create home conditions to support learning. **Type 2:** Communicating, in this type the school shares information about each child's progress with their guardians and details about school programs, ensuring communications is effective and goes in both directions between the school and the home. **Type 3:** Volunteering, in this type the school actively involves parents both as volunteers or audiences in lessons or school activities inside and outside school. **Type 4:** Learning at Home, here the school shares ideas and tips to parents about learning activities which can be done at home related to homework for example. **Type 5:** Decision Making, here the school includes parents as participants in school decisions, for instance through school councils or parent committees. **Type
Collaborating with the Community, in this final type the school utilises resources and services available in the community surrounding the school for students families and the school and providing services for the community such as charity (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 165).

3.1.1 THE EFFECTS OF HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION ON CHILDREN

Being at the centre of three environments; home, school and the community (Epstein et al., 2002), children can gain a wide array of benefits both on the personal and the academic levels if the key players in these three environments, mainly parents and educators, had positive and constructive collaboration practices between them on a regular basis. These benefits include improvements in children's social-emotional skills, a noted decline in behavioural issues and an increase in their all-around wellbeing (Bæck 2010, Christenson et al., 1992; Dauber and Epstein, 1991; Epstein and Sanders, 2000; Niehaus and Adelson, 2014).

Bæck (2010) also notes that parents who affirmed their higher levels of attendance in meetings at schools had children with better academic achievement. However, it must be noted that research on a correlation specifically between parental involvement in children's homework and an improvement in academic success have reported conflicting results (Dumont, Trautwein, Lüdtke, Neumann, Niggli and Schnyder, 2012).

Bridgemohan et al, (2005) notes that the decline in behavioural and educational issues faced by children happens when parents and teachers have personal contact. They specifically stress the importance of communication to achieve these benefits. This is supported by what Cuttance and Stokes (2000) mentioned on the information needed by parents in order to best assist their children's learning.
3.1.2 PARENTS AND HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

As is the nature of human beings, each parent's priorities and needs with regard to home-school collaboration may differ. Nevertheless, the end goal is nearly always the same, the best possible outcomes for their children, regardless of background or social standing (Epstein, 1995; Christenson et al., 1992). This indicates the futility of generalisations or putting parents into stereotypical boxes and expecting them all to act in the same manner, something Bridgemohan et al. (2005) warned against. Moreover, in order for parents to achieve their goal, their main need is information, whether it is details regarding their children's learning or advice about how they, as parents, can help them learn better at home (Dauber and Epstein, 2010).

Hirsto (2010) implies that this information being communicated from the school to the parents is a pivotal need for parents to best support their children's learning. Thus, communication seems to be a key factor towards positive collaboration between home and school. She speaks of how it is crucial for parents to have clear lines of communication with the school in order to have all the knowledge they may need to actively support their children's learning. Hirsto (2010) coined this concept in the term “parents as recipients of information” (p. 105).

Furthermore, beyond communication, a variety of studies depict numerous priorities and needs parents seek from home-school collaboration. Namely, Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) found that parents want to feel like they belong to a school community while Bridgemohan et al. (2005) recommend clearly sharing school policies towards parental involvement with parents as well as take into account the insecurities less educated may have which could affect their participation, a point Bæk (2010) concurs with. Additionally, Cole (2007) points out a positive connection between schools consideration of parents' desires and higher effectiveness of the school's work.
Her point refers to the importance of schools having personal contact with parents, both for the school and the parents themselves.

As for what parents may dislike about home-school collaboration or aspects of it, Bæck (2010) mentioned both insufficient time and information as factors revealed by parents. Cole (2007) mentioned accommodating parent circumstances when setting up meeting times as a solution for the former aspect while Hirsto's (2010) recommendation below may serve as a solution for the lack of information side of things:

Using parents as volunteers and decision makers would give them a more active role and enable them to support their children more efficiently. Active participation would also provide them with more insightful views on the learning environment of their children (p. 106).

Alongside those needs, likes and dislikes, an aspect worth considering is the role and needs of mothers vs. fathers in this collaboration. Research done in a number of countries adheres to the belief that mothers are inherently more involved in their children's schooling than fathers are (Bæck, 2010; Cole, 2007).

3.1.3 CHALLENGES OF HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

A key factor in the success of home-school collaboration is balance i.e., finding ways to reach a common ground where both home and school become environments in which children can thrive (Bridgemohsan et al., 2005). This balance can be shaken by a number of issues. Taking the previously mentioned example of communication for instance, while it has been said to be one of the main needs by parents (Dauber and Epstein, 2010; Hirsto, 2010), researchers also advise
schools to beware of letting communication mostly take place only when negative issues arise because this leads to an unfavourable view of schools by parents (Epstein, 2010).

Bridgemohan et al. (2005) tap into how language can be an obstacle in the face of clear home-school communication if the parents do not have strong skills in the language used in the communication provided by the school. Cochran and Dean (as cited by Bridgemohan et al., 2005) also caution schools from being one directional in their communication and advise them to act more as partners with parents.

An aspect which may make collaboration challenging for schools is what Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) advise with regard to considering all the circumstances and abilities of parents to collaborate at different rates and being accommodating to those issues. Kristoffersson et al. (2013) state examples of such influences adding to the degree of challenge like "social, cultural, and economic circumstances" (p.189).

Furthermore, Bridgemohan et al. (2005) noted the disruption to teachers and hindrance of their work caused by parents coming to the school repetitively and in an ungoverned manner. In their paper, they pointed out that numerous teachers believed they were not fully prepared to collaborate with parents during their professional training (p. 73). Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, and Lopez (as cited by Hirsto, 2010) also state that a drawback in teacher training in the United States is that there is no clear cut definition of family involvement.

All relationships can have conflicts at some degree or another, and the home-school relationship is no different; a mismatch in the goals parents and educators are aiming at can be yet another cause adding to the level of challenge faced by both parties in this collaboration (Cole, 2007).
Nevertheless, as Cole (2007) elaborates in her paper, in order to overcome any such challenges, both home and school need to find ways to converse regardless of their differences and move above the obstacles towards creating useful ideas which can lead to better development and growth.

3.2 HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION IN FINNISH AND SUDANESE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Below I will briefly explain the regulations currently in place at each school where the children of the interviewees study. It should be noted that while clear and documented sources are available for these regulations in Finland, in the case of the Sudanese school, the information is unavailable in writing and thus was retrieved from the school administrator through email.\(^3\)

3.2.1 HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION IN THE FINNISH PRIMARY SCHOOL

The parents in this specific research have their children enrolled at a Finnish school which follows the outline set in the Finnish national core curriculum, as do all Finnish schools (FNBE\(^4\), 2016a). In the latest curriculum released in 2014, the Finnish National Board of Education (2016a, p. 38) states the importance of cooperation and briefly explains what benefits are to be gained from it and touches on the issues which should be covered in home-school cooperation. It states that it is the schools' responsibility to set up their cooperative efforts with the home. A connection is also made between the success of collaboration and the actions of school personnel, proclaiming that they must initiate collaboration and communicate with the children's guardians through a variety of methods including personal. Additionally, collaboration is

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\(^3\) Those emails and the contacts of the administrator can be provided if needed for verification

\(^4\) Finnish National Board of Education
described as occurring both in person-individually or in groups, and with the use of Information and Communication Technology (FNBE, 2016a, p. 38).

This curriculum includes giving feedback to parents on how their child is developing personally and in his/her learning as a trait of home-school collaboration, stating that receiving this information on a regular basis is indeed crucial for parents to be able to support their child's learning at home. Open discussions with parents on a variety of topics are also encouraged, such as support for children's learning and wellbeing, their learning methods and assessments, learning environments, learning goals and curriculum (FNBE, 2016a, p. 38). Furthermore, within the scope of these open discussions, the curriculum mentions that schools are to make it possible for parents to be aware of how the school day goes and to partake in various stages revolving around school activities.

3.2.2 HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION AT THE SUDANESE PRIMARY SCHOOL

The parents in this specific research have their children enrolled at a private primary school where the language of instruction is English. The school's home-school collaboration regulations were discussed in person and confirmed through email with the administrator of the school.

She explained that the school holds a number of workshops at different times during the school year covering school pedagogies in language and mathematics, school regulations and learning techniques at home as well as a workshop on child protection. The school counsellor observes students and holds meetings with parents to assist them with any issues if there was a need. As for communication, the school communicates with parents through email, phone calls and using two notebooks named the Reading Record and the Homework Diary. There are one-on-one
parent-teacher meetings held twice a year, once each semester. The school also uses social media to share pictures of school events. Furthermore, parents are asked and encouraged to volunteer, for instance, some help with reading with the children who are starting to read, they also lend a hand during special days if their support is needed such as Hour of Code. Parents attend the end of year children's performance as audience. Moreover, the school also holds a Sports Day during which everyone participates in sporting competitions including children, teachers and parents. Finally, the school utilises any special expertise parents may have and their community connections to provide sponsorships, services or resources if the school needed it.

3.3 HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION PRACTICES

Extensive studies on home-school collaboration over decades have focused on an arrays of aspects including, but not limited to, the nature of this collaboration (Epstein et al., 2002), parents and teachers views or satisfaction with it (Westergård and Galloway, 2010; Hirsto, 2010), the correlation between parents educational level and the degree of their involvement (Bæk, 2010), the link between this collaboration and students' academic achievement and overall wellbeing (Epstein et al., 2002; Christenson, Rounds and Gomey, 1992), the communication occurring within this collaboration (Christenson et al., 1992), mothers more active role in this collaboration (Bæk, 2010; Cole, 2007) or home-school collaboration with minority families (Epstein and Sanders, 2000). However, from my review of the literature, little seems to focus on teacher training and the skills and knowledge teachers need to be taught in order to develop themselves in this field or the practices schools need to put into action in order to achieve positive home-school collaboration. When asked, teachers stated that they lacked enough

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5 A worldwide initiative aimed at celebrating computer science through simple coding activities ('Hour of Code: Join the Movement', 2018)
training in such practices both in the pre-service stage and after they began working at schools (Hirsto, 2010; Bridgemohan et al., 2005).

Communication being one of the leading factors in the success of home-school collaboration, Bridgemohan et al. (2005, p. 61) focused their research on it and aimed at defining home-school communication and finding out how it can be improved and practiced effectively leading to a more enhanced partnership between the home and the school. Their paper went on to state that improvements to home-school communication were available in the literature, yet schools need to create their individual strategies so that long-term positive changes occur from these practices. Moreover, they expressed the benefits teachers themselves gain when actively listening to parents' points of view.

When it comes to collaborative practices, keeping Hirsto’s (2010) term “parents as recipients of information” (p. 105) in mind is essential. This is because the kind of information shared and received from parents will facilitate their own collaborative efforts towards the school (Hirsto, 2010) which in turn will assist the school with its work (Bridgemohan et al., 2005; Cole, 2007). Moreover, existing literature advises against a few practices within the scope of collaboration. Some of these practices were avoiding excessive communicating when the content of this communication is problem related, avoiding one-way communication with parents and finding ways to control the frequency of parental visits at the school if they reach a point which affects teachers' work (Bridgemohan et al., 2005).

It was also found in that the personal school experiences parents had as children affected their adult practices later on in life, those who had positive experiences as children were more active
in home-school collaboration as parents (Bæck, 2010, p. 556). This is all the more reason to aim at creating a positive experience for children now, through involving their parents in positive home-school collaboration, in an effort to allow them to be such active parents themselves in the future.
4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research seeks to answer the following research questions and fulfil one additional objective with regard to home-school collaboration from the point of view of a specific set of parents of students in one primary school in Finland and one primary school in Sudan.

1. What experiences do Finnish and Sudanese parents have with regard to home-school collaboration?
2. What arguments do Finnish and Sudanese parents have towards the value of home-school collaboration?
3. What kind of similarities and differences can be found in the Finnish/Sudanese data with regard to home-school collaboration?

Furthermore, on the basis of findings gained from answering the above questions, the research aims at constructing a set of practical implications based on parents’ experiences and needs for home-school collaboration. These are to be written in the form of recommendations aiming at assisting both schools and the field of teacher education in their collaborative practices and training respectively.
5 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In this section I will delve into the design of this research, the data collection sample and tools as well as the methodology applied to achieve research results.

5.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This qualitative study aims to gain an insight into the experiences and opinions of primary school parents towards home-school collaboration. The research design was constructed in a sequential manner (see Figure 5.1) within the frame of qualitative underpinnings. Qualitative analysis was seen as suited for the purpose of gaining insights into the worlds, experiences and perceptions of parents (Cohen et al. 2013, p. 458). Consequently, qualitative interviews which took place in Finland and Sudan with parents of students from one primary school in each country were utilised to gain their firsthand accounts. Kvale (2007, p. 9) states that qualitative interviews are a pivotal setting which gives the interviewer access into the world of the interviewees as described in their own words. To explore how they understand and experience their worlds and how they justify the activities and opinions they make.
In this section I will give details on the parents interviewed, the primary schools where their children study, as well as the proceedings and environment in which the data collection was conducted.
5.2.1 DATA COLLECTION SAMPLE

For the purpose of this research, my sample consisted of a total of twelve parents, six of whom were in Finland and the other six in Sudan. The selection criteria were that all parents were those of primary school children at a primary school in their respective countries, they had to have at least one child in the third grade or higher in order to ensure they had sufficient experience with home-school collaboration.

Figure 5.2 Data Collection Sample - Six Parents from One Primary School in Finland and Six Parents from One Primary School in Sudan

For both the Finnish and Sudanese parents, convenience sampling (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013, p. 155) was used and interview arrangements were done through email or online messages after sending the parents my participation request invitation (see appendix IV). In this invitation, and to ensure comfort of participants, I gave them the choice of locations and times they prefer within a specific timeframe, I also briefed them on the overall topic and aim of my
research. An estimated length for the interviews was included along with my contact details. The two invitations were phrased with the Finnish or Sudanese sample in mind as locations had to be specific to each scenario.

The response rate I received from mothers was double that of fathers in both the Sudanese and the Finnish samples, ratio of 4:2 (see Figure 5.3). This aligns with what Cole (2007) states about the fact that mothers collaborate with their children's schools more regularly than fathers (p. 169). Mothers' higher involvement in their children's education is a trend Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) and Bæck (2010) also found in their respective research.

Referring back to the number of participants, although my aim is not to generalise, I was still apprehensive at first considering I only had six parents in each country. However, when I reached the final two interviews out of the twelve, it became apparent little new data was arising and similar issues and opinions were shared by parents, thus indicating I may have reached saturation (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 161).

**Finnish Sample**

According to regulations at the Finnish school, permission to conduct research from the school principal is sufficient. Based on that, and upon obtaining permission from the school principal in the middle of February of 2018 (see appendix V), I contacted two teachers at the school and asked them about the possibility of sending my participation request invitation (see appendix...
IV) to parents through the Wilma\(^6\) system. One teacher sent it to all the parents of his fourth grade students and I immediately began to receive emails from parents who were interested in participating within the hour. Out of the six parents, two were a married couple. At the end of each interview with a parent who's spouse was also an interviewee, I ensured to request that they avoid discussing the interview content as to protect the authenticity of their answers.

**Sudanese Sample**

In the case of the Sudanese school, as it is an independent school and not a governmental one, no further permissions were needed beyond that of the school Administrator (see appendix V). Upon receiving the permission around the end of December of 2017, I began to arrange interviews with the parents in Sudan at a time and location of their choice as was recommended in the *participation request invitation* (see appendix IV) which I had sent electronically to parents from different grades. Some of the responses I received did not meet my selection criteria mentioned previously, hence why I made sure to include them in the modified Finnish invitation. Four out of the six parents were married couples. At the end of each interview with a parent who's spouse was also an interviewee, I ensured to request that they avoid discussing the interview content as to protect the authenticity of their answers.

### 5.2.2 DATA COLLECTION TOOL

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were the data collection tool of choice for this research. Kvale (2007) defines a semi-structured interview as "an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena."(p. 8). He also states that

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\(^6\)Wilma is a computerised system used in Finland by schools, students and guardians for communication and record keeping ("What is Wilma?", n.d.)
The qualitative interview is a key venue for exploring the ways in which subjects experience and understand their world. It provides a unique access to the lived world of the subjects, who in their own words describe their activities, experiences and opinions.(p. 9)

Thus, I considered it to be the most suited form of data collection to meet the purposes of my research and gain in-depth knowledge on parents experiences and thoughts on home-school collaboration. Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2013) mention one of the purposes of interviews is to gauge a person's knowledge, values or attitudes, this indeed aligns with the goals of this research. They also point out that, on the one hand, some advantages of interviews are that they give the researcher a deeper insight than some other forms of data collection, they allow the interviewer to probe further if the need arises, and coding of the data collected allows for extensive reduction of this data.

On the other hand, there are two tricky aspects to interviews which I kept in mind throughout the process, that interviews may also be subject to researcher bias and that they require the interviewer to have social and interpersonal skills in order to create a positive environment that allows the interviewee to speak freely (Cohen et al.,2013, p. 422; Kvale, 2007, p. 55).

**Designing interview questions**

*Why, what and how* (Kvale, 2007, p. 37) were questions I had in mind during the process of designing my interview. *Why* am I conducting my research? *What* kind of knowledge do I want to gather based on existing literature? *How* will I conduct the interview and analyse the data?
During the literature review phase, as my knowledge on the topic of home-school collaboration grew, points of interest began to arise and I collected all those related under the umbrella of each of my research questions and task. To make it simpler and more visual for me as a researcher, I assigned an abbreviation for each of them. It must be noted that in most cases, an interview question fell under more than one research question, if not all of them at once (see Figure 5.4) (see appendix III).

Key: RQ=research question, IQ=Interview question HSC=Home-school collaboration

*Figure 5.4* Examples of Interview Questions in Correlation to Research Questions

As I created more interview questions, I went through a periodic process of rearranging and rephrasing them to ensure that they were not repetitive, redundant or leading, that they fit logically with my research goals and that they were sequenced in a manner which allowed them to be complementary of one another. While I had a range of question types including *yes or no*
questions, on the most part, my interview questions were open-ended. Cohen et al. (2013) clarified that although the answers gained from this type of questions can be harder to code, they lead to more in depth answers resulting in a richer body of data. Having these open-ended questions was also important to me for the rapport between me and the interviewees (Cohen et al., 2013) to be able to seamlessly transition from one question to the next without overwhelming the interviewee or making them feel as if they are being interrogated. With Kvale's (2007, p. 60) advice on keeping interview questions simple and short in mind, I simplified the questions further while maintaining the quality and goals I had set up to the best of my ability.

Once the interview structure reached a satisfactory stage in the original English version, it was time to translate it into my sample's mother tongues - Finnish and Arabic- to have a written version of the questions for the interviewees to refer to during the interview. This choice was made with the purpose of increasing understanding and putting them at ease. It would also help to minimise miscommunication as a likely obstacle in the Finnish interviews as I do not share their mother tongue. Furthermore, after consideration I decided against using an interpreter for two reasons; (1) to have equality between both samples and, more importantly, (2) because I rely on my interpersonal skills to create a positive rapport with the interviewees (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 422) and believed that the presence of an interpreter would create a barrier between me and them.

As my own mother tongue, I translated the questions into Arabic then had them modified and verified by an Early Stage Researcher from the School of Forest Sciences at the University of Eastern Finland who is a native Arabic speaker with good English language proficiency.
Comparatively, I asked a native Finnish speaker to translate the questions into Finnish and had two stages of modification. The first was for them to be edited and verified by my supervisor at the University of Eastern Finland. Following that verification, I set up a pre-pilot in the end of November 2017 with a Finnish parent of a third grader in order to test this version in action and, from the interviewee's remarks, tips and edits, further changes were applied. The final versions were ultimately approved by my supervisor.

**Piloting Interviews**

Parallel to the process above, piloting took two stages in this research, the pre-pilot (mentioned previously) and the pilot, the latter took place in December of 2017 at the university of Eastern Finland with a parent from another school in the same city. After conducting both, minor edits to the order and phrasing of the interview questions were applied and I ensured both the Finnish and Arabic versions were on par with the final English version (see appendix I and appendix II).

Piloting was a positive milestone beyond the phrasing of the questions as it allowed me to see how my protocol works and ways I can adjust it. Moreover, I ensured holding the pilots in Finland to serve as practice with the Finnish sample specifically. In the pilot, interviewee fatigue (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 409) occurred. That indicated that my interview may be too long. However, there was another factor in play, which is that my pilot interviewee had arrived from a long-distance trip the previous day and this may have caused his fatigue. Based on that, no questions were removed from the interview. Both the pilot and the pre-pilot gave me an indication of the estimated length of the interviews, about fifty minutes, which was useful to include in the invitation sent to parents later on.
Arranging interviews

Initially, the intention was to conduct the Finnish interviews first, yet by the time the interview questions were complete and the pilot conducted, Christmas time was nearing. Consequently, to accommodate parents and meet them at a less demanding time in an effort to ensure a positive research environment, interviews in Joensuu were delayed until February of 2018. The interviews in Sudan preceded those and took place in December 2017-January 2018 in Khartoum.

As mentioned previously in the sample section, I contacted parents through email and online messages and agreed with each parent on the interview time and location most convenient to them. For the Finnish interviews, I met with each parent in a private study room at the library of the University of Eastern Finland, except in the case of two of parents with whom I met at their offices. As for the Sudanese interviews, I met with three parents at my home, two at theirs and one at her office. All interviews were individual and their average duration was approximately one hour, ranging between 30 minutes to an hour and 35 minutes. See table 5.1 for details.

Table 5.1

*Individual Interview Lengths with Parents in Each Country*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Interview Length</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Interview Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1 Mother</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>S1 Father</td>
<td>1 hour and 2 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2 Mother</td>
<td>37 minutes</td>
<td>S2 Mother</td>
<td>39 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3 Mother</td>
<td>58 minutes</td>
<td>S3 Father</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4 Mother</td>
<td>34 minutes</td>
<td>S4 Mother</td>
<td>1 hour and 12 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5 Father</td>
<td>1 hour and 34 minutes</td>
<td>S5 Mother</td>
<td>1 hour and 4 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F6 Father</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>S6 Mother</td>
<td>1 hour and 35 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conducting interviews

Interview environment was a crucial element which I put a lot of value into (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 422) Thus, I applied a number of protocols to ensure creating the best atmosphere possible. Starting by giving parents the choice of where and when they would like to meet, making sure the option I provided was easily accessible to parents, is quiet and private and once interviews began, having no distractions or interruptions.

At the start of each interview, I gave a short brief about my research and asked for oral permission to record. Once permission was granted and recording began, I repeated the questions once again as to have the permission on record for the sake of transparency. I also took account of interview quality criteria by ensuring clarity and quality of audio recorder, taking the time to listen to interviewees answers without interrupting, to verbally clarify any points they may have written as to have a record of them, to redirect the interview if it went off topic, to clarify what the interviewees meant by certain expressions I found unclear as to avoid making assumptions, and so forth (Cohen et al., 2013, pp. 423–424; Kvale, 2007, p. 137).

Furthermore, I divided the interview into seven sections each containing 4-5 questions (see appendix VI). Each of those seven sections were printed on a separate piece of paper for the comfort of the interviewee and to facilitate transitions between questions. I included Epstein's (2002) categories of parental involvement and two interesting quotations from existing research (see appendix III) which I found relevant and wanted to hear the parents thoughts on and found them helpful to increase understanding of some interview questions and topics of interest. All questions were presented sequentially in both languages spoken by interviewees (English/Finnish or English/Arabic). The physical interview area was prepared and the materials needed were
organised in due time prior to each interview. To ensure I do not skip any questions, I ticked each off on my paper as we went along.

As semi-structured interviews, I was able to skip ahead if the interviewee had already answered a question or to probe further (Cohen et al., 2013) if the need arose or their answers veered off topic. With probing, I was conscious of keeping it at a minimum as to avoid leading or creating interview bias as Cohen et al. (2013) also warns against that. My aim was to be an active listener (Kvale, 2007) and reflecting that attentiveness to my interviewee.

5.3 QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The interview data collected with the purpose of exploring the experiences and arguments the parents in the sample have with regard to home-school collaboration were analysed using qualitative data analysis. Cohen et al. (2013, p. 539) explain that while this kind of analysis focuses on small samples, the data gained is often extensive. Qualitative data analysis is known for a parallel implementation of analysis right along with the process of data collections (Cohen et al. 2013, p. 537; Gibbs, 2007, p. 3). This occurred during this research as preliminary notes were recorded whenever points of interest arose during or after each interview and more so during the transcription stage.

In alignment with the purpose of this research, Cohen et al. (2013, p. 537) also state that qualitative data analysis includes the organisation, explanation and accreditation of data in order to make sense of it through uncovering themes, trends and categories in the participants' own recorded words.
Furthermore, within qualitative data analysis, content analysis was used. Cohen et al. (2013, p. 559) explain content analysis as a process utilised to achieve the goal of minimising data through placing their contents into categories and codes, these categories can be set through areas of interest related to the research topic. They explain further that content analysis progresses through a set of systematic analyses such as coding and categorising leading to the emergence of theory explaining the phenomena under study (Cohen et al. 2013, p. 539).

Line by line coding (Gibbs, 2007, p. 52) to utterances and pieces of text in the transcriptions was implemented through the use of the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. The emerging codes were then put into clusters (see Figure 5.5) (see appendix VII) which correlate to different topics/categories under each research question/task. As the coded data was analysed, compared and reanalysed, the image became clearer and more distinct points of interest emerged. The data within the codes and categories were then linked, compared and inferences were drawn from them. This was accomplished mainly following Cohen et al.’s (2013, p. 564) content analysis process and Gibbs’ (2007, pp. 38–55) coding techniques.

Figure 5.5 Groups and Codes Attained Through Coding with Atlas.ti
What facilitated this process further was the fact that each interview question was coded under the umbrella of one or more research question or task, as was explained in the interview design section earlier in this chapter. This enabled me to reconnect ideas along the analysis process under the main topics covered in this research. This was in conjunction with what Kvale (2007, p. 60) suggested, for interviewers to consider the later stages of analysis and reporting while still in the earlier phases of the research.

**Transcriptions and preliminary analysis**

As the aim was to analyse the content of the transcriptions, only the spoken words were transcribed, none of the pauses or repetitions were (Kvale, 2007, pp. 94–98). While transcriptions were indeed immensely time consuming (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 537; Kvale, 2007, p. 95), I found them to be important in order to be able to conduct a more organised and fair analysis of the data. They served another benefit which is that while transcribing, points of interest appeared and links were made between those from previous transcriptions thus conducting an invaluable preliminary analysis (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 539, Gibbs, 2007, p.3) of the data before tackling it concretely. This was facilitated by the fact that I made all the transcriptions myself which allowed for clearer cross-comparisons in the analysis (Kvale, 2007, p. 95). Some of the Sudanese interviews were in Arabic or had a mixture of English and Arabic, however I translated as I transcribed directly into English to make easier inferences in the analysis stage.

The process of transcribing was implemented using the Express Scribe Transcription Software (see Figure 5.6). It is a transcription software which assists with the process through easier commands for pausing, rewinding and slowing down the recordings. I used a non-commercial
free version which allowed me to use certain features only and those covered my needs. As seen in the image below, in order to check the accuracy of the transcriptions I replayed the audio files in a media player and followed the text to make corrections as needed.

Figure 5.6 Transcription Software and Accuracy Checking

Furthermore, and to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, I transcribed the recordings myself and used pseudonyms for each interviewee with a code allowing me to know which transcription belonged to which interviewee. Additionally, to protect the anonymity of any school personnel mentioned by name in the interviews, their names were replaced by their titles in the transcriptions. For example, *the administrator* was used in the Sudanese sample and *the principal* in the Finnish one, as those are the titles used in each case. Pseudonyms were made for the children mentioned in the interviews as well. No real names were written at any stage of the process (Gibbs, 2007, p. 13; Cohen, et al., 2013, p. 542).
Throughout the process I used a specific notebook to record points of interest, using distinct codes which allow me to easily connect them later on. As time went by an image began to form and the data began slowly evolving. This correlated to Kvale's (2007) words on how a researcher gets "wiser" (p. 43) through the process of interviewing. He explains that an interviewer learns throughout the course of the analysis. That the interviews themselves can present unexpected perspectives to the phenomena under investigation and by so, expand or change the researcher's understanding of it (Kvale, 2007, p. 43). I found that to be true for interviews and even more distinctly clear in the transcription process. The stages followed for data analysis are explained in table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Summary of the Implemented Stages of Qualitative Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative data collection</td>
<td>Audio recordings of 12 individual semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary analysis</td>
<td>Points of interest recorded during/after each interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative content analysis</td>
<td>Narrowing down data through coding and categorising of both transcriptions and notes from preliminary analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results and discussion</td>
<td>Placing findings within existing research, possible practical implications, further research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4 RESEARCH ETHICS, VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

First and foremost, with regard to research ethics, the very first step I took was ensuring I followed appropriate research conduct. To do so, permissions were obtained prior to contacting the parents in Finland and permission from the school administrator in Sudan was also obtained before conducting any interviews.

Additionally, it should be mentioned that initially another Finnish school was meant to be part of this research. However due to lack of response from parents after repeated attempts to contact them and to avoid creating a negative research environment, I decided to contact the school from which the parents in this research were drawn.

Furthermore, with regard to creating a positive research environment, I gave parents the option to meet at a time and location of their choice or a location which is accessible to them. During the interview I ensured their anonymity and asked for their verbal consent for me to make an audio recording, all permissions were then repeated on tape. In the transcription phase, I conducted the transcripts myself to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewees (Cohen, et al. 2013, p. 542), with that purpose in mind only pseudonyms were used. The recordings were kept in a locked laptop only accessible to me and each had a code allowing only me to know which interviewee it belonged to. At most, my supervisor may need to listen to those audio files to verify the transcripts. Backups of all transcripts, audio files and research related documents were made and kept in a locked location known only to me. Once the research is complete and reviewed, the audio files and transcriptions will be permanently deleted.
With regard to validity, this was defined by Kvale (2007, p. 36) as whether or not the study investigated what it intended to investigate. With that in mind, the processes followed during the creation of the data collection tool were governed by his *why, what and how* questions as was explained earlier in this chapter. This was intended to ensure that each interview question would generate data correlating to the research questions and task, thus allowing for rich data to be collected and investigated.

The results reached from this research cannot be generalised as is clearly indicated by the small number of participants and the fact that they were drawn from only one school in each country. Nonetheless, as these results come from the two vastly differing cultures in question, they may indicate some basic experiences and needs parents share, this makes the practical implications from this research possibly applicable to a wide range of schools or teacher training programmes, if modified according to each case.

Considering the risks in both validity and reliability within this qualitative research process, researcher bias is always a possibility (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 540). I kept heed of their words and tried to be aware of the choices made while analysing the data, aiming to stay true to the words of the interviewees to the best of my ability in order to be as impartial and fair as possible to the data.

**Research Reliability**

Kvale (2007, p. 37) states that reliability indicates to the consistency of the findings. While in qualitative research, the effect of the researcher is inevitable and another researcher could have indeed inferred more results from the same data in this research based on their own perspectives
and experiences, it is my belief that the main outlines and key findings would have remained consistent. This was due to my aim to, as best as I could, allow the results to reflect and revolve around the words of the parents and the issues they highlighted throughout the interviews. Nonetheless, a parallel investigation has not been undertaken to ensure this. I did however remain as transparent as possible throughout the process and in the report, indicating the choices made and justification behind them. One aspect reflecting the reliability of the research perhaps is the specific setting under which this research was done, being from the unlikely pairing of those two countries and the specific criteria for the chosen sample (Cohen et al., 2013, pp. 203–204).
6 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

What can be learned from parental perspectives to home-school collaboration? That was the overriding direction the analysis in this research aimed at. To explore their experiences, opinions on whether or not home-school collaboration matters to them and why, as well as what practical lessons can be drawn from those perspectives of twelve parents of primary school aged children from two vastly differing cultures.

In this chapter I will present the findings of this research, sharing descriptions of parental experiences, desires and needs as well as the arguments they posed explicitly and implicitly as to the value of home-school collaboration. I will also present the similarities and differences between the sample from Finland and the one from Sudan in addition to recommendations made with schools and teacher education in mind for the application of more effective home-school collaboration.

As I present these findings, citations by the interviewees will be included to represent their voices. The parents in Finland will be named F1, F2...to F6, likewise, the parents in Sudan S1, S2.. to S6. Whether it is a mother or a father will be indicated by a letter at the end. I.e. the third parent from the Finland's sample is a mother and will be referred to as F3M while the first parent from the Sudan's sample is a father and will be referred to as S1F and so on and so forth. Home-school collaboration will henceforth be referred to as HSC.

6.1 PARENTS' EXperiences AND Desires FOR HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

This section seeks to answer the first research question; What experiences do Finnish and Sudanese parents have with regard to home-school collaboration?
6.1.1 PARENTS' EXPERIENCES OF HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

In order to depict these findings in a sequentially coherent manner, they will be presented under each of the six types of parental involvement (Epstein et al.'s, 2002). Those were the guide on which I based the definition of HSC, as mentioned previously (see section 3.1).

**Type 1- Parenting: The school helps parents with parenting skills, understanding child development and creating home conditions to support learning.**

In the case of parents in Finland, most said they have none or little of type 1- parenting. Those who had experiences in this type expressed their pleasure and satisfaction with those experiences. One mother mentioned two such examples, one of which was regarding some behavioural difficulties she faced with her son after having babies and minutes after a phone call to the school counsellor who gave her prompt and effective advice which helped her resolve the issue. The other example was the parenting advice she received from an older teacher who had a similar family structure to hers. Furthermore, other parents stated it would help them if there was more of this type implemented at the school.

I could appreciate this if there would be some lessons in these parents evenings for example where we are dealing with such matters. (F5F)

I think the emphasis is so that we understand this child's development together and even if I would understand very well then I would sometimes need someone else to understand it together somehow and discuss about it. (F3M)
Mainly because of course understanding the child development and how to create an environment for learning. Of course that will be good to have. As parents we just take care of the necessary things but we don't have a more wider understanding. (F1M)

All interviewed parents in Finland except for one mother expressed their desire to have more of *Type 1-parenting* and placed it high in importance when compared to the other five six types. One parent explicitly disagreed and stated that while school can lend support, she does not find this type to be a good idea.

Parents in Sudan, on the other hand, indicated that they do experience *Type 1-parenting* currently with the school. They placed this type at the very top in importance or among the top three when compared to the other five types.

Parenting I think is on top of everything. More important than education itself, more important than academics. (S4M)

Parenting, this I think it's very important because not all parents have the skills needed. I could be really good as a parent but when it comes to education would be very weak. So I think when the school gives me support in this area with the skills they see suitable to my child specifically, this is important. (S5M)

These accounts by parents from the Finnish and the Sudanese samples reflect the importance of schools providing support advice and to parents in this parenting area.
Type 2- Communicating: The school shares child's progress and school programs, as well as establishes effective two-way communication.

Type 2- communicating was by far the most discussed of the six type of parental involvement. It was the one given the most weight by parents as well as the most in depth needs with regards to the many aspects it connects to.

Let's say if we say that parents are entities and school is an entity, so communication is the most important factor in order to have a successful collaboration. S3F

The ideal vision would be so that the communication would be open. so the parents would feel that there's no such thing that is too big or too small that they can't tell the teacher. and also, I think that the teacher should feel that parents should know, not everything that is going on in their child's life in school but almost all. (F3M)

If communication is weak between school and parents, there won't be collaboration at all, they won't understand each other's perspective. (S5M)

When it comes to their current or previous communication experiences, parents in Finland mentioned mostly receiving general information such as upcoming activities or homework. Several parents stated that communication has improved recently, mentioning that the teacher is more active than previous ones and uses more modern tools to communicate. Two mothers mentioned their pleasure when teachers would share positive feedback or update them on the day-to-day class activities.

I think that it's very Important to be in contact with the parents in any cases and especially when there are something good to be said. Teachers share this positive
feedback of how the child is doing in class during the day also. Let's say, not weekly, but maybe once in two weeks, sometimes weekly. It's quite nice and this is how it is, especially my older son's current teacher in fourth grade. (F3M)

She's sending messages like *well done, the last class was really nice and we have really good time* and that's the only one who is giving this positive information all the time. (F2M)

Nonetheless, parents in Finland expressed their need for more information specific to their children without having to ask for it, some stated that they have to initiate communication repeatedly. These parents also stated that school mainly communicates when behavioural or academically problematic issues arise. Some of the parents in Finland had more contact previously and their role as parents was clearer when their children were in the first and second grade. This leads them to wonder how their children are progressing and whether they need to lend support at home.

We don't know really if the teachers think that our child is progressing normally or not. (F5F)

Type 2, but maybe it's not so effective. if it's not by default, but it has to be initiated. there's not this kind of child progress. We don't have unless I'm interested and I would tell the teacher I have felt this and that and I would like what she thinks about it. It's not so regular. (F1M)

As for the current or previous communication experiences of parents in Sudan, their accounts were conflicting of one another to some extent. Some parents reported receiving a lot of
academic information from the school especially with regards to reading while they lacked more personal details. Others stated they used to, but no longer, receive such personal details which had been a positive characteristic of the school.

There was a lot of follow-up with regard to personality. The weekly comments made me extremely happy because I could see what my son is like at school, his personality, how he is doing. Academics yes but the personality development meant more to me. (S6M)

They're not like the previous teachers. Used to be the most comfortable thing is communication, daily. Now it's only yearly in the annual meeting. (S1F)

Through the years, even the tone of the emails is instructing us, not relying on us. (S3F)

Additionally, much like the parents in Finland, they stated a lack of knowledge about how their child is progressing and several mentioned their desire to receive information related to the skills, attitudes and behavioural aspect of their children's development more than the academic side.

Now when they are not having the grades anymore, it's only some kind of scaling so it's a bit difficult to know whether they should improve or not. And to know what to expect because not all the children are good in school. So sometimes at home it feels a bit difficult to know that. (F2M)

Tell me about my child's personality, his confidence, how expresses himself, how his teamwork skills are like. I want the teachers to tell me what skills my child has and how
they're developing and what I can do to help. I think these skills are what make you succeed in life, not academics. (S6M)

Specifically, parent's in both Finland and Sudan desired communication to be on set periodic basis such as through a monthly progress report. When communication relates to any assistance their children may need from home, parents stressed the importance of this occurring early on. They mentioned incidents where early contact may have led to better outcomes for their children.

Now they are studying I think in five periods so maybe information in each period.
(F2M)

I think if teacher had contacted me immediately and told that half of the class can read and you should do these small things every day, it would have been better. If they notice something, some difficulties in anything. Small difficulties so that they don't become big, in relationships or in learning. (F4M)

Furthermore, meetings with teachers were also an area parents concretely associated with communication and had high needs for. Finnish parents stated that in the earlier grades there were meetings held between parents and teachers yet currently there aren't. They did mention parent evenings where all parents come and listen to some general information which several parents stated that their role is quite passive in those evenings and they don't see their benefit. Several parents also mentioned that if they asked for a meeting it could be arranged although they would prefer set meetings to exist in the first place. In fact, all Finnish parents expressed their desire to have more fixed and personal meetings with teachers at least once or twice a year, except for one father who said his wife handled this due to his demanding work situation.
Unexpectedly, a mother even expressed how pleased she was when the teacher called her to arrange a meeting regarding her son playing slightly aggressively during football.

If it's not possible one-to-one, it would be a parents meeting where the teacher communicate to us the most important things and the things that he considers in the class is more challenging and what she expects from parents and what they expect from students. That will be four times a year for example. I would think that minimum. (F1M)

More those personal connections with teachers that there would be at least twice a year. or maybe more. And then maybe some information that what we've been doing and how my child is managing. (F2M)

As for their Sudanese counterparts, they were happy with the personal meetings held twice a year with the teachers, one described them as very organised. They also stated that if the school sees a need they request the parents presence and the parents can ask for meetings as well. Nonetheless, most Sudanese parents expressed their desire to have more regular meetings, up to every three months. One even suggested having a monthly phone call about the child's level and progress if face-to-face meetings were too difficult for teachers to arrange.

They analyse child's personality. I feel the teachers always want to hear you, they always look at the positive side. they try to develop the child rather than criticise him. they are helpful. They care about parental involvement a lot. As soon as they feel the parent is distant, they immediately hold a meeting, it's great. They ask you where you are and what is going on. of course they notice it in the child's behaviour at school, the reading record, if his level drops. (S6M)
I think the school should have regular meeting times with parents. I think there should be something done all the time. maybe once every three months something like that. For us to know what they're standard is what their issues with the school is, how I can help them but unless I initiate something, no one tells me anything and the only reason I initiate something is when I feel there's an issue or I see a problem. (S2M)

**Type 3- Volunteering: The school involves parents as volunteers or audiences in lessons or activities inside and outside school.**

In the Finnish case related to this research, it was abundantly clear from the accounts of parents in Finland that volunteering does not happen often. They mentioned that there are not many opportunities for parents to participate or that their participation is quite minimal. Two parents mentioned an event named *pop-up school* where parents with special knowledge or skills hold a workshop and teach them to children. Several parents wanted or liked events where they can be audience to children's performances such as Christmas performances or lesson presentations. When asked about the ideal vision of collaboration one father said for parents to be able participate in these school events such as pop-up school.

Some Sudanese parents said they participate in all school activities, many stated that work comes in the way of that. Along the same line as other parents, one father expressed how memorable it was for his children when he was a referee during an annual sporting event named *sports day* where students, parents and teachers partake in sporting competitions. One mother stated that volunteering bonds her to the school, allows her to see her child's environment and makes the child happy. She was most satisfied with type 3- volunteering out of the six types of parental involvement. Most of the Sudanese parents connected volunteering with their role in HSC, one
mentioned planning and implementing trips such as camping or fishing which would otherwise be somewhat of a security risk for the school to plan. When asked about the ideal vision of collaboration one mother said that the best scenario would be to participate in more non-academic activities with the children.

It is worth noting that all parents in both countries, placed mid to low value on type 3-volunteering in comparison to the other five. One said if some parents did it, others don't have to. In addition, while the majority of Sudanese parents mentioned work as an obstacle in the way of volunteering they also spoke of how their presence affects their children and the boost it gives them. Perhaps this low value placed on volunteering is not an indication of the parents' lack of interest in it but simply that they see some of the other six types as more valuable in comparison. However one Finnish mother stated that she dislikes parents presence in schools as it is a place for children.

Type 4- Learning at Home: The school gives ideas to parents about learning activities which can be done at home.

A mother in Finland said she had the most experience with type 4-learning at home out of all six and that she is satisfied with these experiences and the level at which teachers involved her, she also placed the most importance on it when compared to the other types. This was something several parents agreed on.

Learning at home is very important for a parent because that the one way we can know about what they are learning at school because we are not present. So that firsthand information ,what are the things covered in school and also it helps us to see how the kids skills are developing in learning. (F1M)
Learning at home, this is how they make the parents involved I think. This is what makes you involved with your child, knowing the details. this is what makes me so much involved in his curriculum. (S5M)

It's an Important aspect and it's good to get some advice how to study something at home for example. (F3M)

Two mothers in Finland mentioned that the school used to ask parents to read with the children but this does not occur anymore. Along those lines, a parent in Finland stated that all she receives is some infrequent advice on homework yet she believes that her role at home is clear. All in all, the majority of parents in Finland valued this type highly and wanted more information in relation to it.

It's an Important aspect and it's good to get some advice how to study something at home. (F3M)

From the academic education point of view especially. They could be more clear on how we can support the academic achievement of our kids. Because it's very difficult for parents to know how to really support the school in the academic learning. (F6F)

We would like to know more how this homework could be done in better and effective ways. (F5F)

The parents in Sudan varied in their answers with regard to how clear their role at home, one said it is clear yet what happens at school is not, another two said that the sessions held at school help
clarify what needs to be done at home, while others wanted children to be taught the skills they need to work on their homework as well as to understand lessons at school.

Especially in the projects. I feel he doesn't have the skills for them and I feel bad, he should have these skills. before giving them a project they should tell them how it should be done. they should ask the child to go and do research on how it is supposed to be done, how do you think it should be? I think if something comes from the child himself, he will feel more responsible about it. (S6M)

For example I see that the meetings school holds to show us how to teach the children, because we learned in a different way back in our day. (S5M)

Assessments were associated with Learning at Home as parents tend to help children prepare for them and are keen to know how children perform. One Finnish father had a worry about the written evaluations, he implied that they are unclear and only reflect that the child has passed yet not how well they have performed. This alarmed him because his daughter struggles with her studies much more than her sister and he said that when she begins to get numerical grades in the 6th grade it might be too late to help her which could jeopardise her chances of entering or succeeding in high school. He desired access to an online system where he can see his children's evaluation and through that to be able to support them better. Another father in Finland wanted to be able to discuss how evaluations are done now that there have been changes with the application of the new curriculum. On the same matter, a Sudanese mother had a critique that the school no longer shares results of assessments with parents which causes her to become nervous due to not knowing how her daughter performed.
All twelve parents stated that they do not have type 5- decision making in their previous or current experiences. However, one Finnish mother said that she was involved and made aware of decisions specific to her son needing extra support in reading and how please she was with how the teachers handled the situation.

They wanted to keep me knowledgeable about all these decisions they were making and how they were assessing the skill development. I felt it very appropriate. of course I was not there pushing these decisions but I felt pretty much involved. (F1M)

This goes to show that even within the same school, regardless of country, parents may have completely different experiences as both Finnish fathers specifically stated that the way teachers assess children is unclear. In Finland parents want to be able to discuss issues rather than make full on decisions and mainly with regard to their own children.

Decision making, it would be nice to be involved in some things, of course parents cannot speak in all professional teaching matters and so. (F5F)

Parents can be involved but not making the big decisions. I think parents know about their children and what they want but if parents are having too much power, it's not good either because the school is for children and I believe that teachers have better knowledge of what's good for children in school than parents. I think it's more important that the children are making the decisions with teachers and school. (F2M)
Several Sudanese parents stated that they cannot even voice their opinions or have any say in school decisions. One explained that this course of action by the school creates a wall between it and the parents. Lack of participation in school decisions occurs in Finland too, according to parents, however the a parent committee exists at the Finnish school, although it was described by parents as ineffective and most did not have an interest in partaking in it and saw it as unnecessary. Which may be due to other collaborative aspects being available in Finland, just as indicated by a Sudanese mother who had said that if she had Type 1-parenting, Type 2-communication and Type 4-learning at home, she would not need to partake in Type 5-decision making.

Most parents in Sudan expressed their frustration with aspects involving their children's education which is what drives them to want to partake in decision making. Such aspects included the pace of teaching, the content of subjects taught being above the children's grade, the fact that music is not taught as part of the curriculum and the restrictions with regards to extracurricular activities. One mother did not want to partake at all.

Decision making, to be more involved in that curriculum wise. What sort of curriculum, what is their aim, that is important. To know what they're being taught and why. (S2M)

Not me, because I don't have a background in education nor teaching. So I can't have a say in something I don't have knowledge in but I think that the decision making should be in other things that aren't related to education or teaching. (S5M)
It was notable that all parents both in Finland and Sudan placed low value on *type 6-collaborating with the community* in comparison to others and it was the least discussed type. Nonetheless, many parents stated that it exists at school. Most Finnish parents connected their role in this type mainly with raising funds for school trips and such. One father said it does exist however parents are not involved in it. All Sudanese parents indicated that this type does occur currently and that they are quite satisfied with it.

Every now and then some things happening in school, there might be city orchestra coming there. There's this national fundraising for the red cross, so those types of happenings they have where they collect money for hunger for example. (F3M)

Because it's also an important factor of building the child's personality. Mostly the children, they have their house environment and school environment, so in order to enhance their personality, to expose children is always for the better. (S3F)

### 6.1.2 PARENTS' DESIRES FOR HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

It was evident in this research that regardless of culture, family structure or employment status, all parents wanted to *know* and *do* more with regard to their children's learning and personal development. The parents were keen on collaborating with the school in order to provide strong support for their children. Those who had the opportunity to participate in school activities with their children reported high enthusiasm and such participation left a lasting impact on the parents themselves.
PARENTS WANT TO KNOW MORE

The overriding concern of parents was being kept aware of their children's academic progress throughout the school year. To know what difficulties the child is facing in learning, relationships with children and teachers, and in their personal development. Parents described effectively collaborating teachers as active and that they do not limit their contact when there are problems but share positive feedback and updates on daily school life.

Furthermore, Parents in both Finland and Sudan stated that early contact is crucial for them to be able to lend their support to their children. They want teachers to inform them as soon as any signs of academic or behavioural issues arise. To tackle them while they are small before they manifest themselves into bigger problems which can be harder to resolve. Parents expressed their desire to also know how they can support their children's learning at home.

PARENTS WANT TO DO MORE

By the same token, given the knowledge mentioned above, parents showed their keen desire to both lend their support to their children in the areas they need it at home, as well as to be with their children at school. The latter being through periodic parent-teacher meetings, attending lesson presentations, participating as audience in performances, and participating in school activities which are unrelated to academics.

At home, with regard to learning, parents wanted to know practically how to revise with the children in a manner that will not confuse them. Several parents mentioned that being told clearly such academic related instructions would help them.
Maybe if there's a way of teaching that is new to the parents and the school thinks they need to raise my own skill as a mother, for example if they felt I can't do it by myself at home, if they sent an email with the steps it would be more supportive to me. (S5M)

I think that there is tendency in Finland in the school systems to separate a lot the roles of the school and the parents. And the main schools see that academic education is our turf and the parents do the spiritual education. But I don't see that as completely correct I see that the parents should be involved in the academic education part and the school can give more information in the sense of how we can support the academic education part. (F6F)

6.1.3 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF PARENTS' EXPERIENCES AND DESIRES FOR HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

Parental needs and expectations should be met by schools in their efforts to effectively collaborate with the home as Christenson et al. (1992, p. 198) adds that providing parents with specific recommendations and support increases a student's chances for learning.

Those needs were found to be mainly with regards to receiving tips and advice on parenting, how parents can support their children's academic learning at home and develop their social and personal skills. All of which was said by parents to only be accomplished through consistent and informative communication to and from the school. Hearing parents voices and their concerns was a key issue raised by them. Parents proclaimed that they indeed need such information in order to fulfil their own roles towards their children with regard to academic support (Hirsto, 2010).
In Epstein's (2010, p. 213) research she mentions that inner-city parents need information and support in developing personal qualities in their children, that it is important for schools to pay attention when parents request the school's help with regard to the development of their children’s talents. This goes along the same lines as what several parents in Sudan requested, for the children to have more subjects which nurture their talents such as music and for parents to be told if children need special assistance with their skill development, such as social skills.

In summary, the findings clearly reflect a need for improvement in the various aspects correlated to HSC. For instance, it was the parents stance that schools should be the initiators of contact with regard to child related issues, this aligns with Christenson et al.'s (1992, p. 198) research which points out the effect of home environments on children's learning and that it is the responsibility of the school to reach out to the home and emphasise the significance of the parent's role in the enhancement of children's academic achievements.

6.2 PARENTS' ARGUMENTS TOWARDS THE VALUE OF HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

This section presents the findings related to the second research question; What arguments do Finnish and Sudanese parents have towards the value of home-school collaboration?

The high importance of HSC was astoundingly unanimous among all twelve parents and any event or activity which they had partaken in at the school seemed to leave a lasting and positive impression on them. Many indicated that home and school complete each other. A father described it nicely as the home and the school being two entities which share one goal, the benefit of the child. He also went on to say that for any form of collaboration to work, open
channels of communication must exist. Many parents shared those opinions explaining that these benefits are *spiritual as well as academic*. In their interviews, parents accounts held a variety of benefits to be gained from HSC for themselves, their children and for schools. I will give examples of such gains in the sections below.

**6.2.1 BENEFITS OF HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN**

Those two are *interconnected* as parents' aims for collaboration are to provide the best support possible for their children and the benefits children gain from HSC happen in effect through the actions parents partake in.

Parents reported that when they collaborate through *volunteering* at school events or visiting the school to attend presentations the children feel happier, that their parents place value on their education and it give the children a *boost* and increases their *confidence*. Two fathers, for instance, indicated that by being present *role models* for their children at school they will copy their behaviour and how they treat and interact with other people in the school community and it could also *develop their social skills*. Additionally, by having a *clear picture* of what their role, at home and at school is, parents are able to *provide* exactly the support children may need in order to succeed in their school life. An example given by a parent was that when children have a new lesson at school, the home can provide a different view point to strengthen the children's understanding. Ultimately, it was admirable to see how many parents placed higher value on their children's *wellbeing*, personal, social and emotional development than they did on academic achievement.
I consider it very Important. I think that it's very good for the child that parents and teachers work together and they know what's going on in the child's life. It's important for the teacher to know what's happening at home and it's also important for the parents to know what's happening at school and then collaboration can be varied of different and I think it's important for the well-being of the child and that's the main point why it's important. (F3M)

I don't think it's just enough for them to do their school work at school. When they come home, I think we give another meaning or another dimension to what they're being taught. For example when they're given weights and measuring and things like that, so at home we would do the measuring when we bake cupcakes or brownies and so they're responsible for actually measuring them and reading the recipe and the direction and so on. in a way that helped. (S3M)

Parents also stressed that they would have peace of mind in knowing that the school shares the values and morals they try to instil in their children at home and that having discussions to ensure such an alignment is crucial to them. Moreover, parents mentioned that by being given the information they need to support their children's education (see section 6.1.1) this, in turn, supports their own parenting plan and allows them to work in parallel to how the school does.

The school was the best choice because I sat with the administrator and discussed her ideas about children and upbringing and I was very pleased and comforted. (S6M)

What I'm kind of happy about is that they are involved in the spiritual education a lot actually now, like I said about the issues of discipline. (F6F)
6.2.2 BENEFITS OF HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION FOR SCHOOLS

As inferred from the parents' statements, the benefits from effective HSC are bidirectional, when the school provides effective collaborative practices to the home, it stands to benefit in return. Such benefits can be clearly seen in the parents words about their desire to be on the same wavelength as the school, to have the ability to discuss and agree on goals and thus be more keen to support them at home and schools may face less resistance from parents.

If there is communication and decision making is done by both parties then parents at home can boost these goals because they are convinced and they were participating in taking such a decision, therefore, they will help in, they will support the school in the path that they are going. (S3F)

Furthermore, with parents presence in some school events they may lend their support to teachers now and then with preparing resources and such as well as seeing firsthand the great efforts teachers put into their daily work. This latter was no more clearer than when a Father mentioned how he was well prepared for his workshop at a pop-up school event and was faced by numerous struggles he had not anticipated such as keeping the children's attention and catering to the different pace at which each of them works, he then proclaimed that “it was also valuable to see that teaching is not so easy“ (F5F). These events serve a great value to schools in how they tend to create a sense of community among teachers, parents and children and perhaps in some cases even creates bonds.

Sports day, it's amazing, the parents are so involved and there are parent races. I'm a great runner and won for the team. It's so beautiful and my sons are so happy that mama is here with me and playing with me. You know in Sudan how our culture is like, I feel like the
school forces me to do such nice things that I'm usually missing, that I don't have time, but at school I have to do them and at the end I feel so happy to do it. (S6M)

6.2.3 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF PARENTS' ARGUMENTS TOWARDS THE VALUE OF HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

The parents interviewed in this research were undivided when it came to the high value and positive impact of effective HSC. As was indicated in the previous sections, they presented a variety of arguments towards that including benefits to them, the children and the schools themselves. Those benefits include, but are not limited to, clarity in the parent's role at home, social and emotional gains to the child as well as loyalty by parents to schools and the drive for them to support the goals set by the school. The importance of these gains is that the effects they have are not only on the parents but on schools as well.

The type of information shared and received from parents can encourage their own efforts towards collaborating with the school (Hirsto, 2010), which consequently facilitates the school's work (Bridgemohan et al., 2005; Cole, 2007, Lerkkanena, Kikas, Pakarinenc, Poikonend and Nurmic, 2013). This can indeed be seen through the impressions of interviewed parents based on their personal remarks or the positive effect certain collaborative acts left on them.

A point of departure from the previous findings is that if schools fulfil certain areas which parents prioritise, the parents in turn may forgo their desire to partake in decision making. A grey area which both schools in this research have little to no parental role in. Those areas prioritised by parents were being given stable and clear communication on their children's progress, advice on parenting and home environment, in addition to clear guidance about how to support their children's learning at home. A shared basis for values between home and school was said to give
parents peace of mind, much like what the Finnish National Core Curriculum states, that "Joint discussions on values lay the foundation for cooperation in educating the children." (FNBE, 2016a, p. 38).

Correspondingly, the sense of community or loyalty to school mentioned by parents as a result of collaborative events was yet another aspect matched to that in the Finnish National Core Curriculum, which states that "Networking and the parents' joint activities enhance community spirit and support the work of the teachers and the school." (FNBE, 2016a, p. 38).
6.3 POINTS OF SIMILARITY OR DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE FINNISH AND SUDANESE SAMPLES

This section presents the findings related to the second research question; *What kind of similarities and differences can be found in the Finnish/Sudanese data with regard to Home-School Collaboration?*

I will begin by briefly stating the issues which were unique to either sample then go into details of similarity and difference below.

6.3.1 UNIQUE TO PARENTS IN FINLAND

First and foremost, parents in Finland wanted *clearer instructions* as to how they could assist their children's academic development at home. Along those lines, they expressed a high degree of willingness and desire to be more *involved at school* and to attend events with their children. It was also quite apparent the *trust* Finnish parents had in their children's teachers, stating that teachers know what is best for the children education wise.

There could be also a whole day in school where the parents could participate, like having some workshops but perhaps also to see normal lessons given by the teachers. and the parents are sitting with their child at the desks and to have this feeling of experiencing it together and that the child could be teacher to the parents during the school day for example. (F5F)
They are experts and they have freedom to do their teaching and how they make this curriculum happen in action. They base their teaching in recent research and their knowledge and their experiences. (F3M)

A point which was distinctly occurring in this sample was the mention of teachers who give positive feedback, the effect this had on parents was notable, they mentioned it as a trait of good HSC. Moreover, parents stated that they are receiving too little communication, and expressed their desire to have more.

6.3.2 UNIQUE TO PARENTS IN SUDAN

The issue which is most unique to this sample was the repeated mention of financial issues, those were related to somewhat excessive reminders of school fees in addition to dissatisfaction with the fact that extracurricular activities had to be paid for separately as well. With regard to extracurricular activities, parents-especially mothers- were disillusioned by the restrictions to the choices and duration of those activities and more so with the fact that subjects such as music are not part of the set curriculum, that it is a basic need which should be covered within the primary school years education.

I think that music right now has become something basic in the world, not something that should be extracurricular. Just the same as sports, there should be a music class, the child should learn music from a young age. After that, the child can choose to continue or not. Because at this stage the children know their hobbies and inclinations. Other than that the effect of music is globally known on a child's behaviour and creativity. It is something important and I can't provide it to them at home. (S4M)
Furthermore, decision making was a distinct area of need for these parents, several expressed their sentiments of frustration with not having their voice heard of having the ability to voice any opinions. Two parents also mentioned that at times the school has too much communication with them which causes exasperation on the parents part.

Without the council, again you can't say anything. You can't suggest because you suggest alone it will not be supported by other parents. So as if you're not saying anything. Got it? So the council of the parents is a must, is really a must, because it even shares too many opinions with the school they know what the parents need and it will give the school all the support needed by the parents. (S1F)

6.3.3 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF THE DISTINCT DIFFERENCE AND KEY SIMILARITIES BETWEEN PARENTS IN FINLAND AND SUDAN

One of the most distinct difference between the samples was that the parents in Finland complained about there being too little communication while those in Sudan said at times there is too much communication or some unnecessary details are shared. Furthermore, it was apparent from the parents accounts that parents in Finland had much higher level of trust in their children's teachers than those in Sudan. In many cases the latter said they even want teachers to undergo more professional training.

Decision making was perhaps the main point of difference between parents in each country as in Finland, parents were mainly either satisfied with the current situation or wanted little to no part in decision making. Those who did, mainly wanted to be able to discuss with teachers, with regards to their children specifically. This was not the case with the parents in Sudan as they
wanted higher levels of involvement with making in depth decisions related to a variety of school related issues including curriculum and policy. This goes to show that parental experiences dictates their priorities, even within the same school.

By the same token, parents in Sudan were exasperated when speaking about the amount of homework given to children, needing hours to be done after the child had already spent all day at school, leaving little time for play or rest. Furthermore, the parents indicated that in many cases the children don’t understand lessons at school and need to be taught from the start at home. This adds pressure to both the children and the parents. Parents in Finland, by contrast, expressed their desire to be explicitly asked to do more with the children both at home and at school yet they did not mention any dissatisfaction with aspects of children's learning, in fact some parents stated that homework is short and only takes a few minutes. Only one parent expressed his belief that the curriculum should aim at preparing children for the future society rather than the current society.

Moreover, parents in Finland mentioned the positive feedback they received from some teachers and those who initiate contact actively, while parents in Sudan expressed their disappointment in the tone of communication and felt underappreciated. Epstein and Sanders (2000) did state that parents do indeed rate teachers active in communication higher than those who don't have much contact with the home.

The final point of difference, was the financial issues parents in Sudan faced. Especially with regard to the extracurricular activities offered by the school. They indicated that it is not always financially feasible for them to pay for those in addition to the school fees and feel as though they deprive their children in the process. This may indirectly correlate to Epstein and Sanders
63

(2000) research which mentions that parents' income can have an effect in the level of involvement with schools, because extracurricular are not part of HSC yet the sentiment it leaves may double as a barrier between home and school.

Comparatively, the similarities between the two sets of parents were abundant (see figure 6.1). They placed very high value on children's personal wellbeing and growth, more so than their academic achievements. All parents wanted to be kept aware of their child's progress consistently and wanted teachers to be active and to initiate contact. Additionally, two mothers in each sample pointed out that homework helps them, otherwise they would not know what their children are learning. Parents also stressed the importance of shared values and morals at the home and the school as to not confuse the child.

Figure 6.1 Summary of Similarities and Differences Between the Parents in Finland and in Sudan
Furthermore, one mother in each sample expressed that children should partake in decision making. While two other parents said that if a parent was informed of a school decision, they may have an idea worth considering which the school may have overlooked. Parents frustrations in discussions can be connected to the fact that:

"Most teachers do not know most parents' goals and high aspirations for their children, what parents do to help their children, how they would like to be involved at school and at home, and what information parents want in order to be more effective in their interactions with their children about schoolwork". (Epstein and Sanders, 2000, p. 288)

Additionally, the challenges parents stated they face with HSC can be clustered into three sections; work related, personal or cultural. Both Finnish and Sudanese parents mentioned that coming back late from work meant there was not enough time to sit with the children and the children would be too tired themselves by then to want to do any more studies. One Finnish father mentioned his working schedule and constant travel as a barrier for his collaboration with the school. Along those lines Bæck (2010) stated that the most common reason parents give for not participating in HSC was lack of time. On the personal side, parents had varied obstacles such as, living too far away from the school, the load of home responsibilities or in the case of one divorced parent, her children spending only one week at a time with her made it difficult to always follow up with their homework and studies. Most Sudanese parents mentioned that the social obligations in Sudan demand a lot of their time and affects their ability to collaborate.

To conclude, while differences do exist, these two sets of parents situated continents apart are nonetheless aligned in their goals and basic needs for HSC similarly to what Epstein and Sanders (2000) went on to add that "families in diverse cultural groups believe that education is important
for children, involvement is important for parents, and that they need better information from their schools in order to help their children succeed" (p. 293).

6.4 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND THE FIELD OF TEACHER EDUCATION

This section tackles the objective I had for this research in finding *practical lessons learned from the parental perspectives, experiences and arguments* which can be recommended to those concerned with both preparing and training teachers in such practices and those who apply them in day-to-day school life. Positive and negative encounters mentioned by parents were utilised to inspire these recommendations as both are needed to get a comprehensive view of the most efficient HSC practices.

6.4.1 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

When considering the lessons learned and practices inspired by the previous findings, I set the implications related to schools into six areas as to facilitate their application. Applying all at once may be too large a task for any given school, given that each is different and may face an array of restrictions and influences of their own. Therefore, it is recommended to begin with the action plan, mentioned in more detail below, in order to gage what the school's priorities are then adjust and incorporate more practices each year or as per the capabilities of the school.

First and foremost are the main **attributes of effective HSC** schools can aspire to have in their HSC practices. Ideally for it to be *consistent*, remaining at a stable and unwavering level throughout the school year and as applied by different teachers. Along the theme of consistency, HSC should also be *periodic*, that collaborative initiatives are scheduled to occur at times know
by both parents and teachers allowing child progress to be shared. Next is for them to be preventative, as to tackle any issues early on and include parents in any behavioural or academic needs the child may have and how both school and home can support. This leads to the final attribute which is for HSC to be supportive, by being accommodating to the different needs of families, and give them support according to those specific needs.

In order for schools to be able to reach a point where those attributes are met, the first course of action would be to create a realistic and tangible HSC Action Plan. This may take place at the start of each academic year where administration and teachers can plan and assess the needs and capabilities of the school, to reflect and adjust based on the previous year's collaborative experiences and most importantly to inform the parents of the general outline of these plans.

In my opinion, it is crucial for the success of HSC that schools consider the working circumstances set For Teachers. A teacher's work covers a multitude of tasks beyond teaching itself, and as it is, in many cases teachers are overloaded with such tasks and duties. Schools need to find actionable way to accommodate and support their teachers and hire the needed staff and provide the proper tools in order for teachers to be able to apply the HSC practices set in the action plan. This can be done in a gradual manner as to allow teachers to adjust. Brainstorming, can be a valuable asset for teachers to learn from each other's previous experiences and come up with solutions together.

As mentioned in section 6.1, communication was considered by parents to be the key to collaboration. Thusly, the attributes of effective communication to be aimed at are for it to be active and regular. For both parents and teachers to have the knowledge who (class teacher, counsellor, etc) to contact, when (under which circumstances) and how this contact can take
place (phone, online, in person etc). It is also important to communicate just as the *early signs* arise with regard to any issues relating to the children. The next step would be to ensure *follow up* of any issues discussed by parents and teachers as to learn if the issue has been resolved or any further assistance is required. With regards to any general updates shared by the school, parents indicated that in some cases they would like to know not only *what* is happening but *why* things happen as well. For example the school had once cancelled the annual Christmas performance and parents said they would have liked an explanation rather than just to be told that it will not take place that year.

Delving deeper into the **content of effective communication**, parents are to be kept updated about their child's academic *progress* and for *relevant information* to be shared with them if it could assist with their support of their child's learning at home such as a syllabus or the class schedule. Furthermore, to give parents *positive feedback*, this need not be specific to each child but perhaps a general note about the entire class and a special activity done during lessons. An aspect which may be minor yet can have an effect on some parents is the *language of communication*, one mother had mentioned that written communication at school being in English holds her back from writing freely as she lacks confidence in her English language skills, this may fall under the category of considering the *circumstances of each family* and lending support based on those needs. One such act could be through helping families with multiple children close in age by allowing them to do their homework at school with the supervision of school staff if the parents cannot cope at home.

Those special activities may also be open to parents to *participate in as audience*, such as for presentations. Perhaps as to not have too many parents there at once which could disrupt the
lesson, this can be done by inviting 3-4 parents at a time. In general, to have **events** which parents can **partake** in has been seen to add value to HSC. Those can be **unrelated to academics** such as social days or outdoor activities for children, parents and teachers. Moreover, those **related to academics** are key for HSC, one-on-one parent/teacher meetings for instance, held at least twice a year. Class teachers can hold periodic **parents' evenings** with the parents of each class where they can discuss issues of interest to them. Each evening can be dedicated to specific issue voted upon by the parents themselves prior to the day (i.e. assessments, mathematics .. etc). Furthermore, schools can hold **workshops** where parents can be given advice related to **parenting skills**, advice on **learning at home** and the like.

Including parents in **decision making** can be a delicate line to tread. However, a middle ground could be to keep parents **aware** of the decisions and policy changes occurring at school, perhaps through a school **newsletter**. Additionally, schools can cater to parents desire to be **involved**, while eliminating unnecessary clashes by sharing a digital **questionnaire** related to the issue in need of discussion.

Finally, as is to be expected, HSC can face an array of **possible obstacles**. Those can be related, but not limited, to school **budgets, cultural aspects** such as power distance\(^7\). More so, it can be related to **teacher work load** as stated previously. Those and other factors can come into play and affect the application of these recommendations. Nonetheless, it was my aim to keep them broad in order for schools to perhaps be able to adjust them according to their specific circumstances (see Figure 6.2).

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\(^7\) One of Hofstede's (1991) **cultural dimensions** stating that the distribution of power can differ in different countries.
6.4.2 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

Teacher education is the first stepping stone for aspiring educators prior to starting their careers, it trains and prepares them for the undertaking ahead of them and HSC is an integral part of that task. Thus, this is a stage in which skill development in connection to HSC practices needs to be made available, both for pre-service teachers and in-service teachers alike. It is crucial for teachers to be prepared early on to become efficient collaborators with their partners in the home. Consequently, the following recommendations will focus on aspects of development to be
provided for pre-service teachers. Nonetheless, ideally these recommendations would be made equally accessible to in-service teachers for further development, as I will mention in detail further in this section.

Taking the practices mentioned in section 6.4.1 into consideration, such as creating actionable plans, communicating effectively and appropriately with the home, involving parents in decisions, considering family needs and circumstances and so on. Teacher trainees need to learn about such practices **beyond the theoretical and into the practical**. This can be done through being given the opportunity to have **real-life encounters** with parents during their teaching practice, to perhaps acquaint themselves with a small number of students long enough to be able to conduct such practices. Furthermore, to be given the space to improve through **reflective assessments** with their trainers and through **brainstorming sessions** with other students. Both to be implemented in parallel to their training, assessing how certain encounters were handled and if they could have been dealt with differently, what worked and what could be improved. However, realistically in some cases contact with parents might be unattainable, in which case an alternative would be to use **role plays** with trainers based on real-life situations could be carried out in a similar manner.

Based on the experiences of some interviewed parents who had the impression that certain teachers lacked the initiative to collaborate and communicate with them. This could be connected to a need for training courses aimed at improving the skills teachers need to collaborate such as, but not limited to, **communication, presentation and intercultural skills**. Having such courses could also increase their confidence with that regard and thus drive them to collaborate more.
Therefore, the **inclusion of courses** on the skills teachers need to apply these practices can serve as an immensely valuable asset to teacher trainees. When considering *communication skills*, both speaking and writing skills are needed for HSC, learning how to tackle sensitive issues for instance. *Presentation skills* serve teachers well when speaking with or meeting parents one-on-one or in a group for parental evenings. Last, but certainly not least, *intercultural skills* are crucial at this day and age to allow young teachers to be more open and understanding of the different cultural backgrounds their students may represent. Advancing teachers' *intercultural competence* perhaps through exchange programmes prepares teacher trainees for future working life with parents and students from multiple cultures and also opens up the opportunity for future work in multiple environments.

By the same token, allowing in-service teachers the opportunity to partake in such skill development programs periodically throughout their careers is needed. With that in mind, certain aspects are imperative to be considered by policy makers such as **allocating set periods** of time when teachers may focus on such development. In addition to supplying schools with **budgets** for substitute teachers during those times. The balancing of the above can be critical for the improvement and long term stability of HSC.

**6.4.3 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The recommendations made in this chapter were inspired by findings related to the three research questions in this work (See table 6.1). The recommendations are aimed at serving as an outline on which schools and teacher education could seek to improve their HSC practices, they, by no means, are intended to dictate those actions upon them.
Taking those aimed at schools into consideration, mainly through planning and effective communication (Epstein, 2010) the positives gained from applying some, if not all, can create bonds between the home and the school and facilitate both of their roles.

A solution with regard to the possibility of cultural barriers on parent-teacher interaction could be having a spokesperson acting as a buffer between home and school as Kristoffersson et al. (2013) mentioned for the Chinese parents in their research.

Additionally, with regards to positive feedback by teachers to parents, Bridgemohan et al. (2005) said that teachers admit to mainly contacting schools when there's a problem, he also stated that parents can be overly demanding at times and only consider their own child rather than the responsibility the teacher has to all children. They also recommended in their research that school makes parents attendance of collaborative events easier, this can perhaps be done by accommodating the working hours of employed parents. Moreover, the parental recommendation made by an interviewee in Finland who suggested themed meetings voted by parents (Bridgemohan et al., 2005) can also serve as involving parents in decision making which can make them feel as though their voices are being heard.

As for what makes communication effective, Anderson and Minke (2007) had raised a need in research of parents perspectives on the forms and styles of communication which they consider best has been uncovered in this research, as it was clear that parents do not find written communication either through email or Wilma to be ideal and prefer direct phone calls and, above all, personal contact. This coupled with the importance parents placed on their collaboration with the school counsellor can lead to positive outcomes for HSC. Christenson
(1992, p.180) indeed states that providing leadership through school psychologists' collaboration with the home on issues relating the child's development and learning is critical.

However, it is of the utmost importance for schools to find a balance when involving parents in HSC practices as too much contact has been reported to leave a negative impression on parents in this research and others (Epstein and Sanders, 2000). More importantly, too much parental involvement can have unwanted effects on children, while in some cases parents involvement in learning at home can have a positive impact on children's achievement (Sikiö, Siekkinen, Holopainen, Silinskas, Lerkkanen and Nurmi, 2017). In other cases, the time parents spend with children on studies can also have a negative correlation on behaviour and academic performance (Epstein and Sanders, 2000) as was indicated by parents in this research who mentioned children's frustrations with spending hours on homework at home under their supervision.

Finally, considering the development of teachers early on during their studies in the varied aspects recommended such as their intercultural, communication and presentation skills, this is a matter discussed in research repeatedly, some even adding the importance of developing teachers conflict resolution skills as well (Bridgemohan et al, 2005; Anderson and Minke, 2007).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Summarised Key Findings</th>
<th>Summary of Practices Inferred</th>
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</table>
| RQ1 What experiences do Finnish and Sudanese parents have with regard to HSC? | Parents in both countries expressed their need for clear communication with regard to their children's progress and instructions as to how they can help them academically and personally at home. Parents wanted to spend more time at the school for meetings with teachers or on events with children. | For schools:  
• Consistent, periodic and appropriate communication.  
• More meetings with parents.  
• Events with parents, teachers and children.  
• Gradual application of HSC practices by teachers, in accommodation to their work load.  
For teacher education:  
• Allocating time and budgets for in-service teachers to be able to partake in skill development programmes. |
| RQ2 What arguments do Finnish and Sudanese parents have towards the value of HSC? | Parents indicated they would have a clearer vision of their own role if HSC was effective. Consequently they would be more keen to support school goals if they were kept aware of policies. They also stated their desire to hear from the school even if there are no problems. Parents seemed to want to have their voices heard more than actually making concrete decisions. Parents indicated that at times, teachers lacked the initiative to collaborate. | For schools:  
• Involvement in decision making or being made aware.  
• Giving positive feedback.  
• Making action plans and informing their goals to parents.  
For teacher education:  
• Providing appropriate training in HSC practices as well as the skills teachers need to collaborate such as presentation or communication skills. |
| RQ3 What kind of similarities and differences can be found in the Finnish/Sudanese data with regard to HSC? | While differences did exist in certain details such as the challenges parents face with regard to HSC or the fact that teachers were well trained and thus trusted by parents in Finland while in Sudan the lack of training of teachers was an issue and led to little trust. Nonetheless, overall, parents needs were aligned, in both samples they wanted to know more about their children personally and academically, how they can help them and to be told as soon as issues arise. | For schools:  
• Child progress informed to parents.  
• Contact early on if any issues arise.  
• Content of messages sent from school to be made clear.  
For teacher education:  
• Training teachers in intercultural skills, allowing them to be more open and understanding of the different family structures and norms of their students. |
7 CONCLUSIONS

This concluding chapter will present a summary of the research in addition to an evaluation of the research, its' limitations and strengths finally leading to the recommended further research in the field.

7.1 REFLECTIVE SUMMARY

The overriding aim of this research was to delve into the parental perspectives with regards to HSC and to reflect their voices as true to their words as possible while taking those accounts further and drawing some practical lessons learned from them. Much previous research has studied HSC on a variety of scales, yet through my literature review I personally have not found many in more recent years which utilises parents perspectives as a base for practice.

despite the low number or interviewees the data was rich and produced an array of results, due to the qualitative nature of the research. While these results cannot be generalised to the populations of each country by any means, the points which arose in the findings can be learned from and perhaps the implications could be applicable in a wide range of schools and teacher education programs. This is due to the sample coming from those two countries, a developed vs. a developing one, each with immensely differing cultures, norms and day to day living circumstances. Yet, the parents needs, while wide, were along the same lines, showing that regardless of those differences, the basic needs of parents may very well be the same in many countries.
As has been found through the first research question, the parents most highlighted experiences and needs were aligned, mainly wanting to know how their child is doing, what support they may need and clear guidance as to how they can support those needs as parents. Furthermore, the parents unanimous arguments towards the high value of HSC, as was found through the second research question, is yet another indication of the attention these practices need to be given and that HSC should ideally be a staple part of primary school curriculum everywhere, to be followed and the aspects which affect it taken into consideration by schools and more importantly by the field of teacher education. Therefore, teachers can be well versed in those skills early on and throughout their careers.

This leads to the implications for practice found in this research, which can be taken even further by specialists, studied, tested and improved upon. A lot of knowledge is yet to be uncovered with regard to many practical aspects of HSC in order for it to be effectively incorporated into routine school life.

In closing, as a teacher-researcher who taught in Sudan and studied in Finland, I would hope that if the Sudanese Ministry of Education is indeed planning on implementing an upcoming curriculum reform, the country's education specialists would somehow take heed of Finland's example or even benefit from the Finnish education export efforts.

7.2 EVALUATION OF THE STUDY

The choice of this research topic was inspired by my own collaboration with parents during the years I taught at a primary school in Sudan. I saw firsthand the positive impact on children when parents and teachers collaborate, this drove me to pursue a more tangible examination and
evaluation of HSC practices mentioned in research or are taking place in action currently at school to gage their effectiveness and possibly improve upon them. Nonetheless, I put in an effort to curb researcher bias to the best of my ability by remaining true to the words of the parents and by justifying the choices I made during the various stages of the research and report them in previous chapters in an attempt to be as transparent as possible. Additionally, because of my former experience working with parents I was able to empathise with my interviewees which had an effect during the interviews, allowing parents to open up to me and share their experiences, frustrations and thoughts candidly.

Subsequently, throughout the research process I endeavoured to fulfil the aims I had set for it by designing a data collection tool which fairly investigates the research questions and objective set in place equally, to create a positive research environment for all those involved, in addition to analysing the data at multiple depths to reach the goals set for this body of work while staying true to the data.

7.3 LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

Perhaps the most distinct limitation in this study is the lack of inclusion of the voices of children and teachers along with those of parents. The input by those key players would have added strength to the research and given it a wider view from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, with regard to the practical implications, various factors come into play, as schools and teacher education programmes are governed by budgets, cultural norms and a variety of factors which may serve as obstacles in applying some of those recommended guidelines. However, the aim was to draw them in a manner which can be used as a guide which can be tailored to each institution’s needs and moulded to suit them.
The small sample size was yet another limitation. Despite that, it was of interest to discover that while variation did exist between the experiences and needs of these parents coming from two distinctly different countries, with massively varying cultures (see Figure 7.2). Their most basic and crucial needs were indeed aligned, they agreed on certain issues and placed high value on specific matters. Therefore, this could possibly indicate that the recommended implications may be applicable on a wider scale.

![Figure 7.1 Finland and Sudan: Continents Apart, yet Aligned in Parental Goals](image)

**7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Going into this research I was hopeful yet apprehensive on whether the data under each of the three research questions would indeed lead to fruitful and practical insights for HSC. However, the lessons learned have auspiciously exceeded my expectations. This is an indication that perhaps in the future, research on HSC can consider the perspectives of parents, children and
teachers at the same time, perhaps in the same school, to evaluate the practices from all angles.

The perspectives and roles of mothers vs. fathers can also be taken into consideration.

Furthermore, a point of departure from the results of this research could be putting the practical implications into practice and testing them in real life to hone and develop them. Exploring the desires of pre-service and in-service teachers to have training in HSC is another area of interest. Finally, as can be seen from some of the parents experiences with their own children differing in needs, perhaps studying how HSC affects children personally and academically. This can be done in a bidirectional manner, by asking how children's personal and academic performance, in turn, affects HSC.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

APPENDIX I ENGLISH/ARABIC VERSION OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you consider collaboration between home and school important? Why?
   هل تعتبر التعاون بين المدرسة والمنزل مهمًا؟ لماذا?

2. Could you tell me about your current or previous experiences of collaboration at X school?
   هل من الممكن أن تخبرني عن تجاربك الحالية أو السابقة في التعاون مع مدرستك؟

   Do you participate in planning activities with the school?
   هل تشارك في تخطيط الأنشطة؟

   Do you participate in such activities or events or you're just aware of them?
   هل تشارك في تنظيم الأنشطة أو الأحداث؟

   What activities are you actively involved in at the moment?
   ما هي الأنشطة التي تشارك بها في الوقت الحالي؟

   How familiar are you with your child's curriculum overall?
   ما مدى معرفتك بالمنهج الدراسي الخاص بطفلك عمومًا؟

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EPSTEIN'S CATEGORIES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT</th>
<th>Johns Hopkins University US</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Type 1: Parenting&quot;</td>
<td>The school helps parents with parenting skills, understanding child development and creating home conditions to support learning.</td>
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<td>The school shares child's progress and school programs, as well as establishes effective two-way communication.</td>
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<td>The school gives ideas to parents about learning activities which can be done at home.</td>
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<td>The school includes parents as participants in school decisions through school councils or other parent committees.</td>
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<td>&quot;Type 6: Collaborating with the Community&quot;</td>
<td>The school utilizes the resources and services available in the community surrounding the school.</td>
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<td>Types</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Communication</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Volunteering</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Home learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Community cooperation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Which of those six types are you currently experiencing?

4. Are you satisfied with one type more than others? Elaborate.

5. Please put the six types in order of importance in your opinion. Explain.

6. With whom do you normally communicate? Is that enough?

7. Is the content of communication general or tailored to your child’s development? In other words, is it personal?

8. In what kind of situation does the school contact you?

9. Would you say it is a two-way communication between you and the school?

10. Is the school clear about what they expect you to do at home and at the school to support your child?


if, yes, could you give me examples?

إذا نعم، الرجاء إعطاء بعض الأمثلة.

either

If no, why?

إذا لا، لماذا؟

11. What type of information and support do you want to receive from the school and the teachers?

ما هو نوع المعلومات والدعم الذي تود الحصول عليه من المدرسة والمعلمين؟

12. Speaking of home-school collaboration as a whole, what factors do you believe affect this collaboration on your part? Work commitment, home responsibilities etc.

ما هي العوامل التي تؤثر على تعاونك؟ إنجازات العمل، مسؤوليات المنزل.. إلخ

13. In your opinion, what is the ideal vision of collaboration between you and the school?

برائك، ما هي الرؤية المثالية للتعاون بينك وبين المدرسة؟

14. How does this collaboration help you as a parent? In turn, how does it benefit your child?

كيف يساعدك هذا التعاون؟ و بالتالي كيف يساعد طفلك؟

15. Is the benefit to your child purely academic?

هل الفائدة التي يتحصل عليها طفلك من هذا التعاون فائدة أكاديمية بحتة؟

if, yes, could you give me examples?

إذا نعم، الرجاء إعطاء بعض الأمثلة.

If no, elaborate.

إذا لا وضح.

"Recent research suggests that higher levels of parental involvement [in school] are linked to more advanced social skills, fewer behavioural problems, and better social-emotional adjustment" (p. 815). Niehaus and Adelson, 2014.

"اقتترح أبحاث حديثة أن زيادة إشراك أولياء الأمور (في المدرسة) مرتبطة بتطور المهارات الاجتماعية، تقليل المشاكل السلوكية وتحسين التكيف العاطفي والاجتماعي للطفل".

16. Do you see such effects in your child or at the school?

هل ترى تأثيرات كهذه على طفلك أو في المدرسة؟

17. What do you think your role as a parent should be in this collaboration? Give me some examples.

ماذا تعتقد يجب أن يكون دورك في هذا التعاون؟ إعطيني بعض الأمثلة.
18. Would you want to take part in affecting curriculum content and teaching?

هل تود ان تشارك في التأثير على محتوى المنهج وطريقة التعليم؟

19. What kind of decisions would you want to take part in making?

ما انواع القرارات التي تود ان يكون لك دور في اتخاذها؟

In *Mothers, gender and inclusion in the context of home–school relations*, Cole (2007) states:

"The term ‘parent’ hides the fact that mothers are the ones generally perceived as having responsibility for their children and their relationship with school."

"The paper concludes by drawing attention to the need to also recognize fathers’ perspectives and to acknowledge the importance of their contribution, a different one from the mothers’ perhaps, but no less significant in the children’s lives."
APPENDIX II ENGLISH/FINNISH VERSION OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you consider collaboration between home and school important? Why?
   Pidätkö kodin ja koulun välisestä yhteistyötä tärkeänä? Miksi?

2. Could you tell me about your current or previous experiences of collaboration at X school?
   Kertoisitko nykyisistä tai aiemmista kokemuksistasi koskien yhteistyötä X koulun kanssa?

   Do you participate in planning activities with the school?
   Osallistutko suunnittelutoimintaan koulun kanssa?

   Do you participate in such activities or events or you're just aware of them?
   Osallistutko kyseisiin aktiviteetteihin ja tapahtumiin, vai oletko vain tietoinen niistä?

   What activities are you actively involved in at the moment?
   Missä toiminnoissa olet aktiivisesti mukana tällä hetkellä?

   How familiar are you with your child's curriculum overall?
   Kuinka hyvin tunnet lapsesi opetussuunnitelman kokonaisuudessaan?

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3. Which of those six types are you currently experiencing?
   Mitä näistä kuudesta tyypistä koet tällä hetkellä?

4. Are you satisfied with one type more than others? Elaborate.
   Oletko tyytyväisemi joihinkin tyyppeihin enemmän kuin muihin? Kerro tarkemmin.

5. Please put the six types in order of importance in your opinion. Explain.
   Pane kyseiset kuusi tyypää omasta mielestäsi tärkeysjärjestyksen. Perustele.

6. With whom do you normally communicate? Is that enough?
   Kenen kanssa yleensä viestit? Onko viestintää tarpeeksi?

7. Is the content of communication general or tailored to your child’s development? In other words, is it personal?
   Sanoisitko, että viesti sisältää yleistä informaatiota, vai onko viestintä räätälöity lapsesi kehityksen mukaan? Toisin sanoen, onko viestintä henkilökohtaista?

8. In what kind of situation does the school contact you?
Missä tilanteissa koulu ottaa sinuun yhteyttä?

9. Would you say it is a two-way communication between you and the school?
   Sanoisitko, että viestintä sinun ja koulusi välillä on kahdensuuntaista?

10. Is the school clear about what they expect you to do at home and at the school to support your child?
    Onko koulu kyennyt selvästi ilmaisemaan, mitä he odottavat sinun tekevän kotona ja kouluissa antaaksesi tukea lapsellesi?
        if, yes, could you give me examples? jos kyllä, antaisitko siitä esimerkkejä?
        if no, why? jos ei, niin miksi?

11. What type of information and support do you want to receive from the school and the teachers?
    Minkälaita informaatiota ja tukea haluat vastaanottaa koululta ja opettajilta?

12. Speaking of home-school collaboration as a whole, what factors do you believe affect this collaboration on your part? Work commitment, home responsibilities etc.
    Kun kyseessä on kodin ja koulun välisestä yhteistyöstä kokonaisuudessaan, minkä tekijöiden uskot vaikuttavan yhteistyöhön sinun osalta? Sitoutuminen työhön, kodin velvollisuudet, jne.

13. In your opinion, what is the ideal vision of collaboration between you and the school?
    Mikä on mielestäsä ihanteellinen näkemys sinun ja koulun välisestä yhteistyöstä?

14. How does this collaboration help you as a parent? In turn, how does it benefit your child?
    Miten tämä yhteistyö auttaa sinua vanhempana? Toisaalta, kuinka yhteistyö hyödyttää lastasi?

15. Is the benefit to your child purely academic?
    Onko lapsesi saama hyöty puhtaasti akateeminen?
        If yes, could you give me examples? jos kyllä, antaisitko siitä esimerkkejä?
        If no, elaborate. jos ei, kerro tarkemmin.
"Recent research suggests that higher levels of parental involvement [in school] are linked to more advanced social skills, fewer behavioural problems, and better social-emotional adjustment" (p. 815). Niehaus and Adelson, 2014 (Suom. “viimeaikainen tutkimus esittää, että vanhempien aktiivinen osallistuminen [lasten koulun kanssa tehtävään yhteistyöhön] on yhteydessä lasten kehittyneemiin sosiaalisiiin taitoihin, vähempiin ongelmiin käyttäytymisessä ja parempaan sosiaalis-emotionaaliseen sopeutumiseen”).

16. Do you see such effects in your child or at the school?
   Näetkö tällaisia vaikutuksia lapsessasi tai koulussa?

17. What do you think your role as a parent should be in this collaboration? Give me some examples.
   Miten arvioisit, minkälainen rooli sinulla vanhempana pitäisi olla tässä yhteistyössä? Anna joitain esimerkkejä.

18. Would you want to take part in affecting curriculum content and teaching?
   Haluaisitko vaikuttaa opetussuunnitelman sisältöön ja opetukseen?

19. What kind of decisions would you want to take part in making?
   Minkälaissten päätöksien kanssa haluaisit olla tekemisissä?

In Mothers, gender and inclusion in the context of home–school relations, Cole (2007) states:
"The term ‘parent’ hides the fact that mothers are the ones generally perceived as having responsibility for their children and their relationship with school."
"The paper concludes by drawing attention to the need to also recognize fathers’ perspectives and to acknowledge the importance of their contribution, a different one from the mothers’ perhaps, but no less significant in the children’s lives."

tosiasian, että yleensä äitien arvellaan kantavan vastuuta lapsistaan ja heidän suhteistaan koulun kanssa.”
"Julkaisun johtopäätöksissä kiinnittää huomiota tarpeeseen tunnistaa isien näkemykset sekä tunnustaa isien osallistumisen tärkeää merkitys, joka voi olla mahdollisesti eri kuin äidin mutta silti ei sen vähemmän merkittävää lapsen elämälle."
APPENDIX III FINAL ENGLISH INTERVIEW STRUCTURE WITH CODES CORRELATING TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Briefing: Me, my research, my goal, anonymous, child age/grade.

1. Do you consider collaboration between home and school important? Why? (ARG1)(SIM1)
2. Could you tell me about your current or previous experiences of collaboration at X school? (EXP1) (SIM2)
   - Do you participate in planning activities with the school?
   - Do you participate in such activities or events or you're just aware of them?
   - What activities are you actively involved in at the moment?
   - How familiar are you with your child's curriculum overall?

READ - Present the paper with Epstein's six areas of parental involvement, read then give parents a moment to read it properly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EPSTEIN'S CATEGORIES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT (2002)</th>
<th>Johns Hopkins University US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Type 1: Parenting&quot;</td>
<td>The school helps parents with parenting skills, understanding child development and creating home conditions to support learning.</td>
</tr>
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<td>&quot;Type 2: Communicating&quot;</td>
<td>The school shares child's progress and school programs, as well as establishes effective two-way communication.</td>
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<td>The school involves parents as volunteers or audiences in lessons or activities inside and outside school.</td>
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<td>&quot;Type 4: Learning at Home&quot;</td>
<td>The school gives ideas to parents about learning activities which can be done at home.</td>
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<td>&quot;Type 5: Decision Making&quot;</td>
<td>The school includes parents as participants in school decisions through school councils or other parent committees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Type 6: Collaborating with the Community&quot;</td>
<td>The school utilises the resources and services available in the community surrounding the school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Which of those six types are you currently experiencing? (EXP2) (SIM3)
4. Are you satisfied with one type more than others? Elaborate. (ARG2) (EXP3) (IMP1) (SIM4)
5. Please put the six types in order of importance in your opinion. Explain. (ARG3)
6. With whom do you normally communicate? Is that enough? (EXP4)(IMP2)
7. Is the content of communication general or tailored to your child’s development? In other words, is it personal? (EXP5) (SIM5)

8. In what kind of situation does the school contact you? (EXP6) (SIM6)

9. Would you say it is a two-way communication between you and the school? (EXP7) (SIM7)

10. Is the school clear about what they expect you to do at home and at the school to support your child? (IMP3) (SIM8) if, yes, could you give me examples? if no, why?

11. What type of information and support do you want to receive from the school and the teachers? (IMP4) (SIM9)

12. Speaking of home-school collaboration as a whole, what factors do you believe affect this collaboration on your part? Work commitment, home responsibilities etc. (EXP8) (IMP5) (SIM10)

13. In your opinion, what is the ideal vision of collaboration between you and the school? (IMP6) (ARG?)

14. How does this collaboration help you as a parent? In turn, how does it benefit your child? (ARG4) (EXP9) (SIM11)

15. Is the benefit to your child purely academic? (ARG5) (EXP10) (SIM12)

   If yes, could you give me examples? If no, elaborate.

**READ quote: if it is unclear, I can explain it further:**

"recent research suggests that higher levels of parental involvement [in school] are linked to more advanced social skills, fewer behavioural problems, and better social-emotional adjustment" (p. 815). Niehaus and Adelson, 2014

16. Do you see such effects in your child or at the school? (ARG6)(EXP11)

17. What do you think your role as a parent should be in this collaboration? Give me some examples. (IMP7)(ARG7)

Refer to Epstein's areas again, focusing on parents as decision makers:

18. Would you want to take part in affecting curriculum content and teaching? (IMP8) (SIM13)

19. What kind of decisions would you want to take part in making? (IMP9) (SIM14)

**READ and discuss their thoughts briefly: if it is unclear, I can explain it further:** In Mothers, gender and inclusion in the context of home–school relations, Cole (2007) states:"The term 'parent' hides the fact that mothers are the ones generally perceived as having responsibility
for their children and their relationship with school." "The paper concludes by drawing attention
to the need to also recognize fathers’ perspectives and to acknowledge the importance of their
contribution, a different one from the mothers’ perhaps, but no less significant in the children’s
lives." she didn't specify a country but research was done in England. (Further research and
possible PhD topic)

Debriefing: Is there anything you would like to add? anything you feel is relevant that I
didn't ask about? Research should be ready early summer 2018 if you're interested.
Dear Parent,

My name is Zizi and I would be delighted to invite you to participate in my research. The research revolves around collaboration between home and school and how to improve it. Your opinions as parents are the most valuable way to do so.

We can meet on a day/time convenient to you for 45-50 minutes at the library of the University of Eastern Finland or any a quiet location of your choosing. The interview will be in English and a written version of the questions will be shared in Finnish and English. Your participation will be anonymous.

If you have a child who studied at X school for three or more years and would like to participate, please contact me.

Thank you so much for helping me and feel free to ask me any further questions.

Zizi

Email: XX@XX.X
Phone/Whatsapp: XXXXXXXX
To whom it may concern,

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I give Zinab Elgundi permission to conduct her Master's thesis research with regard to Home-School collaboration with six parents of our students at X School in city.

Sincerely,

Principal

Signature

Date
APPENDIX VI SECTIONS OF INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

EACH SECTION WAS CUT INTO SEPARATE PIECE OF PAPER

SECTION 1

20. Do you consider collaboration between home and school important? Why?
   Pidätkö kodin ja koulun välistä yhteistyötä tärkeänä? Miksi?

21. Could you tell me about your current or previous experiences of collaboration at Kanervala school?
   Kertoisitko nykyisistä tai aiemmista kokemuksistasi koskien yhteistyötä Kanervalan koulun kanssa?

22. Which of those six types are you currently experiencing?
   Mitä näistä kuudesta tyypistä koet tällä hetkellä?

23. Are you satisfied with one type more than others? Elaborate.
   Oletko tyytyväisempi joihinkin tyyppeihin enemmän kuin muihin? Kerro tarkemmin.

24. Please put the six types in order of importance in your opinion. Explain.
   Pane kyseiset kuusi tyyppejä omasta mielestäsi tärkeysjärjestykseen. Perustele.

SECTION 2

**EPSTEIN'S CATEGORIES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

<table>
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"Type 6: Collaborating with the Community"

The school utilises the resources and services available in the community surrounding the school.

------------------------ CUT SEPARATELY AND STAPLED ------------------------

EPSTEIN MATKAPUHELUN KATTAVUUDEN LUOKAT
Johns Hopkins Yliopisto Yhdysvallat

- Tyyppi 1: vanhempien rooli
  Koulu auttaa vanhempia vanhemmuustaitojen, lapsen kehityksen ymmärtämisen ja uuden kodinolosuhteiden kanssa tukeakseen oppimista.

- Tyyppi 2: viestintä
  Koulu jakaa tietoa vanhemmille lapsen koulumenestyksestä ja opetussuunnitelmasta, sekä huolehtii siitä, että viestintä toimii molempiin suuntiin.

- Tyyppi 3: osallistuminen
  Koulu osallistaa vanhempia vapaaehtoisiksi, yleisöksi tunneille tai aktiviteetteihin sekä koulussa että koulun ulkopuolella.

- Tyyppi 4: oppiminen kotona
  Koulu ohjeistaa vanhempia siinä, kuinka oppimista voidaan tukea kotona.

- Tyyppi 5: päätöksenteko
  Koulu osallistaa vanhemmat mukaan koulun päätöksiin koulun toimikunnan tai muussa vanhempien toimikunnassa.

- Tyyppi 6: Yhteistyö yhteisön kanssa
  Koulu hyödyntää ympäristön tarjoamia resursseja ja palveluja opetuksessa.

SECTION 2

SECTION 3

25. With whom do you normally communicate? Is that enough?

Kenen kanssa yleensä viestit? Onko viestintää tarpeeksi?

26. Is the content of communication general or tailored to your child’s development? In other words, is it personal?

Sanoisitko, että viesti sisältää yleistä informaatiota, vai onko viestintä räätälöity lapsesi kehityksen mukaan? Toisin sanoen, onko viestintä henkilökohtaisesta?

27. In what kind of situation does the school contact you?

Missä tilanteissa koulu ottaa sinun yhteyttä?

28. Would you say it is a two-way communication between you and the school?

Sanoisitko, että viestintä sinun ja koulusi välillä on kahdensuuntaista?
29. Is the school clear about what they expect you to do at home and at the school to support your child?
   Onko koulu kyennyt selvästi ilmaisemaan, mitä he odottavat sinun tekevän kotona ja koulussa antaaksesi tukea lapsellesi?
   if, yes, could you give me examples? jos kyllä, antaisitko siitä esimerkkejä?
   if no, why? jos ei, niin miksi?

SECTION 3

30. What type of information and support do you want to receive from the school and the teachers?
   Minkälaista informaatiota ja tukea haluat vastaanottaa koululta ja opettajilta?

31. Speaking of home-school collaboration as a whole, what factors do you believe affect this collaboration on your part? Work commitment, home responsibilities etc.
   Kun kyseessä on kodin ja koulun välisestä yhteistyöstä kokonaisuudessaan, minkä tekijöiden uskot vaikuttavan yhteistyöhön sinun osalta? Sitoutuminen työhön, kodin velvollisuudet, jne.

32. In your opinion, what is the ideal vision of collaboration between you and the school?
   Mikä on mielestäsi ihanteellinen näkemys sinun ja koulun välisestä yhteistyöstä?

33. How does this collaboration help you as a parent? In turn, how does it benefit your child?
   Miten tämä yhteistyö auttaa sinua vanhempana? Toisaalta, kuinka yhteistyö hyödyttää lastasi?

34. Is the benefit to your child purely academic?
   Onko lapsesi saama hyöty puhtaasti akateeminen?
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SECTION 5

"recent research suggests that higher levels of parental involvement [in school] are linked to more advanced social skills, fewer behavioural problems, and better social-emotional adjustment" (p. 815). Niehaus and Adelson, 2014 (Suom. “viimeaikainen tutkimus esittää, että vanhempien aktiivinen osallistuminen [lasten kouluun kanssa

99
tehtävään yhteistyöhön] on yhteydessä lasten kehittyneemiin sosiaalisiin taitoihin, vähempiin ongelmiin käytävänä ja parempaan sosiaalis-emotionaaliseen sopeutumiseen”.

SECTION 5

SECTION 6

SECTION 6

SECTION 7

In Mothers, gender and inclusion in the context of home–school relations, Cole (2007) states:

"The term ‘parent’ hides the fact that mothers are the ones generally perceived as having responsibility for their children and their relationship with school."

"The paper concludes by drawing attention to the need to also recognize fathers’ perspectives and to acknowledge the importance of their contribution, a different one from the mothers’ perhaps, but no less significant in the children’s lives."
Examples of clusters and connections between codes which emerged from data (Total 41 codes)

Key: Blue= Related to parent's arguments towards the value HSC
Grey= Related to parent's desires