

Parental Involvement in Higher Education in Oman Pelibatan Ibu Bapa dalam Pendidikan Tinggi di Oman

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to examine the perceptions of parents and students regarding the role of the family in Omani higher education institutions. Two major issues are considered: the perceptions of parents and students regarding the role of the family in higher education, and the differences that exist among the two groups in their perceptions of that role. Participants included 92 parents who have children in higher education and 172 students from government and private higher institutions. Two questionnaires, one for parents and the other for the students, were used to collect the data. Descriptive statistics, Independent t-test and One Way ANOVA were used to analyze this data. Overall findings indicated that parents perceived themselves as playing a major role in their children's higher education. They viewed this role as a duty that needs to be fulfilled and believed it to be as vital as the role of their children's higher education teachers. The parents' views were mostly supported by the students.

Keywords: Parental involvement, higher education, Oman, students' perceptions, parents' perceptions.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meninjau persepsi ibu bapa dan pelajar berkaitan peranan keluarga dalam institusi pengajian tinggi di Oman. Dua isu utama dikenal pasti: persepsi ibu bapa dan pelajar berkaitan peranan keluarga dalam pengajian tinggi, dan perbezaan yang wujud dalam dua kumpulan berkenaan berkaitan persepsi terhadap peranan keluarga. Peserta kajian meliputi 92 ibu bapa yang mempunyai anak di peringkat pengajian tinggi dan 172 pelajar yang belajar di institusi pengajian tinggi kerajaan dan swasta. Dua bentuk soal selidik, satu untuk ibu bapa dan satu untuk pelajar digunakan untuk mengutip data. Statistik deskriptif, t-test dan ANOVA satu hala digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan ibu bapa melihat mereka berperanan penting dalam pengajian tinggi anak-anak mereka. Mereka merasakan peranan ini sebagai satu tanggungjawab yang perlu dilaksanakan, dan percaya peranan ini sama pentingnya dengan peranan para pensyarah anak mereka di institusi pengajian tinggi. Pandangan ibu bapa kebanyakannya disokong oleh data pelajar.

Kata kunci: Pelibatan ibu bapa, pendidikan tinggi, persepsi pelajar Oman, persepsi ibu bapa

INTRODUCTION

Many teachers will verify that without the continuous support of the family, school goals cannot be accomplished effectively. Pedagogical practice and experience tells us that the most successful students are those who come from homes where parents provide structure, support and guidance.

A growing body of research supports the importance of parental involvement in their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2005; Shoup, Gonyea & Kuh 2009; Simmons 2008). Researchers, practitioners and policymakers confirm that parental participation and involvement in the education of their children leads to higher academic achievement, improvement in student attendance, less likely to have discipline problems,

improvement in student conduct and attitudes, higher aspirations, an increase in completion rates and in the numbers of students attaining tertiary education (Caplan et al. 1997; Carter 2002; Henderson & Mapp 2002; Izzo, et al. 1999; Marcon 1999).

Furthermore, Brown and Banicky (2002) indicate that the importance of parental involvement is not only vital for students but also for parents, teachers and schools. This involvement can take a variety of forms such as creating a positive learning atmosphere in the homes, and encouraging a stronger relationship between the school, the family, and the community. They concluded that a school's efforts in promoting parental involvement are more important than household income and parents' levels of education as factors that determine whether or not parents are involved in the school. Moreover, their findings indicate that effective communication, positive teaching practices, and a strong commitment from the school district are essential in maintaining high quality parental involvement in school programs. Similar results were reported by Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) who confirmed that a school climate that invites involvement can also influence parents' decisions about involvement in their children's education.

When children graduate from high school and go off to college, they gain independence and somewhat outgrow parental supervision. Such independence at an early age raises significant concerns among parents. The most prominent being whether they will be safe, whether they will behave according to their parents' moral standards and approved code of ethics and whether they will be successful academically.

Increasingly, parents in the Western world want to play a greater role in their children's education and this is more pronounced in situations where parents are responsible for paying fees. In response to the articulated need for involvement, many higher education institutions in the United States and other western countries are beginning to initiate programs to accommodate this need. Universities and colleges have started to host programs that help parents get involved in campus activities (Russell 2004). Despite the efforts and the growing research interest in this

area, one notes that most of the research evidence available so far, does not specifically investigate whether what has been solidly proven at the general education level can also be applied at the higher education level.

Further exploration of this issue reveals that there are number of areas that have not yet been studied. Of equal importance is the impact of this partnership on the performance of the college student. Similarly, there is a need to explore the perceptions of both students and parents on the boundaries and desirability of such a partnership.

The paucity of research in this area leads one to wonder if it could perhaps be attributed to the age at which a child in the western world is given independence and is considered to be solely responsible for his own decisions and actions. By virtue of this independence one would assume that the college student is mature enough to manage his own life including his academic progress without parental supervision. Thus, parental involvement in higher education was not considered to be a priority on the agenda of tertiary institutions.

According to Badran (2003), El-Haddad (2003) and Nosseir (2003), the Middle East presents a completely different picture. In their studies on families in different parts of the Arab World, they agreed that even though Arab society is said to be in transition and is being influenced by the winds of change brought about by globalization. They argue that the Arab family is intact and continues to be paternalistic. The extended family also continues to play an important role in major decisions concerning the child. Thus, unlike the Western family, the Arab family continues to be very much involved in their children's lives, regardless of age and level of education.

Parental involvement in children's education at the school level has long been established in Oman. While school education has long promoted open channels of communication on issues relating to the child's progress, behavior, etc., similar programs do not seem to have been initiated at the higher education level. However, one notes that in keeping with Islamic Arab tradition, parents are called upon to approve most of the academic and non academic decisions that are taken on behalf of their children.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Prior research has established that family involvement in children's education is an important factor for academic success. Earlier studies focused on the role that parents play in increasing the learning opportunities and the success of their children in elementary education. More recently, important advances have been made in the theoretical conceptualization of parental involvement and in the empirical investigations that extend from elementary to secondary school. Relevant literature shows that the conceptualization of Parental Involvement and family-school connections has consistently been influenced by the social organizational perspective developed by Epstein (1987/1990). Epstein's perspective is based on a theory that conceptualizes Parental Involvement in terms of overlapping spheres of influence which focuses on the complex interrelationships of family, community, school and peer groups as they affect student's well being and academic performance. School, family and community partnerships include practices initiated by parents, educators or other community members. These practices may occur at school, home or in the community and they reflect six different types of family involvement (Anfara & Mertens 2008; Epstein 1990, 1992; Epstein & Lee 1995). The significance of Epstein's theoretical perspective of the overlapping spheres of influence lies not only in the identification of the different types of parental involvement but also in recognizing that parental involvement in children's education and family-school connections is not static, but rather a complex phenomenon. Parental involvement may therefore vary by factors such as student's age and grade level, social background, family experiences and school policies (Epstein 1992). Additionally, this perspective points to the importance of expanding existing knowledge of how family involvement and student life change from the middle grades to high school and beyond, what factors influence any observed changes, and what are the effects on student performance and progress.

A review of related literature on family related factors that impact positively on students' performance in higher education reveals that family background has an important influence on students' decision to pursue higher education. Background factors such as parental education, occupation, income, expectations and aspirations have also been found to be important (Carter 2002; Corak, Lipps & Zhao 2003; Godde & Schnabel 1998; Marcon 1999; Sadjapod et al. 2004; Trusty 1999; Wartman 2009).

Corak, Lipps and Zhao (2003) analyzed the relationship between Canadian family incomes and their children's participation in higher education. They concluded that children from higher income families are more likely to attend university than their counterparts from low income families. Similar results were reported by F. Carol and M. Carol (1993) who concluded that the opportunity to enroll in college is dramatically influenced by family income. They also found that the family's socioeconomic status has a strong impact on whether students drop out of high school, or out of college. It was similarly found that family income makes a major difference to whether students pursue higher education at all and what path they would take if they did. To this regard, Trusty (1999) conducted a follow up study of eighth grade students to investigate the impact of parental involvement on post secondary education plans. Two years after high school, student reports of parent-child communication and support at home seem to pay off in plans to complete a Bachelor or even higher levels degrees. The researcher concluded that the school should encourage families to communicate with their children and support their school work so as to ensure higher academic aspirations for their children.

Albeely (2005) discussed the convergence of evidence indicating that fulfilling parents aspirations was reported to be among the top five motivators for Sudanese high school and college students to gain a higher education degree, regardless of the students' socio-economic status. Hence, Albeely emphasized the importance of recognizing and capitalizing on the role of the family as a top motivator for the students to attend and perform well in higher education.

The social and cultural construct of the Arab/ Islamic family typically encourages involvement of parents in children's lives, including academic. It is observed, however, that while positive steps have been taken to actively involve parents in general education, such involvement seems to be lacking at the higher education level. Research has shown that the role of the family in higher education has not been thoroughly explored, and that many issues need to be addressed in order to enable policy makers to determine precisely the type and level of family involvement that will positively enhance the student's education at the post secondary level. Studies that address such issues would need to seek out the perceptions and opinions of the main stake holders, i.e. the parents and the students. The present study seeks to further existing knowledge regarding parental involvement in higher education through the perceptions of Omani parents and students regarding parents' roles.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main questions investigated in this study are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of the parents and the students regarding the role of the family in their children's higher education in Oman?
2. Are there differences between parents and students' views regarding the role of the family in children's higher education?

In order to answer the first main question, sub-questions were divided into two parts: questions related to parents and questions related to students.

PART ONE: SUB-RESEARCH QUESTIONS RELATING TO PARENTS

What are the major roles of the family in their children's higher education as perceived by parents?

Does the family's role in children's higher education as perceived by parents vary according to their gender (male, female); level of education (School certificate, university degree or more); job sector (government, private); level of monthly salary

(low, medium, high); person paying the tuition fees (parent, parent and /or some other family member, personal loan, free tuition); number of children in higher education (one, two, three or more); person paying other miscellaneous fees (parent, parent and / or some other family member)?

PART TWO: SUB-RESEARCH QUESTIONS RELATING TO STUDENTS

1. What are the major roles of the family in their children's higher education as perceived by students?
2. Does the family's role in their children's higher education as perceived by students vary according to their gender (male, female); specialization (humanities, sciences); institution (government, private); overall academic performance (excellent, very good, good); tuition (free, paying); person paying the fee (one of the parents, a sibling or a relative, bank or personal loan); person paying other miscellaneous fees (one of the parents, a sibling or a relative, bank or personal loan)?

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE

The study sample consisted of 264 Omani participants divided into 2 sub-samples; 92 parents who have children in higher education, and 172 students from government and private higher educational institutions. Table 1 and 2, below illustrate the description of the sample characteristics.

INSTRUMENTS

Two 5-choice Likert-Type questionnaires were developed. Each questionnaire consisted of 40 statements which were divided into four categories as follows:

First Category: Role understanding and appreciation (for parents, Role understanding and acceptance); Second Category: Children's rights; Third Category: Parents' rights; and the Fourth Category: Sharing and Co-operation. A panel of 20 experts reviewed the instruments in terms of relevance, accuracy, and clarity, and

TABLE 1. Parents' Characteristics

Variables	Categories	N	%
Gender	Male	48	52.2
	Female	44	47.8
Level of education	Elementary or less	10	11.0
	Preparatory or Secondary	25	27.5
	University or higher	56	61.5
Job sector	Government	52	56.5
	Private	19	20.7
	Personal	8	8.7
	Retiree or with no work	13	14.1
Level of monthly salary	Low salary	15	16.7
	Medium salary	51	56.7
	High salary	24	26.7
No. of children in higher education	One	34	38.2
	Two	33	37.1
	Three or more	22	24.7
Financing children's education	Me (The parent)	28	36.8
	Me- plus one or more family member(s)	16	21.1
	One or more family members	7	9.2
	Personal or bank loan	4	5.3
	Free tuition	21	27.6
Financing other miscellaneous items (books, food, accommodation, etc...)	Me (The parent)	48	57.8
	Me- plus one or more family member(s)	23	27.7
	One or some family members	8	9.6
	Personal or bank loan	4	4.8

TABLE 2. Students' Characteristics

Variables	Categories	N	%
Gender	Male	65	37.8
	Female	107	62.2
Specialization	Art & Education	23	13.7
	Islamic Sciences	3	1.8
	Science	9	5.4
	Medicine & Health Sciences	52	31.0
	Engineering	6	3.6
	Computer & Technology	31	18.5
	Agriculture & Veterinary	2	1.2
	Management, Commerce & Economics	42	25.0
	Institution	Government	59
	Private	111	65.3
Overall performance	Excellent	31	18.8
	Very good	57	34.5
	Good	70	42.4
	Average	7	4.2
	Below average	0	0.0
Tuition	Free	106	64.2
	Partial payment	21	12.7
	Full payment	38	23.0
If tuition not free it is Financed by	One of the parents	28	45.9
	A sibling/ relative (s)	18	29.5
	Personal or bank loan	15	24.6
Financing other related miscellaneous items	One of the parents	78	62.4
	A sibling/ relatives(s)	36	28.8
	Personal or bank loan	11	8.8

modifications were carried out according to their recommendations. Regarding reliability, the instruments showed .84 and .91 Alpha Cronbach's coefficients for the parents' and students' questionnaires respectively.

PROCEDURE

A total of 400 questionnaires were randomly distributed, 200 questionnaires for the students were distributed to all government colleges of education and technical colleges, and private colleges. The other 200 were distributed to parents who have children enrolled in higher education institutions. The number of completed questionnaires received is indicated by the number of participants in each sub-sample (Table 1 and 2).

DATA ANALYSIS

To address research questions, descriptive statistics were used to assess the perceptions of the participants regarding the role of family in children's higher education. Independent t-test and One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to examine the significant differences, if any, between the participants.

RESULTS

PART ONE: SUB-QUESTIONS RELATING TO PARENTS

To answer the first sub-question: "What are the major roles of the family in their children's higher education as perceived by parents?" The means and standard deviations were calculated for every item in each category. The results are as follows:

First Category Role Understanding and Acceptance. The means were arranged in a descending order from the highest mean to the lowest, with the highest indicating the most important role. The means ranged from 4.61 to 2.80. Inspection of the means of the individual items revealed that all the items in this category indicate that the parents strongly understand and accept the importance of their role in their children's higher education, and they believe that their role in their children's education is not less important than that of the teachers. They also believe that without their financial and moral support their children will not

be able to pursue their education. Additionally, they view themselves as basic partners in their children's success. This result is further confirmed by the following item which received the lowest mean, "Contributions of parents to their children's higher education are important, but not essential".

Second Category Children's Right. Relevant to the issue of children's rights, the parents felt very strongly about the importance of providing moral support and encouragement all through their children's education, with the highest item having a mean of 4.66. In addition, they highly acknowledged the importance of providing an appropriate atmosphere for their children to study, and the importance of supporting their children's academic and professional ambitions (mean values of 4.61 and 4.54, respectively). However, the parents were not sure whether family related tasks and duties imposed by them on their children weakened the children's academic performance. They were similarly unsure as to whether their children's failure in higher education is mostly due to the weak support that they receive from the home. These two items had mean values of 3.01 and 2.71, respectively.

Third Category Parents' Rights. The means under this category ranged between 4.45 and 1.87. The parents strongly agreed that it is their right that their children make them aware of problems or failures that they may face with some of their courses, and disagreed on the topic of their right to know about their children's grades in their university courses.

Fourth Category Sharing & Co-operation. Concerning sharing and co-operation, the findings show that the highest level of agreement among parents were in the following four items: Parents immensely enjoy attending university social and cultural activities of their children and therefore they make sure to attend; It is useful that parents take part in solving their children's academic problems such as probation, temporary or final dismissal, etc; It is useful that parents attend the university social activities of their children such as art galleries, exhibitions, plays, etc.; It is useful that parents take part in solving their children's social problems that may arise in their residences or lecture halls. The mean values of these items were 4.34, 4.30, 4.25,

3.55, respectively. On the other hand, parents did not agree that their attendance at their children's social and cultural activities would make the children feel uneasy because their freedom is being restricted. They also disagreed with the statement that said that they do not like to attend these activities because it is a waste of time.

To answer the second sub-question, "Does the family's role in children's higher education as perceived by parents vary according to their gender; level of education, job sector, level of monthly salary; person paying the tuition fees; number of children in higher education; person paying other miscellaneous fees?" An independent t-test was used to find out the differences among the parents responses that can be attributed to gender, level of education, job sector, and person paying other miscellaneous fees. One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to find out if there were any differences that can be attributed to level of monthly salary, number of children in higher education and person paying the fees.

Results of the t-test revealed that there were no differences among the parents regarding their

roles in their children's higher education that could be attributed to gender, level of education and job sector. However, Table 3 below shows that significant differences were found in the first category of 'Role understanding and acceptance' depending on whether the parent and/or some family member paid the miscellaneous expenses. This indicates that when parents are assisted by other family members in paying miscellaneous expenses, it leads to better 'Role understanding and acceptance' than when parents pay these alone.

One way ANOVA results of the four categories of family roles in their children's education illustrated no significant differences that could be attributed to the number of children the family has in higher education and to the person paying the fees. However, significant differences were found in the third category that was attributed to parents' monthly salary, Table 4 indicating that the level of monthly income influenced the way the parents perceived their role.

In order to locate sources of these differences in this category, Scheffe post-hoc comparisons

TABLE 3. Perceived Family Roles According to Persons' Paying Other Miscellaneous Fees

Categories	Parent (n = 48)		Parent &/or family member (n = 31)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Role understanding and appreciation	4.17	.40	4.38	.40	-2.24	.02*
Children's right	3.96	.39	3.92	.55	0.38	.71
Parents rights	3.36	.29	3.34	.23	0.41	.68
Co-operation	3.21	.31	3.27	.38	-0.74	.46

* $\alpha < 0.05$

TABLE 4. Perceived Family Roles According to Parent Monthly Salary

Categories		S.S.	d.f.	M.S.	F-value	Sig*
Role understanding and acceptance	Between group	.34	2	.17	1.08	.35
	Within groups	13.79	87	.16		
Children's right	Between group	.32	2	.16	.68	.51
	Within groups	20.46	87	.24		
Parents rights	Between group	.60	2	.30	4.13	.02*
	Within groups	6.28	87	.01		
Co-operation	Between group	.26	2	.13	1.03	.36
	Within groups	10.99	87	.13		

* $\alpha < 0.05$

technique was used and the results are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5. Scheffe Comparisons of Salary Groups in Role of Family

Category	Groups	Mean	Low	Medium	High
Parents Rights	Low	3.52		.04*	.03*
	Medium	3.31			
	High	3.28			

* $\alpha < 0.05$

As Table 5 indicates, two significant differences ($\alpha < 0.05$) were found by the Schaffe test. These differences were between the low and medium income groups as well as between the low and high income groups, with differences being in favor of the low income group. This means that low income parents viewed their parents' right to be engaged in their children's higher education as a very important issue compared to the other two groups.

There was no significant difference between medium and high income groups. This means that both the medium and the high income groups had the same degree of agreement on this specific issue.

PART TWO: SUB-QUESTIONS RELATING TO STUDENTS

To answer the first sub-question: "What are the major roles of the family in their children's higher education as perceived by students?" For each category the means and the standard deviations were calculated for each item.

First Category Role Understanding and Appreciation. The means were arranged in a descending order from the highest to the lowest indicating that the highest is the most important role. The means ranged from 4.53 indicating strong agreement, to 2.67 indicating a "not sure" response. However, all the items were rated either as "strongly agree" or "agree" except for item number 5 "My parents' contributions to my higher education are important but not indispensable" which had the lowest mean of 2.67. That is, the students strongly agreed on two items that state, "I am often overwhelmed by feelings of appreciation towards the efforts that my parents exert to support my higher education" and

"I view my parents as fundamental partners in the success of my university education".

Second Category Personal Rights. Regarding this issue, students felt very strongly that it is their right that their parents give them moral support and encouragement all through their higher education, (the highest item mean value of 4.57. This item was followed by items such as, item 15 which states: "It is my right that my parents support my academic and professional ambitions"; and item 9: "It is the children's right that their parents arrange an appropriate atmosphere for them for studying," with mean values of 4.35 and 4.26, respectively.

Third Category Parent's Rights. The means under this category ranged between 4.32 indicating "agree" to 1.85 indicating "disagree" responses. The statement that the students viewed as highly important in the issue of parents' rights was: "the role of parents in choosing their children's specialization should only be an advisory one, and they do not have the right to make the final decision". While they disagreed on the item that states, "My parents do not have the right to know my performance grades in my university courses." with mean item values of 4.32 and 1.85, respectively.

Fourth Category Sharing and Co-operation. Concerning the sharing and co-operation category results show that the highest level of agreement among the students was in the following four items: "My parents get really happy when I participate in the university's social activities, therefore I make sure that they attend"; "I like my parents to share in solving the academic problems I face such as probation, temporary or final dismissal, etc."; "I do not like my parents to interfere in the way I study or how I arrange my studying timetable"; and "I do not like my parents to interfere in the way I do my assignments such as essays, research, etc". The mean values of these items were 4.08, 3.76, 3.67 and 3.56, respectively.

To answer the second sub-question, "Does the family's role in their children's higher education as perceived by students vary according to their: gender, specialization, institution, overall academic performance, tuition, person paying the fees, person paying other miscellaneous fees?" An independent t-test was used to find out the difference among

the students' gender, specialization, whether the institution is a government or a private one, tuition, and the person paying the miscellaneous fees, while One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to find out if there were any differences that could be attributed to students' overall performance and person(s) paying the fees.

T-test results did not yield any significant differences between students' responses related to their gender or to their education (being free or paid for by family). However, significant differences were seen between students' specializations, and the types of institutions attended. In other words, there were differences between the students relevant to their specializations which affect their perception of role understanding and appreciation

(Category one) and parents' rights (Category three). Students who are in science specializations considered these two categories as more important than their counterparts in the humanities (Table 6). Other differences were found between students in government and private universities/colleges; the differences were in favor of the private institutions Table 7.

To answer the second main question, "Are there differences between parents, and students' views regarding the role of the family in children's higher education?" Independent t-test results of the four categories of the role of family in their children's higher education illustrated that the two respondent groups (parents and students) differed on all four categories (Table 8).

TABLE 6. Perceived family roles according to students' specialization

Categories	Humanity		Science		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Role understanding and appreciation	3.97	.65	4.20	.45	-2.21	.02*
Personal rights	3.58	.60	3.73	.52	-1.73	.09
Parents rights	3.16	.28	3.25	.27	-1.95	.05**
Co-operation	3.00	.38	2.92	.40	1.34	.18

* $\alpha < 0.05$, ** $\alpha = 0.05$

TABLE 7. Perceived family roles according to students' institution

Categories	Government		Private		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Role understanding and appreciation	3.95	.63	4.14	.48	-2.00	.03*
Personal rights	3.68	.49	3.67	.60	0.11	.91
Parents rights	3.13	.22	3.26	.29	-3.12	.00**
Co-operation	2.91	.33	2.97	.42	-1.04	.30

* $\alpha < 0.05$, ** $\alpha < 0.0$

TABLE 8. Comparison of perceived family roles between respondent groups

Categories	Students (n = 172)		Parents (n = 94)		t-value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Role understanding and appreciation	4.08	.54	4.26	.40	-2.80	.01*
Personal rights	3.67	.56	3.91	.48	-3.56	.00**
Parents rights	3.22	.28	3.35	.28	-3.62	.00**
Co-operation	2.95	.39	3.28	.36	-6.72	.00**

* $\alpha = 0.01$, ** $\alpha < 0.0$

As Table 8 indicates, an independent t-test revealed that there were significant differences in each of the four categories. These significant differences were between the parents' group and the students' group in favor of parents, meaning that parents perceived these roles to be more important than students.

CONCLUSION

It was shown in the literature that family involvement in the child's education is considered to be a highly important factor in his/her school education. While this fact is relatively well established at the school level, the same cannot be said with regards to higher education. The paucity of research in this field can be attributed to the long standing belief that when children reach university age they are independent of parents and would therefore neither benefit from nor entertain parental involvement in their education. Recent research and initiatives from universities in the Western world seem to indicate that this view is being challenged and actually beginning to change.

The Arab/Islamic world on the other hand, presents a different scenario in which parents and the family as a whole, play a major role in all key decisions that affect children – irrespective of age. However, these researchers could not trace any research that has attempted to explore this field. Questions remain as to whether parental involvement is indeed desirable at this level and whether or not it has a positive impact on the academic performance of university/college students.

This study set out to investigate the role of the family in the education of their children in higher education institutions in Oman. The findings indicated that parents perceived themselves as playing a major role in their children's higher education. They viewed this role as a duty and obligation that needed to be fulfilled, believing that all their contributions are important and essential. In other words, parents believed that their role in their children's higher education was as vital as the role of their children's teachers. Also the parents' duty to finance, give moral support and encourage their children throughout

their studies was confirmed by the majority of the parents. Furthermore, parents felt that they should be more involved in their children's university lives, indicating that they believe that they have the right to know about their children's progress, take part in solving their academic and social problems, and to be able to communicate with teachers. In terms of selecting their children's college and specialization, the results showed that parents were happy to be involved in the selection process. However, they realized that their role should be advisory and facilitative and not one of imposing decisions.

With regards to the parents' gender, level of education, job sector, number of children they have and the person responsible for paying the fees, the results did not reveal any significant differences in the way the parents perceived their role in their children's higher education. It may be noted here that these results contradict the findings of previous research where it was found that the level of parental education and socio-economic status of the family were important factors effecting parental involvement (Corak, Lipps & Zhao 2003; F Carol & M. Carol 1993).

Similar findings were illustrated by the students who participated in this study. They confirmed the importance of parents' roles in higher education in terms of their financial support, moral support and academic/professional guidance when they choose the college and specialization. Like their parents the students also believed that it is important for the parents to know their grades. In addition to this, the students agreed that they always got encouragement and support when they involve their parents in any problems they faced. Furthermore, the students highlighted the benefit of parents attending social and cultural activities at the university/college.

The findings suggested that gender did not make any difference to the way the students viewed the importance of parents' roles in higher education. With regards to students' specializations and the types of institutions the students attended, statistically significant results have indicated that the students who were in science specializations and private institutions considered the role of their parents to be more important than their counterparts in the humanities and government institutions. This

could perhaps be explained by the fact that in private institutions and science specializations, parents have to bear higher education costs compared to those attending government institutions or specializing in the humanities.

In conclusion, the findings of this study clearly illustrate that both parents and students view parents as important partners in children's higher education. The results also clearly supports Epstein's "Social Organization perspective" and his assertion that parents' involvement in children's education and family-school connection is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by the nature of the participants' relationships.

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