PERCEPTIONS OF ARAB AMERICAN PARENTS REGARDING HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS

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Communication between parents and teachers benefit both children and teachers (Epstein, 2001). A collaborative relationship can improve parental self-image, which in turn can facilitate a positive working relationship between the parent and teacher. Teachers who are persistent in reaching out to parents meet with enough success to realize that their efforts are effective and appreciated. This study examined perceptions of Arab American parents of children with special needs regarding communication with the school and professionals who work with their children. The Arab American parents were both foreign-born and born in the United States and had students with special needs in the first through fifth grades. The Arab American parents were from different Arabic countries of the Middle East. A non experimental, descriptive research design was used in this study. A survey adapted from a dissertation by Windsor (1999) was used as the primary data collection tool in this study. The survey was divided into five sections: Information and Issues Communicated between School and Home, Parent’s Way’s of Communicating with their Child’s Teacher, Teacher Communications, Communications Specific for Parents of Children Receiving Special Education Services, and a short demographic. The survey was distributed to 100 parents, with 77 parents returning their completed surveys. As many of the parents included in the sample may have had difficulty reading and understanding English, the survey also was translated into Arabic. The data from the surveys were analyzed using SPSS – Windows, Ver. 14. Both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were used. Inferential statistical analysis included t-test for one-sample, Mann-Whitney test for two independent samples, and stepwise multiple linear regression analysis. Results of this study found that parents shared similar views about communication. Mixed outcomes were noted in responses to the kinds of preferable communication. Another difference was found between parents who had been in the United States for longer time frames and those were new arrivals. Another finding revealed that parents had difficulty in contacting teachers outside of the school day. The study provided support that parents want to be involved in their children’s education, especially when these children have special needs. Barriers resulting from language difficulty and previous experiences with education in their native countries also impeded parent’s participation in their child(ren)’s educational process.

Keywords:
Home-school-community links, Education policy, Social-class, Disadvantaged families.