



PERCEPTIONS OF HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP AMONG ACADEMICALLY TRAINED ARAB EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS IN ISRAEL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LINK BETWEEN PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIP AND CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL SELF-REGULATION AND CONFIDENCE

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Abstract:

Partnership between parents and kindergarten teachers is widely credited with shaping young children's development, yet little is known about how Arab early childhood educators in Israel understand this link in their own professional world. The present study examined how academically trained Arab educators perceive the connection between home-school partnership and children's behavioral self-regulation and confidence. A qualitative interpretive design was adopted, grounded in a constructivist worldview, and thirty female educators from the Galilee, the Triangle, and the Negev were interviewed in Arabic through a semi-structured protocol built around four thematic axes. Transcripts were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, and four themes emerged. Educators described a professional journey from a defensive stance toward parents to a collaborative leadership style, portrayed children as a behavioral mirror of the teacher-parent relationship, identified parental presence in the kindergarten as an engine of child self-efficacy, and reported turning to digital tools to work around time poverty and geographic barriers. The findings are integrated into a proposed model, the Triadic Synergy of Trust, which ties educator leadership, home-school alignment, and cultural validation to a state of behavioral synchronicity in the child. Implications for the training of future educators and for partnership policy in the Arab sector are discussed.

Keywords: home-school partnership, parental involvement, arab early childhood educators, behavioral self-regulation, child confidence, qualitative research, Israel

1. Introduction

Few claims in early childhood research enjoy as much agreement as the idea that parents matter - involvement at home and in the educational setting has been linked repeatedly

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to stronger cognitive, social, and behavioral outcomes in the early years, and the benefits of quality early education were found to persist well into adolescence (Wildmon *et al.*, 2024; McCoy *et al.*, 2017). Most of what is known about how such partnership works, however, comes from studies of parents, pupils, or program outcomes, while the professionals who manage the relationship on a daily basis have received far less attention. Kindergarten teachers decide how often to talk with parents, in what tone, and about what, and their perceptions of the partnership therefore carry a practical weight that goes well beyond their formal duties.

In Arab society in Israel, these questions take on a sharper form, since partnership must be built under conditions that the general literature rarely assumes. Roughly two million people, about a fifth of the country's population, live overwhelmingly in localities ranked at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale, and nearly half of Arab children grow up below the poverty line (Khalaily *et al.*, 2023). Households are large, transportation in many localities is limited, and mothers' access to educational settings is constrained accordingly (Haddad Haj-Yahya & Assaf, 2017). The institutional side is no less demanding, as participation in educational frameworks before age three reaches only 46% among Arab children compared to 90% among Jewish children, and the supply of daycare centers in Arab localities lags far behind need (Vaknin & Shavit, 2021; Madhala *et al.*, 2021). Educators who wish to bring parents into the kindergarten therefore operate inside a dense web of economic, logistic, and cultural constraints.

Against this background, the perceptions of the educators themselves remain a nearly unexamined territory, and this is precisely the gap the present study addresses. Research comparing parental help-seeking found that relations between Arab parents and teachers tend toward dependence and avoidance, yet also showed that collaborative relations predict more autonomous engagement, which suggests that the quality of partnership is malleable and depends heavily on how the educator structures it (Grinshtain & Harpaz, 2023). Academically trained Arab educators stand at a distinctive junction in this respect, since their studies expose them to Western models of partnership while their cultural knowledge allows them to translate these models into forms their communities can accept.

The study asked, accordingly, how Arab early childhood educators perceive the link between parent-teacher partnership and children's behavioral self-regulation and psychological confidence, and what shapes their ability to sustain such partnership across different regions. Thirty educators from the Galilee, the Triangle, and the Negev were interviewed in Arabic, and their accounts were analyzed thematically. The paper proceeds as follows: the next chapter reviews the relevant literature, the third chapter presents the methodology, the fourth reports the findings by theme, and the final chapters discuss the results against the literature and draws conclusions for training and policy.

2. Literature Review

Four bodies of work frame the present study - the general literature on parental involvement in early childhood education, research on Arab society and family life in Israel, evidence on the institutional conditions of early childhood education in the Arab sector, and studies of parent-teacher relations and the position of future educators. Read together, they indicate that involvement is consequential but unevenly implemented, and that its form in Arab society cannot be separated from the cultural and structural setting in which it takes place.

2.1. Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education: Concepts and Evidence

Within the research literature, parental involvement in early childhood education is treated as a multidimensional construct that spans home-based engagement, school-based participation, and ongoing home-school communication (Otero-Mayer *et al.*, 2025). A large body of work links these dimensions to improved cognitive, social, and behavioral outcomes among young children, with meta-analytic evidence showing that both home-based and school-based involvement predict higher achievement and fewer behavioral problems (Wildmon *et al.*, 2024). Longer-term evidence points in the same direction, as participation in quality early childhood programs was found to reduce special education placement and grade retention while increasing high school graduation rates, with effects that were strongest for children from low-income families (McCoy *et al.*, 2017). Findings from the early elementary years reinforce this picture, since all forms of involvement, and especially parent-teacher communication, correlated positively with academic performance among young pupils (Salac & Florida, 2022).

The dominant conceptual framework in this field remains Epstein's model of six involvement types, ranging from basic parenting and communication through volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration (Newman *et al.*, 2019). Empirical applications of this typology reveal that implementation is uneven, as parenting and communication activities tend to be rated highest while decision-making and community collaboration lag behind (Gitonga, 2023). Perceptions of school effectiveness also vary by parental background, and more educated parents in urban settings actually rated schools' partnership practices lower, apparently because they hold higher expectations for genuine collaboration (Newman *et al.*, 2019). Teacher-side evidence complicates the picture further, since preschool educators in different national contexts reported relying mainly on written, one-directional communication and attributed weak involvement to parents' unwillingness, while acknowledging their own workload and lack of training as contributing factors (Ekinçi-Vural & Dogan-Altun, 2021; Hakyemez-Paul *et al.*, 2018). Structural barriers such as parental illiteracy, poverty, time constraints, and cultural norms that position teachers as sole experts have been documented across diverse settings as well (Kambona, 2025).

2.2. The Arab Society and Family Context in Israel

Turning to the specific context of this study, the Arab population in Israel numbers roughly two million people, constitutes about a fifth of the country's population, and is concentrated overwhelmingly in localities ranked in the lowest socioeconomic clusters, with nearly half of Arab children living below the poverty line (Khalaily *et al.*, 2023). Household structure differs from the Jewish majority as well, with an average of 4.6 persons per Arab household and limited transportation infrastructure in many localities, conditions that constrain mothers' physical access to educational settings (Haddad Haj-Yahya & Assaf, 2017). Economic analyses further show that Arab pupils from weak socioeconomic backgrounds receive roughly half the per-pupil budget of comparable Jewish pupils, and that limited Hebrew proficiency among Arab mothers restricts both employment and communication with educational authorities (Tehauko, 2019).

Family dynamics in this society are central to any discussion of parental partnership. The Arab family remains collectivist and patriarchal, with childcare assigned primarily to mothers, although intergenerational research documents growing resistance to traditional gender ideologies among younger and more educated cohorts (Khoury, 2022). Visual research on family perceptions similarly found that the nuclear family model has become the dominant ideal, even as patriarchal preferences such as favoring firstborn sons persist in subtle forms (Meler & Marnin-Distelfeld, 2023). Employment data connect these cultural patterns to practical constraints, since religiosity, conservative attitudes, and husbands' views were all strongly associated with Arab women's labor force participation, which in turn shapes the time and resources available for engagement with kindergartens (Kasir *et al.*, 2019).

2.3. Early Childhood Education in the Arab Sector

Institutional conditions in the Arab sector present distinct challenges for partnership. Participation in educational frameworks from birth to age three stands at only 46% among Arab children compared to 90% among Jewish children, a gap attributed partly to supply shortages and partly to the low quality of available frameworks (Vaknin & Shavit, 2021). Supply-side analyses confirm this shortage, showing that Arab localities operate far fewer daycare centers per capita and utilized only half of the construction budgets allocated to them, a pattern described as a Matthew effect in which the neediest populations receive the least (Madhala *et al.*, 2021). System-wide reviews add that high child-to-staff ratios, low assistant training levels, and a severe manpower crisis affect quality across Israel, with the Arab sector experiencing these problems more acutely (Silverman & Blank, 2023).

Intervention research nevertheless suggests that partnership-oriented programs can succeed in this context. A national quality improvement program in Arab kindergartens produced measurable gains in teacher-child interactions and parental involvement, raising the share of kindergartens meeting developmental quality thresholds from 44% to 72% (Nijim-Akhtailat & Shoruk, 2020). A community-based

model operating in Arab localities similarly demonstrated that cultural adaptation, empowerment of local Arabic-speaking professionals, and positioning early childhood on the municipal agenda can strengthen parent-kindergarten relationships (Pro-Nasraddin *et al.*, 2017). At the family level, a remotely delivered reading intervention with Arab mothers improved their mediation behaviors during shared book reading and was linked to children's emotional understanding, indicating that even low-cost programs can shift home practices (Issa, 2022).

2.4. Parent-Teacher Relations and the Role of Future Educators

Research comparing help-seeking orientations found that Arab parents displayed more dependent and avoidant approaches toward teachers than Jewish parents, a pattern interpreted through the hierarchical and collectivist orientation of Arab society, yet positive collaborative relations predicted more autonomous engagement in both groups (Grinshtain & Harpaz, 2023). This finding matters for the present study because it suggests that partnership quality is malleable and depends heavily on how educators structure the relationship. Evidence on school leadership reinforces this conclusion, since teacher invitations, rather than principals' vision statements alone, were the decisive predictor of actual parental involvement (Yulianti *et al.*, 2022). Arab early childhood education students therefore occupy a strategic position, as their training exposes them to Western partnership models while their cultural knowledge equips them to translate these models into forms acceptable to Arab families, making their perceptions of parental partnership a meaningful object of inquiry.

3. Material and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative interpretive design guided the study, resting on the constructivist assumption that partnership is not an administrative arrangement fixed by regulation but a relationship whose meaning is built through daily interaction among teachers, parents, and children. Such a stance suits a minority-culture setting particularly well, since the same behavior, for instance a parent who never attends meetings, may signify time pressure, deference to the teacher's authority, or a lack of trust, and only interpretation from within can separate these readings. A phenomenological orientation was therefore adopted, one that aims to capture the lived experience of educators rather than to measure it, and the interview rather than the questionnaire served as the natural instrument. The design itself was descriptive-analytical and moved in stages, from mapping perceptions, through comparison across regions and career phases, to the construction of an integrative model. Within this logic the educator's perception is treated as a professional reality in its own right, because it is the perception, accurate or not, that steers her daily practice with children and families.

3.2. Population and Sample

The population under study consisted of academically trained Arab early childhood educators in Israel, a group positioned between the Western developmental theories of its training and the collectivist family culture of its communities. Thirty women took part ($n=30$), ten from the Galilee, ten from the Triangle, and ten from the Negev, so that the sample covered the main geographic and cultural variations of Arab society, including the distinct conditions of the Bedouin community in the south. Professional seniority ranged from early-career teachers with four to nine years of experience to veterans with twenty to thirty years, and graduates of both teacher-training colleges and research universities were represented. Recruitment combined two strategies, purposive sampling directed at educators with documented experience in behavioral cases where parental involvement played a part, and snowball sampling, in which trusted participants recommended colleagues known in the community for innovative partnership work such as heritage workshops or digital storytelling.

3.3. Study Tools and Procedure

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Arabic, the participants' mother tongue, so that the emotional precision of their accounts would not be lost in translation during the conversation itself. The protocol contained fourteen core questions arranged along four axes: the educator's professional background and sense of readiness, her practical modes of communication with parents, her observations of children's behavior and emotional development, and the regional and socio-cultural barriers she faces. A pilot with two educators preceded the main study and confirmed that the questions were culturally appropriate and produced usable material. During the interviews the researcher relied on recursive probing, returning to concrete episodes and asking for detail, so that the data remained anchored in specific cases rather than general opinion. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English using a cross-translation procedure. Ethical safeguards included written informed consent, an explicit right to withdraw at any stage, replacement of identifying details with participant codes, and storage of recordings on encrypted drives, and the phrasing of the questions respected the religious and social sensitivities of the community throughout.

3.4. Analysis and Trustworthiness

Reflexive thematic analysis served as the analytic method, moving through the accepted six phases of this approach - repeated reading of the transcripts, open coding of every unit of meaning, grouping of codes into candidate themes, refinement of the themes against the full data set, final naming, and integration into the written report. The reflexive variant was chosen deliberately, since it treats the researcher's interpretive involvement as part of the method rather than a threat to it. Rigor was pursued through the four established criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry. Member checking returned the emerging themes to a subset of participants, who confirmed that the

interpretation matched their lived experience, an audit trail documented every step from raw transcript to final theme, thick description of the three regional settings supported the transferability of the findings, and a reflexive journal tracked the researcher's assumptions across the analysis. Four themes resulted from this process and are presented in the next chapter.

4. Results

Analysis of the thirty interviews produced four themes that together answer the research question - the professional evolution of the educator, the child as a behavioral mirror of the teacher-parent relationship, the developmental force of parental presence, and the navigation of contemporary barriers to partnership. Each theme is presented below with illustrative voices from the field.

4.1. Theme 1: The Evolutionary Paradigm of the Educator

Nearly every professional life story in the sample followed the same arc, opening in defensiveness and ending in what the participants described as shared leadership. Early in their careers, the educators tended to guard the classroom against parental interference and to experience involvement as a challenge to their authority. Experience reversed this stance. A veteran from the Galilee with twenty-six years in the field recalled that she once "*kept parents at the door,*" and that only a series of behavioral crises taught her that "*the child cannot be repaired inside the classroom alone.*" Younger participants reached the same conclusion faster and often credited their academic training for it. The mature position that emerged across the interviews casts the educator as a community leader who contains both the child and the parent, initiates contact rather than waits for it, and treats the parent as an ally in behavioral work. Participants repeatedly tied this evolution to results, arguing that their ability to manage difficult behavior improved in step with their openness toward the home.

4.2. Theme 2: The Behavioral Mirror

Children, in the eyes of the participants, register the state of the adult relationship around them with striking accuracy. When teacher and parents pull in the same direction, the educators reported calmer classrooms, more self-regulation, and children who move between home and kindergarten without friction, whereas a strained or contradictory relationship was said to be absorbed by the child and returned as confusion, testing, and defiance. An educator from the Triangle (P7) put the pattern bluntly: "*when the mother and I speak the same language, the child stops fighting us both.*" Several participants described concrete reversals in which a defiant child settled within weeks once the adults agreed on shared rules and messages. A diagnostic implication accompanied the theme as well, since some educators reported reading a child's sudden restlessness as a sign that

something in the home-school channel had broken, and turning to the parents before turning to disciplinary measures.

4.3. Theme 3: The Socio-Cultural Presence Motif

Physical presence of parents inside the kindergarten emerged as a developmental force in its own right, beyond any pedagogical content it happened to deliver. Participants described occasions on which a father told a traditional story to the class, a grandmother demonstrated embroidery, or a mother presented her occupation, and traced a visible change in the child whose family stood at the front of the room. Confidence was the word used most often, and one Negev educator (P22) captured it simply: "*the day his father came, the boy walked differently.*" The mechanism the participants pointed to is cultural validation, since the appearance of the family inside the institution signals to the child that his home, language, and heritage belong there, and this recognition feeds self-efficacy and even early leadership behavior. Educators who had built regular formats for such presence, heritage mornings for example, reported the effect systematically rather than anecdotally and counted these formats among the most efficient tools at their disposal.

4.4. Theme 4: Navigating Modern Resistance

Barriers occupied a central place in the interviews, though the participants spoke of them as conditions to be worked around rather than as final constraints. Time poverty was named most frequently, since growing numbers of working mothers cannot attend daytime meetings, and in the Negev distance and weak transportation added a logistical layer that educators in the north rarely face. Digital tools carried much of the response. WhatsApp groups, photographed work samples, and short video updates kept parents informed and preserved a minimal channel even with families who never appear in person, and one Bedouin educator (P25) called her phone "*the bridge my kindergarten stands on.*" At the same time, the participants insisted on the limits of this bridge, drawing a line between messages that sustain a relationship and encounters that build one. Trust, in their experience, is created face to face, and the digital layer works only where some foundation of personal acquaintance already exists, which is why most of them continued to invest in home visits and flexible meeting hours.

5. Discussion

The study set out to understand how Arab early childhood educators perceive the link between parent-teacher partnership and children's behavioral and psychological development, and the four themes converge on a clear answer: in the educators' professional world, partnership is not an administrative extra but a developmental mechanism. This position sits comfortably with the outcome literature, which ties involvement at home and in the educational setting to better achievement and fewer

behavioral problems, and identifies communication with the teacher as the component most consistently related to performance (Wildmon *et al.*, 2024; Salac & Florida, 2022). What the present findings add is the perceived mechanism behind these correlations. The behavioral mirror theme describes children as reading the adult relationship and returning its quality in their conduct, an account that gives the statistical associations a concrete psychological pathway and echoes the long-term logic of early investment documented in longitudinal research (McCoy *et al.*, 2017).

The evolutionary theme speaks directly to the teacher-side literature and partly against it. Studies of preschool educators in several countries found heavy reliance on written, one-directional communication and a tendency to attribute weak involvement to parents' unwillingness (Ekinci-Vural & Dogan-Altun, 2021; Hakyemez-Paul *et al.*, 2018). The educators interviewed here began their careers close to that pattern but did not remain in it, and their movement toward initiating, containing leadership matches the finding that teacher invitations, more than institutional vision, are what actually draws parents in (Yulianti *et al.*, 2022). The same movement offers a practical reading of the help-seeking literature, which found dependent and avoidant orientations among Arab parents alongside evidence that collaborative relations predict more autonomous engagement (Grinshtain & Harpaz, 2023). If the orientation of parents responds to the structure the educator builds, then the professional evolution documented here is not merely biographical; it is the lever through which partnership quality in the sector can change.

The presence motif can be read as a culturally grounded answer to a known weakness of the Epstein framework in practice. Applications of the typology repeatedly show that parenting and communication are implemented widely while the deeper types, volunteering, decision-making, and community collaboration, lag behind (Gitonga, 2023; Newman *et al.*, 2019). Heritage mornings, storytelling visits, and similar formats described by the participants effectively import volunteering and community collaboration into the kindergarten in a form that collectivist family culture recognizes and rewards. The success of such translation is consistent with intervention evidence from the Arab sector, where culturally adapted programs improved teacher-child interaction and parental involvement, and where empowering local Arabic-speaking professionals proved central to strengthening parent-kindergarten ties (Nijim-Akhtailat & Shoruk, 2020; Pro-Nasraddin *et al.*, 2017). Even modest, low-cost formats appear capable of shifting home practices, as shown by a remote reading intervention with Arab mothers (Issa, 2022).

The barriers theme anchors the perceptions in the structural reality reviewed earlier. Time poverty, distance, and the absence of transportation are not idiosyncratic complaints; they reflect documented conditions of poverty, large households, and weak infrastructure in Arab localities, alongside budget gaps and a chronic shortage of quality frameworks (Khalaily *et al.*, 2023; Haddad Haj-Yahya & Assaf, 2017; Tehauko, 2019; Madhala *et al.*, 2021; Silverman & Blank, 2023). The constraints on mothers' availability

echo the employment literature, in which religiosity, conservative attitudes, and spousal views shape women's participation in the labor force and, through it, the time left for the kindergarten (Kasir *et al.*, 2019). Against this background, the digital bridging described by the participants is best understood as bottom-up compensation for structural deficits, similar in spirit to barriers documented in other developing contexts (Kambona, 2025). Their insistence that the digital channel supplements rather than replaces personal encounter is an important qualification for any policy that hopes to solve partnership by application alone.

Taken together, the themes support the integrative model proposed in this study, the Triadic Synergy of Trust. The model holds that a child's behavioral and psychological progress is the joint product of three forces: reflexive educator leadership, alignment between the language of the home and the language of the kindergarten, and explicit validation of the child's cultural world, and that when the three converge, the child reaches a state of behavioral synchronicity in which discipline feels natural and confidence is high. Each pillar corresponds to a theme in the findings, and the model also explains the failures the participants described, since weakness in one pillar, a disengaged home for instance, produced exactly the fragmentation the model predicts. The contribution is a framework that treats trust not as an atmosphere but as a working structure with identifiable components that training and policy can address.

Several limitations bound these conclusions. The data reflect educators' perceptions rather than direct observation of children; the sample is entirely female, as the sector itself is; perceptions were captured at a single point in time under a specific social and political atmosphere, and the cultural specificity of the setting cautions against automatic generalization. Within these limits, the implications are concrete. Training programs for future Arab educators should treat relational skill, the ability to build and repair trust with parents, as a core professional competence rather than a personality trait, and policy in the sector should support formats of parental presence and recognize the kindergarten as a community institution, not only an educational one.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how thirty academically trained Arab early childhood educators in Israel perceive the connection between parent-teacher partnership and the behavioral and psychological development of young children. Four themes emerged from their accounts - a professional evolution from defensiveness toward collaborative leadership, a view of the child as a mirror of the adult relationship around him, a belief in the developmental power of parental presence inside the kindergarten, and a resourceful navigation of time poverty and geographic barriers through digital tools that supplement, but never replace, personal contact. The themes were integrated into the Triadic Synergy of Trust model, which links educator leadership, home-school alignment, and cultural validation to the child's behavioral synchronicity.

Two conclusions carry particular weight. Partnership in the Arab sector is malleable, and its quality follows from what the educator initiates far more than from what regulation prescribes, which places the training of relational competence at the center of teacher education. Beyond that, the kindergarten in Arab society functions, in the eyes of those who run it, as a bridge between the family and the public sphere, and policy that treats it as a community hub rather than a service point is likely to return its investment in the behavior and confidence of children. Future research should test the proposed model against direct observation of children and follow partnerships over time, in order to move from perceived mechanisms to demonstrated ones.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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