Reasons for Barries in Family-School Cooperation

Jiajia Li[1,a,*]

[1]*Department of Art, Wenzhou Kean University, Wenzhou, 325088, China*
a. lijiaj@kean.edu
*corresponding author

Abstract: The concept of family-school cooperation was proposed very early, and its importance has always been emphasized. However, due to the excessive acceleration of the life cycle and the extension of working hours, families have unilaterally delegated the responsibility for children's education to schools. This negative situation for student growth needs to be reversed. Families must realize that the role of the school is to complement the work initiated by the family, not to replace it. Schools also need to realize that without the cooperation of families, school functions and outcomes will be limited. However, awareness is not enough, it is necessary to know the causes of this phenomenon. Therefore, this paper conducted a systematic review of previously published research on the causes of barriers to family-school cooperation. Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence theory, the reasons for obstacles in family-school cooperation will be analyzed from different perspectives

Keywords: Family-school cooperation, Ecological Systems Theory, Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory, Barries, Reasons

1. Introduction

The concept of family-school cooperation can be traced back to the very early history of education. Many great educators have also expressed their affirmation of family-school cooperation. For example, American educator John Dewey claimed that families and schools should work closely together to support a child's education and development in his book "The School and Society" [1]. Ecological theories emphasize the interconnected characteristics and behaviors of families and schools [2]. Because they believe that the alignment of goals between teachers and parents is crucial for the optimal development of children, and this alignment can be best achieved through coordination, cooperation, and mutual support between teachers and parents. For a long time, in most theoretical teaching methods and practical teaching, promoting family-school cooperation has been established as an educational goal [3]. Because from an ecological perspective, parents and schools interact with each other so that valuable information, advice, and experiences have a more positive impact on children when they are continually shared between members of two or more environments. However, due to various factors, the implementation of family-school cooperation has not been very successful. There are several reasons for this phenomenon. For example, parents do not feel welcome or invited by the school, or lack of time leads to difficulty balancing work and family life [4]. It may also be that teachers think that a series of one-off activities such as supervising homework will be welcomed

by parents, but it is not [4]. All these problems lead to the fact that although family-school cooperation is frequently mentioned, it has not achieved breakthrough progress.

In the epidemic context, family-school cooperation has once again become a hot topic. A large number of research has proved that effective collaboration between families and schools is crucial for students, families, teachers, and schools. Epstein proposed overlapping spheres of influence theory. For students, family-school cooperation improves their academic performance and supports their learning interests, as well as improves their willingness to learn [5]. For families, family-school cooperation promotes strong parent-child relationships and helps parents to grow, as well as increases their self-esteem [5]. For teachers and schools, they will have higher enthusiasm for work and academic standards as well as gain the trust of parents [6]. Without proper communication and cooperation, differences between teachers and families can result in misunderstanding, alienation, and even conflict.

However, despite the recognized importance of family-school cooperation, numerous barriers hinder its successful implementation. The obstacles to family-school cooperation are caused by many reasons. The premise of overcoming these obstacles is to have a clear understanding of the causes of these obstacles. Therefore, this paper will explore the reasons for the obstacles in family-school cooperation based on the theoretical basis of Ecological Systems Theory and Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory.

2.   Reasons for Barriers In Family-School Cooperation

2.1.   Theoretical basis

2.1.1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory explores the dynamic interplay between individuals and their surroundings, highlighting the significance of the diverse ecological contexts in which individuals engage and function [7]. He divided the human environment into 5 different levels. Microsystems refer to the tangible environments in which individuals actively participate and directly experience [7]. The way these microsystems contribute to development varies depending on factors such as the individual's personal traits (such as age, gender, and abilities) and the physical and social contexts they encounter on a daily basis for long periods of time. The mesosystem is the relationship between microsystems [7]. The interaction between two microsystems can either be characterized by mutual support, leading to a reinforcing effect on the child, or by discordance, where there are significant discrepancies in expectations between the two systems. The exosystem encompasses microsystem settings where the focal individual is not directly involved but involves significant members of the individual's microsystem [7]. Macrosystems consist of broader attitudes, beliefs, and social ideals, which have further effects on children and their needs [7]. Lastly, the chronosystem refers to the progression of the entire system over time, encompassing the influence of historical events on individual development [7]. Each of these five environments plays a direct or indirect role in a child's development.

2.1.2. Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory

Epstein proposed the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which seeks to explain how families, schools, and communities collectively contribute to the educational and holistic growth of children. It acknowledges that certain practices within the three primary environments where students learn and develop - family, school, and community - are conducted independently, while others are executed collectively to impact children's growth and educational progress [8]. The internal models of overlapping spheres of influence provide a visual representation of the intricate and vital

interpersonal connections and influential dynamics that exist among individuals within the home, school, and community contexts [8]. These models illustrate the significance of relationships and patterns of influence within these environments, emphasizing their pivotal role in molding the progress of individuals, particularly children. [8]. Epstein believes that effective families and schools have overlapping common goals and missions when it comes to student education. As a result, their effects on students will intertwine and interact with each other. Family and school having a close relationship will promote the growth of students. On the contrary, if there is conflict and competition between family and school, the negative consequences can adversely affect students' development. In addition, students at the center of the theory are also crucial to the successful establishment of harmonious relationships between school and family [8]. Because students are the bridge between family and school, they can transfer information between family and school to promote their mutual understanding. Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence theory provides good basic knowledge and framework for family-school cooperation and provides guidance for analysts on the causes of barriers to family-school cooperation.

2.2. Analysed from The Perspective of Microsystem

The microsystem refers to the immediate surroundings and personal biological makeup of an individual. Therefore, the impact of Microsystems on children is often direct and profound. The effective cooperation between families and schools is contingent upon the essential elements within the microsystem, namely teachers, parents, and students. According to overlapping spheres of influence theory, the microsystem aspect can be analyzed by schools and teachers, parents, and students.

2.2.1. Teacher-Related Factors

Teachers are active initiators and participants in family-school cooperation. However, there are many reasons why teachers do not live up to this responsibility. The level of experience that teachers possess significantly influences the promotion of family-school cooperation. Because teachers who have limited work experience in schools tend to perceive themselves as less qualified, leading to increased insecurity and fear when it comes to communicating with parents of students [9]. This can lead teachers to be less willing to cooperate with parents and make parents feel unwelcome. Conversely, according to Galián's research, the majority of teachers expressed satisfaction with their efforts in fostering parental involvement in the school setting [3]. Another reason to note is the gender of the teacher. Machancoses draws attention to the phenomenon of education becoming feminized in the context of family and school, indicating that female teachers play a more prominent role in fostering collaboration between families and schools [10]. However, according to Galian, gender has no obvious impact on them when it comes to supporting family involvement [3].

2.2.2. Parent-Related Factors

Multiple factors can affect parental engagement in school's activities. According to Vurayai and Ndofirepi, the socioeconomic level of parents has a direct impact on parental involvement in school [11]. Similarly, Sebidie also points out that financial constraints were identified as the primary obstacle preventing parents from actively participating in school programs [12]. This is because financial limitations can restrict parents' ability to attend school events, provide necessary supplies or resources, or participate in activities that require financial contributions. Contrarily, Shaver and Walls found that the income level of parents does not play a role in determining their level of involvement [13]. Research findings consistently demonstrate that the educational background of parents is a significant determinant of the degree of their engagement with their children [14,15]. Parents who do

not have a college education often express a lack of knowledge regarding how to assist children's learning and a lack of confidence to contact school staff due to poor language skills and cultural differences [15].

In addition, the family structure also closely impacts parental involvement. The family structure includes many aspects such as family relationships, family size (number of children), and birth order. According to Xiong et al., children in single-parent families communicate less with their parents than in two-parent families [15]. Because marital conflict within the family not only directly affects students negatively but also diminishes the amount of time parents dedicate to their children, subsequently leading to a decrease in parental involvement [5]. In line with family relationships, family size can also have a huge impact on parents' involvement in school. Pavan and Starek both stated that in families with multiple children, parents tend to pay more attention to their eldest children and have a higher involvement [5,16]. Nevertheless, Xiong's et al. ideas are slightly different from theirs [15]. He demonstrated that in families with multiple children, parents are less involved in the daily life and school life of each child.

2.2.3. Student-Related Factors

The main body of family-school cooperation is family and school (teacher), but students also play an important role as a bridge between the two. Parents will determine the level of participation in school activities based on their child's age and gender. Numerous studies have consistently found a robust association between parental engagement in schools and students' age. Parents commonly exhibit greater levels of involvement. such as kindergarten, as they perceive a greater sense of necessity and importance in their involvement [17,18]. However, by middle school and high school, parents always feel that their children have become independent and need more freedom, so parents are involved less. Indeed, parental involvement holds significance even for older students. For children's gender, according to Carter and Wojtkiewicz, parents are more involved in their daughters' lives and studies because their daughters are more willing to share what happens at school with their parents so that their parents feel invited [19].

2.3. Analysed From The Perspective of Mesosystem

The mesosystem is concerned with the interconnections and interactions between various microsystems. It plays a significant role in influencing children by shaping the quality and exchange of information, and support among different microsystems.

2.3.1. Communication Between Teachers and Parents

Schools act as platforms that facilitate family-school cooperation. The extent to which schools prioritize and emphasize family-school cooperation directly influences the level of involvement between teachers and parents. However, not all schools prioritize the importance of family-school cooperation. According to Galián, public schools tend to encourage less family involvement compared to private schools [3]. This discrepancy may arise from the direct management of public schools by the national government, which imposes various constraints and limitations on schools, hindering their ability to prioritize partnerships with families. Moreover, this may also affect teachers' attitudes towards family-school cooperation.

Numerous studies have identified the absence of invitations and a lack of interest from teachers as the primary barriers to effective collaboration between families and schools [20]. Consequently, parents may refrain from communicating with teachers if they do not feel welcomed or invited by them. This creates a detrimental cycle where teachers do not perceive parental enthusiasm for participation, while parents do not feel welcomed by teachers. Such a vicious circle contributes to

conflicts and a lack of trust between the two parties. However, Galián's research argues that most teachers acknowledge their effective facilitation of family involvement in their schools [3]. This suggests that teachers have expressed their welcome and invitation to parents. Nevertheless, the overall impact of family-school cooperation falls short of expectations.

2.4.   Analysed from The Perspectiveof Exosystem

The exosystem is related to external environmental settings. In most cases, the effect on children is indirect. However, the exosystem can directly affect the functioning of the microsystem and mesosystem. Therefore, its impact on family-school cooperation cannot be underestimated.

2.4.1. School-Teacher Conflict

For a long time, family-school cooperation has been placed in an important position. Schools, teachers, and parents know its importance. However, family-school cooperation is not easy to carry out. Because there is a lot of theoretical knowledge and foundation behind it. Therefore, students are not the only learners in family-school cooperation, and teachers, as initiators of family-school cooperation, also need to learn how to properly carry out family-school cooperation [21]. Unfortunately, due to the lack of emphasis on family-school cooperation, teachers often lack relevant training opportunities [3]. However, relevant training is critical to the success of family-school partnerships. Let's take the way of family-school cooperation as an example. Some teachers will think that parents who come to school and spend an afternoon supervising homework are cooperating [22]. However, in fact, this way has no obvious positive impact on students. If teachers could be trained, they might learn the six different types of family-school collaboration identified by Epstein, depending on the intensity or degree of involvement [7]. In this way, teachers will design more efficient forms of family-school cooperation based on this theory.

2.4.2. Work-Family Conflict

In this fast-paced, high-intensity new world, parents have more to do than just stay at home and look after their children. They also work to provide financial support for their families. Work-family conflict arises when there is a mismatch or lack of harmony between the demands and expectations of work and family responsibilities [23]. One reason for work-family conflict is time constraints. Because it is difficult for parents to reconcile work and family life. Many studies have shown that parents' working hours have an impact on parents' participation in school activities [13,24]. Especially for low-income families, the pressures of life often compel parents to allocate more time and effort toward meeting their financial needs and obligations. As a result, they may have no option but to forego participation in school-related activities and courses. In addition to time constraints, work stress is also a factor. Beutell's research indicates that there is a direct correlation between high work pressure and the occurrence of work-family conflict [25]. Because it creates challenges for parents in meeting the demands of their family and fulfilling their work obligations, often resulting in changes to family plans. Such stress often results in parents not being in the mood to participate in family-school cooperation.

2.5.   Analysed from The Perspective of Macrosystem

The macrosystem encompasses the broader cultural and societal context It includes factors such as cultural background, values, customs, laws, beliefs, and social norms. These factors often have a profound and lasting impact on family-school cooperation, often in subtle ways.

2.5.1. National Policy

National policies attach great importance to educational reform and development and have formulated many relevant policies to promote reform and development in the education field. For example, in the 21st century, national and international legislation in the education field is established with the goal of ensuring high-quality education [3]. These laws aim to strengthen the position of teachers as advocates for excellent learning environments and as predictors of students' academic achievements [4]. In addition, in the European regulatory framework, students are given a central role; however, it is widely acknowledged that teachers have consistently held and will continue to hold a crucial and essential position in an effectively operating education system. [3]. However, it is clearly observed that the state does not emphasize parent involvement. Instead, the subject position is ceded to teachers and students. This may explain why public schools pay less attention to parent involvement as mentioned in the system mesosystem perspective. In addition to the education policy that has a direct impact, the 'three-child policy' proposed by the China on May 31, 2021, means that couples can have up to three children and enjoy parenting measures. It also has an indirect impact on the continued development of family-school cooperation [26]. Because this policy will change the family structure—increasing family size. According to the analysis from a microsystem perspective, it is clear that in families with a larger number of children, parents will more or less reduce the number of times they participate in school activities.

2.5.2. Racial and Ethnic Problem

In a culturally diverse society, it is increasingly common for students of different nationalities to attend the same school. Families of different nationalities may have different cultural values and beliefs, language and communication, and socioeconomic disparities. These variances have a significant impact on the level of collaboration between families and schools. Numerous studies suggest that parents who are foreign-born are less inclined to communicate with their adolescent children about school compared to parents who are native-born [27-29]. Nord and Griffin conducted research that uncovered a discrepancy in the extent of parental engagement in schools among Hispanic and Asian immigrant parents in comparison to native-born white parents [28]. Specifically, they found that Hispanic and Asian immigrant parents demonstrated lower rates of active involvement in their children's schools, such as volunteering, compared to native-born white parents. Surprisingly, research has revealed that immigrant parents, including those from Hispanic and Asian backgrounds, exhibit similar levels of attendance at parent-teacher conferences compared to native-born parents [28]. Carreon also pointed out that immigrant parents have limited participation or even do not know that they should be involved in school due to cultural challenges and language barriers [29]. Therefore, racial problems are also one of the stumbling blocks in the way of family-school cooperation.

3. Discussion

On the way to achieving family-school cooperation, although we acknowledge the significance and requirement of collaboration between families and schools, numerous challenges persist in implementing it. To overcome these obstacles, we must understand why they exist. Then, based on these specific reasons, overcome the obstacles one by one. Based on Ecological Systems Theory, this paper analyses the reasons from four perspectives.

The microsystem perspective emphasizes the intricate interplay among various factors related to teachers, parents, and students in the realm of family-school cooperation. For teachers, they feel scared and nervous when communicating with students' parents due to a lack of work experience. In addition, some male teachers may do not care about and are not very good at communicating with students' parents. For parents, due to their own financial level, they may not have time to participate

in school activities. At the same time, they also said that the different levels of education between themselves and their teachers made them afraid to communicate with them. What's more, the degree of parental involvement is influenced by the internal structure of the family as well. Parents in two-parent families and small families tend to be more involved in school affairs. Except for teachers and parents, students' biological makeup also affects family-school cooperation. Parents generally exhibit higher levels of involvement in student activities, particularly for their younger children and they show a greater inclination to participation specifically associated with their daughters. By understanding and addressing these factors, barriers to family-school collaboration can be removed as early as possible.

From the mesosystem perspective, it can be concluded that the willingness of schools and parents for family-school cooperation is not very high. They do not feel each other's invitation, leading to mutual distrust. However, some teachers also indicated that their efforts to promote family engagement had an overall impact that fell short of expectations. This means teachers need to further explore strategies that can advance family-school collaboration. What is more worth mentioning is that schools should also pay more attention to family-school cooperation and provide relevant training for teachers to provide teachers with a theoretical basis.

The exosystem sheds light on the external factors that impact family-school cooperation, such as school-teacher conflict and work-family conflict. By acknowledging the importance of teacher training in family-school partnerships, schools can bridge the gap between theory and practice, enabling teachers to implement effective collaboration strategies. Additionally, addressing work-family conflict requires schools to be flexible and accommodating in their approach, considering the time constraints and stress faced by parents.

The macrosystems perspective reveals the broader cultural and social factors that influence family-school cooperation. National policies and racial/ethnic disparities are two key factors in the macrosystem. National policies that prioritize teacher support and student-cantered education should also acknowledge the significance of parental involvement. Changes in family structure resulting from national policies also have an indirect impact on parental participation. Furthermore, racial and ethnic differences introduce distinct challenges to family-school collaboration, necessitating schools to adopt culturally sensitive approaches to address them.

4. Conclusion

In the development of cooperation between families and schools, whether at the national level, social level, or individual level, there are certain obstacles that prevent the development of family-school cooperation. Whether it is the state, society, school, or family, it is necessary to identify the causes of obstacles and take measures to overcome them. For example, the country can pay more attention to family participation when formulating policies; schools should also pay more attention to parents' participation when formulating activities; parents should also strive to balance work and family to give more attention to their children. Collaboration between families and schools will be better developed if barriers are recognized at all levels and steps are taken to address them.

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