

## TEACHERS AND PARENTS; FRIENDS AND FOES IN EFL LEARNING

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### Abstract

In this ever-changing world, EFL teachers are in continuous challenge to provide the best education for their students. Changes in social structure, economy and technology give rise to new roles with new standards of competence. Therefore, continuous efforts for professional development are obligatory to ensure that teachers can perform their duties in line with the demand of their clients. Most teachers realize that they are not the only actors in EFL education. Students' parents may also play a big role in their children's academic development by actively and routinely involving themselves in the process. When both school and home are supportive, students will be in correct atmosphere to maximize their potential in acquiring EFL. There are times, however, when school and parents are in different sides. Disagreement over teaching techniques, learning models, teaching materials, curriculum etc. may put teachers and parents in opposition which can be contra-productive to students' development. This paper discusses the problems that arise in the teachers-parents cooperation and the ways the two can work together for the sake of students' success. The data sources are EFL teachers and students parents to whom questionnaire and interview were given to obtain the data.

**Keywords:** Research teachers, parents, cooperation, opposition

### A. INTRODUCTION

In the era of technological advances with their impacts to the global cooperation, the need for quality English teaching is increasingly important. Teachers as the main agents in education are facing tougher challenges to achieve the raising standard of quality. Improvement should be done in qualification and practice, so every teacher should be engaged in self-development programs, and at the same time, do continuous efforts to develop his/her methods or techniques of teaching, learning materials and evaluation, all to produce students with more competitive English knowledge and skills. These tasks are not simple, surely, because teachers are bound with limitations: time, energy, school system, government policy etc. which hold their efforts to maximize students' potential.

Teachers do not need to work that hard, actually, should they realized there are people who can assist them, i.e. parents. While students take up a half of their active time at school, a half other is spent at home with their parents. If only there is strong cooperation between teachers and parents, English learning can be a continuous action which will give much better result. Henderson (in Bempechat, 2010) says that parents' involvement have positive impact on children's achievement. Parents who maintain frequent contact with school have higher achieving children than those who do not.

However, it sometimes happens that teachers and parents are in different sides. Misunderstanding and disagreement over teaching plan and practice in class may make parents stand in opposition with parents. Comments like "my kid's teacher's English is awful" or "my kid's teacher can't teach" are quite common among parents, especially those who are highly educated or highly skilled in English. On the other hand, teachers often accuse parents for 'stepping in my territory' or 'act like they can teach better than we'. This is pitiful because parents and teacher can actually work together as a team.

This paper will discuss what common problems between parents and teachers in English learning, and what they can do to build and maintain cooperation for the sake of the students' success in learning English.

## B. METHOD

This study is descriptive qualitative which attempts at explaining problems concerning with parents-teachers relationship in EFL. The data sources are two groups of respondents, i.e. ten parents and ten English teachers. The parents have various academic backgrounds, i.e. graduate and post-graduate degrees, and professions. All of them have children at elementary level. The second group is EFL teachers of elementary school who have been teaching for at least 5 years.

The data are collected from the respondents using interview. A set of questions are prepared mostly concerning with the opposition between parents and teachers, and ideas that can improve cooperation between them.

## C. DISCUSSIONS

The interview to parents as respondents revealed their most complaints about teachers are:

**Table 1. Parents' Complaints on Teachers**

No.	Complaints
1	Teacher lacks of English skill
2	Teacher is not sensitive to kids' level of ability
3	Teacher does not teach properly
4	Teacher rarely involves parents in learning process
5	Teacher rarely reports the kids' progress
6	Teacher ignored parents' suggestion or criticism

Respondents said that what concerns them most is teacher's lack of English skill. They said teachers should be models for students on good English and set standards. This will be impossible if the teachers themselves have poor English. Teachers' incompetence may go undetected for years by students, but well-educated parents will notice it immediately. One respondent said that her child's English teacher made grammatical mistakes in speaking, explaining rules, giving examples and answering student's questions. This incompetence may extend to learning evaluation in which he/she made wrong test items or answers. Another respondent, who happened to be an English instructor at university level, complained about teacher's poor pronunciation skill.

*"One day my son wrongly uttered a word which I directly corrected. The next day he came back from school and said that his teacher told him that his pronunciation was correct, and that mine was wrong. My son believed his teacher more, of course."*(P04)

When asked for possible cause, the respondents said that some teachers may be 'not well-trained', 'not-talented' or 'not self-learning type'. They suspected that the teachers may have no academic background in English teaching, and even if so, perform badly in English but are confident enough to teach students of lower educational level.

Another complaint is that some teachers fail to understand students' different ability and characters. According to parents, the tasks given to their children are often too difficult to accomplish. In comparison, in their days as students, English was more simple, yet capable of grooming their interest and skills.

*"English today is more and more difficult. My son at elementary school got tests which in my day was equal to senior high's."*(P01)

Another respondent blamed on the raising standard of Indonesian English test. Teachers are forced to make their students pass the national exam with high scores and in the process they often ignore students' individual ability to learn. Parents wish teachers to be more sensitive with their students' ability to absorb the lesson and be willing to make any necessary adaptation which fit national standards.

Complaints also arise over the teachers' method of teaching. Some respondents who observe their children's classes said that sometimes the teachers do not seem to know what to do best with the teaching material. Their performances in class are deemed boring, not motivational or unsupportive to the learning process. One respondent said the English teacher in her daughter's class did not explain the point clearly and rarely used fun techniques when possible.

Next, the respondents say the teachers rarely report their children's progress in English. Some of the respondents say they are often surprised with their children's achievement in English class, either good or bad.

*"I wish the teacher give us the progress report of our child, or at least tell us about it. Therefore we have enough time to do something with our children's English before examination day."* (P03)

The respondents also said that their children's teachers rarely ask them to be involved in the learning process, even when they ask for it. One admitted she is not acknowledged with the teaching plan, progress report, evaluation result, etc. Sometimes she, who is academically trained in English, finds errors in English material and exam items. However, her offer to help the teacher gets no response.

On the other hand, teachers also have complaints on the parents of their students, which can be summed up in six points:

Table 2. Teacher's Complaint on Parents

No.	Complaints
1	Parent interferes teacher's job
2	Parent blames teacher for bad grade
3	Parent gives all responsibility to teacher
4	Parent is unwilling to help
5	Parent is not supportive to English learning
6	Parent embarrasses teacher

Teachers say that what they mind the most is when parents intervene their job without their consent. One respondent in particular says he really dislikes the experience.

*"Once I taught a child privately in his home with his mother watching us for the entire time. After we finished the lesson, the mother told me to do 'this and that' as a 'better way' to teach his son. I quitted right away."* (T01)

For most of the respondents, teacher-parent relationship should be built on trust. When parents tells teachers what to do, it means they are not confident with the teachers' ability hence the contract is invalid. Being someone who had been teaching English for years, the respondent said that the intervention is a breach on his right and dignity as a professional.

Teachers also say that parents often blame them for the children's bad grade. When the child shows poor performance or understanding, they quickly judge that it is because of bad teaching.

*"Parents can be quite judgmental. They do not realize that teachers are constantly facing different situations and pressure. There is big number of students with various levels of ability, while on the other hand the government has set the standard of achievement."* (T03)

Respondents said that they want parents to understand the complexity behind the learning process in class and be forgiving with imperfection happens on the way. They also feel that some parents expect too much from them in terms of students' behavior. Children can be different pupils at school. Parents should know that what works on their children at home may not work well in English class. Children who are active at home may be passive at school; those who are calm can turn to be disruptive once they stay with their friends. again in the studies is that relationships are key.

While parents say that they are willing to help, most teacher-respondents said the opposite. They said that parents rarely get themselves involved especially when it comes to learning English. This happens in particular among parents who are not highly educated or not well-versed in English.

*"At school, teachers are responsible for the students' English performance. But when my student's English is so poor I can't help thinking what this kid has been doing at home or what his/her parents have contributed to this."* (T09)

Teachers remind that school comprises just a half of the students' improvement in English, while another half is on their parents'. Teachers can not be held responsible for the time span when children are outside the class. Parents' attitude to English is also important factor, said the teachers. If parents show aversion to English or act as if it is a difficult subject, their children will be more likely to do the same.



There seems to be some contradiction between teachers and parents, so how to make these work? Cross-check between two sides reveals some findings:

### **1. Teachers do understand the importance of having good ability in English**

When asked whether teachers should meet standard of qualification at any level of English teaching, both groups of respondent said surely they should. Teachers are aware that they are posing themselves as a model for English practice in class; therefore mastery in English is a must. They said that teachers, like any other profession, fall into two categories i.e. those who are qualified, and those who are not. There are teachers who keep on learning to develop their skill and behave positively to input from parents or even students, and there are those who do little to their own improvement and avoid criticism. Anyone dares to take teaching as their job should make him/herself qualified and engaged in life-long learning for self development.

Then, why some teachers said they welcome criticism, while others said they dislike it? It seems that teachers' responses toward criticism also depend on the way it is delivered. The respondents are opposing judgmental comments from parents who behave like 'they know everything' and show disrespect to teachers as individuals or professionals. Teachers also mind with parents who criticize them before the students eyes, or who tell students negative comments on the teachers.

### **2. Teachers want parents to assist them in English learning**

Despite the fact that some teachers do not actively involve parents in the learning process, most of them actually expect that parents would be willing to help. However, in their opinion the extent of the assistance should be limited, especially when it comes to learning process at school. Parents may suggest some references for teaching material in addition to the one used by teachers, but should not get involved in making test instruments, as it will break the test's confidentiality. Patrikakou (2010) said parent roles must expand in other areas such as (a) decision making at school or the district; (b) collaborating with the community to offer additional resources and support to families and students; and (c) establishing new learning opportunities, such as interactive homework assignments and classroom presentations, to enhance involvement in both school and at home.

Therefore, how can parents assist teachers? Both groups of respondents suggested ways which they can work together:

#### **a. Teachers share the teaching material or teaching plan with parents**

One way to make parents involved in English learning is providing them with lesson plan or teaching materials. Once parents get the lesson plan, they can think of strategies to cope with the teaching objectives of each session. Teachers can also share some of teaching material or references they use in class. To avoid misunderstanding, it is necessary to tell parents that the initiative to deliver the lesson plan/material to parents is just to keep them informed with learning topics and activities in English class. The decision to actively involve in their children's learning still belongs to parents, as some of them may have limited skill or time.

This sharing will also help parents to know the responsibility of teachers' in coping with curriculum decided by the school or government, hence it increase their understanding of the problems teachers deal in class.

#### **b. Teachers can share progress report to parents**

Most parents will welcome reports on their children's progress in class. It is not easy for teachers to write such note for each student because it takes time and they do not usually evaluate the students' progress every meeting. However, it is possible to do daily observation on students' individual responses during the class as the base of their reports, as an alternative to periodical quiz. The report may include student's scores, strength and weakness in learning, attitude in class, what should be improved, etc. It is important that the report should be received by parents on regular basis to give parents chance to do something in response before examination day.

#### **c. Parents can be teachers' assistants at home**

Parents' involvement in English learning can extend to positioning themselves as teachers' assistants outside the class. There are some advantages of this i.e.

##### **1) Children can learn English in real setting**

Experts say that language is better learned in context. This makes learning at home very effective to improve English skill. Parents can use different expressions, i.e.

instructions like “*Could you push that ON button?*”, or questions like “Which shirt do you like, the blue one or the red one?” Such real uses of language make words and structures more easily understood and stay longer in children’s memory. This is also limitless in practice, since every moment and action at home can actually be a vehicle to improve children’s English.

2) Children get more attention and practice

In class, teachers have limited time to treat and monitor the students individually. They are not always aware of each student’s comprehension, responses, or involvement during class activities. This will be different with home learning when children can practice more intensively under full guidance of their parents.

3) Parents can build closeness with their children

Every parent knows that communicating with children can improve the bond between them. Home learning gives parents chance to make up their absence on busy days, and children can get more attention important for their psychological development. This will improve cooperation between parents and children in other aspects of life. Patrikakou (2010) said parents who hold high expectations for their teens, communicate their expectations clearly, and encourage their adolescents to work hard in order to attain them can make a difference in students’ success. Students whose parents stayed well informed and held high expectations for them had higher grades, completed more academic credits, and were more likely to plan for college.

Parents can share positive values

English lesson at home can be used to groom good attitude and behavior. For instance, parents can teach children how to say thanks in English, how to make polite request, how to greet people, etc.

4) Parents can motivate children

Parents’ involvement can get the children into thinking that English is a part of their life, and that their parents share the same interest. As children take their parents as models, they will try to embrace their parents’ attitude towards the language.

5) Parents can adapt the lesson to children’s need

At home children can learn English in more comfortable atmosphere since there are fewer restrictions in time, material, and media. As parents know their children very well, they will know what way works and what does not. Parents can decide to start the lesson when the children are at their best, and stop when they look tired. This allows a variety of techniques or media which parents can use inside the children’s comfort zone.

Parents and teachers are working in different ways. At school, teachers develop students’ English skills in social setting, with themselves as the managers and the other students as peers or partners of learning. There are definite rules and consequences, reward and punishment, discipline, assessment, competitiveness etc. at school that give students an early sense of professionalism in learning. At home, parents can provide more comfortable atmosphere so children can learn English with more flexibility in time, medium and method, but at the same time get more guidance and chance to practice. These two situations are complementary to each other and give balance to the learning process.

So, how can teachers and parents work together as partners? Most problems of teachers-parents above seem to root from the lack of communication between them. Therefore it is necessary for teachers and parents to develop a system way where they can express their thought and opinion in the most comfortable mode within the atmosphere of respect. Patrikakou (2010) said An important ingredient to parent involvement is communication between parents and teachers. Most parents report that they would like to know what their children are learning at school and how they can be involved in their education. Henderson (2002) also said any attempt to form genuine collaborations among school staff, parents, and community members must start with building relationships of respect. The building of relationships must be intentional and consistent. When outreach efforts reflect a sincere desire to engage parents and community members as partners in children’s education, the studies show that they respond positively.

Conversations inside or outside school between teachers and parents can be a great way to communicate the problems and solutions in English learning. However, when the chance

of meeting is scarce, teachers can share copies or notes of materials, progress reports, instructions etc. The availability of modern tools like mobile phones also gives way to easy and affordable communication with much comfort in time and space.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Learning English at school and at home each has advantages and disadvantages. It is a good idea if both of them co-exist as complements for the best result. Teachers and parents should be partners, not enemies, in students' English learning. This can be achieved by improving communication and cooperation between them. Sharing problems and solutions, exchanging progress reports, sharing materials etc. can be done for the betterment of the students.

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