# Psychological Achievements

## Mothers' Lived Experience of Cooperating with Teachers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Parvaneh Valavi[1] , Ashraf Bland Shushtari[2], Masoud Safaei Moghadam[3]

1- Associate Professor, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran.
2- Master student of History and Philosophy of Education, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran
3- Professor, Department of Educational Sciences, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran.

## Article Info

## Abstract

***Aim:***. The purpose of this study is to investigate mothers' experiences of collaborating with primary school teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

***Methods:*** This research employs a qualitative approach using a phenol-menological method. The study population consists of mothers of elementary school students from the academic year 2013-2014. Sampling was purposive and included mothers who expressed their willingness to participate in interviews. Through semi-structured interviews and data saturation, a final sample size of 25 participants was determined. The interview data was analyzed using Paul Ricoeur's three-step method, which includes raw reading (simple comprehension), structural analysis, and total interpretation.

***Results:*** The findings of the research reveal three main themes and seven sub-themes. The main themes identified are learning facilitation, maternal supportive tasks, and supportive feedback.

***Conclusion:*** The cooperation between mothers and teachers has led to enhanced communication and empathy, allowing mothers to gain insight into the complexities of teachers' jobs and the challenges they face. Additionally, a mother serves as the first teacher and role model for her child. Numerous studies indicate that effective communication between parents (especially mothers) and teachers positively impacts students' academic performance. Establishing communication has helped mothers stay informed about their children's classroom and school-related issues, thereby strengthening and improving their education. Another key finding is the importance of collaborative feedback. Prior to the pandemic, families played a limited role in their children's education, as most learning and teaching activities occurred within the school. However, with the shift to online learning due to the pandemic, the roles of parents and mothers became significantly more prominent, transforming them into "teaching assistants." This new role requires acquiring additional skills and competencies, and the more effectively this role is carried out, the higher the quality of the educational process will be.

## 1. Introduction

The transformation of educational programs in schools largely relies on the alignment between the value systems of families and schools, as well as the mental preparedness and willingness of parents to collaborate with school planners and teachers. If parents recognize the importance of their role in their children's upbringing and learn effective methods to support them, many behavioral and emotional issues can be prevented (Kakia, 2010). Since the family serves as the primary center for the education, growth, and development of a child's personality, and the school is the foremost official organization responsible for educating future generations, these two institutions need to coordinate their goals, content, and educational methods. One effective way to achieve this coordination is through timely and effective communication between home and school—specifically, between parents and teachers. Cooperation has historically enhanced social life, reduced the costs associated with achieving goals, and contributed to a more pleasant and comfortable existence. In particular, parental involvement in school matters enriches the spiritual, scientific, educational, and financial resources of the community in support of schools. Parents can assist in their children's education in various ways, such as understanding their psychological traits, identifying educational deficiencies, participating in the planning and implementation of educational programs, and addressing behavioral issues. In essence, parental presence in schools and their relationship with teachers create opportunities for better education and more effective child-rearing (Dehghan & Sarajian, 2017). Moreover, the principal plays a crucial role in fostering parental cooperation, acting as a liaison between the school and the community (Assare, 2012). Across all countries, most parents, regardless of their social and cultural backgrounds, are interested in their children's education and aspire for them to succeed academically. They often strive to provide the necessary resources for their children's educational success. In developing countries, parents view education as a pathway for their children to acquire better knowledge, skills, and eventually attain a higher socio-economic status (Hiatt-Michel, 2005). As parents are the closest individuals to students and are privy to their positive and negative experiences, they are the most valuable stakeholders who should actively participate in school affairs. Stern (2003) emphasizes that parental involvement in schools is an extension of the responsibility they entrust to teachers. Consequently, educational systems worldwide facilitate the continued educational role of families alongside formal education (Mazaheri et al., 2017). This partnership between families and schools fosters a sense of shared responsibility and collaboration in educating children (Jaspen, 2012). Experts agree that the interaction between parents, school administrators, and teachers significantly aids in implementing school strategies. Parental involvement has a positive impact on children's decision-making, learning, and school activities (Vahedi, 2010). Various factors influence parental participation, including social concepts, the school environment, and individual circumstances. Despite the necessity for interaction between family and school, conflicts often arise due to differing roles and responsibilities (Shirbeigi et al., 2015). In developed countries, cooperation between home and school has become more harmonious, allowing both institutions to fulfill their common responsibility in raising children through mutual understanding and collaboration (Gohari et al., 2015). In the Iranian educational system, parental involvement often falls short of expectations. Some parents believe that the responsibility of educating children rests solely

with schools and, upon observing any abnormal behavior, tend to blame teachers and school officials. However, today it is increasingly recognized that serious collaboration between families and schools is essential for a child's educational success. Parental cooperation in education encompasses a range of behaviors that directly or indirectly influence children's cognitive development and the overall success of educational institutions. The involvement of parents, especially mothers, plays a vital role in facilitating this process.

In December 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged as a significant global health threat. Numerous organizations, including the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, have developed strategies to combat the spread of COVID-19 worldwide (Molaei Amjaz and Farnam, 2023). The rapid spread of the coronavirus led to widespread fear and panic globally (Bagheri-Sheikhangfasheh et al., 2022). Consequently, educational systems worldwide implemented measures to combat the virus. During the Corona pandemic, in-person education became impossible, leading to a shift to virtual learning for the first time. Given the age of elementary school students, it was essential for parents to collaborate with teachers. As a result, many parents, particularly mothers, attended virtual classes alongside their children and took an active role in enhancing their learning experience. In other words, During the COVID-19 pandemic, parents became more involved with schools and teachers than ever before. The majority of parents took on increased responsibility for their children's education (Garbeh et al., 2020). In addition to acting as educators, which was a crucial factor in their children's learning (Fantnel-Treschak, 2021), parents supported their children's virtual education and helped them use technology to ensure continued learning despite school closures (Fantnel-Treschak, 2021). Long-term research has demonstrated that parental involvement in their children's education positively impacts their academic performance and social-emotional development (Barger et al., 2019; Bonk et al., 2018). In the context of distance education, parental support has proven to play a crucial role in the success of learners in virtual learning environments (Feng and Cavanaugh, 2011).

Numerous studies indicate that parental involvement plays a crucial role in students' academic success (Salehi et al., 2019). This involvement becomes even more significant during the COVID-19 pandemic, as education shifts to a virtual format. During this time, teachers and students are not physically present in schools, and students are at home with their parents while engaging in online learning.

## 2. Objectives
The current study aimed to explore mothers' experiences collaborating with teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 3. Methods
### 3.1. Sample and Procedure
The research method employed in this study is interpretive phenomenology. This qualitative research was conducted according to Van Manen's (1997) interpretive phenomenology framework. Van Manen defines hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology as a systematic approach to studying and interpreting a phenomenon. Unlike other methods, interpretive phenomenology not only describes lived experiences

related to specific phenomena but also examines these experiences within the context of people's daily lives. In interpretive phenomenology, the emphasis is on understanding and interpretation rather than merely describing phenomena or experiences (Imanzadeh & Selahshuri, 2011). This method provides rich information and deep insights into the lived experiences of participants, moving beyond superficial analysis. Van Manen (1997) suggests that interpretive phenomenology offers a structured approach to examining and interpreting phenomena, enabling researchers to gain a deeper understanding of lived experiences through the interpretive process. Regarding the target population and sampling method, the statistical population for this research consisted of all mothers of elementary school students in Ahvaz city during the academic year 2019-2020. The sampling method used was purposive sampling. This approach involved selecting mothers of elementary school students who expressed a willingness to participate in the interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted until data saturation was achieved, ultimately resulting in a final sample size of 25 participants.

### 3.2. Research Tools

The present research utilized a semi-structured interview as its primary tool. The interview included questions such as: What does cooperation mean to you? What motivates you to cooperate with teachers? What are your feelings and experiences regarding cooperation with teachers? Prior to each interview, the researcher confirmed the level of preparation and willingness of each participant. The objectives of the research were explained, confidentiality was assured, and permission was obtained from the participants before presenting the questions. During the interviews, the discussions were fully recorded and later transcribed with each participant's consent. For some participants who preferred not to be recorded, the interviews were conducted in written form. Each interview lasted between 35 and 60 minutes, depending on the depth of the topic discussed and the participant's willingness to continue. To ensure the validity of the research results, the following steps were taken: 1) Van Manen's six-step model was adhered to; 2) After analyzing the data, any ambiguous items were discussed with participants, and clarifications were added or incorrect items were removed as necessary; 3) The guidance and supervision of advisors and supervisors were sought, and modifications were made to enhance the precision of the content presented; 4) To uphold the principle of data verifiability, efforts were made to eliminate bias during the interviewing and data extraction processes.

### 3.3. Ethical Considerations

To uphold ethical considerations for the study participants, we clearly explained the purpose of the research, the research method, and the benefits of participation. We provided all necessary information regarding the study and obtained the participants' consent and willingness to be interviewed voluntarily. Furthermore, participants were assured that their information would be kept confidential and that the research results would be published without revealing their identities. To maintain anonymity, we replaced participants' names with numbers, and during the data analysis and reporting of results, we referred only to these numbers.

## 3.4. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, we employed the six-step thematic analysis method based on Van Manen's interpretive phenomenology approach. Van Manen recommends six overlapping and dynamic activities to guide hermeneutic phenomenological research. These activities provide a framework for reflecting on and interpreting the studied experience (Van Manen, 1990). Following this six-step methodology enables researchers to implement the research method grounded in the philosophical foundations of the study. The six steps are as follows:

1. Immersion: Organizing the data set in text form and providing a preliminary interpretation to facilitate coding. 2. Understanding: Identifying primary constructs derived from participants' perspectives and coding the data. 3. Abstraction: Recognizing secondary constructions (the researcher's interpretations) and classifying them into relevant subjects. 4. Composition and Formation of Topics: Grouping sub-topics into main themes, expanding those themes, and comparing them among scientific sub-topics. 5. Clarification and Delineation of Phenomena: Connecting research backgrounds to the identified issues and reconstructing interpretations into narrative form. 6. Consolidation and Criticism: Critically evaluating the topics both internally and externally, and reporting the final interpretations of the research findings.

## 4. Results

3 main themes and 7 secondary themes were extracted from the data, which can depict mothers' experiences of cooperating with teachers. The main themes are: facilitating learning, mother's supportive tasks and supportive feedback, which are mentioned in Table 1 and are discussed below:

Table 1. The main and sub-themes obtained from the data analysis

| main themes | Sub- themes |
|---|---|
| Facilitate learning | Helping students learn |
| | Helping the teacher to communicate with the children |
| Mother's supportive duties | Communication with teacher and school |
| | Follow up on academic status |
| | Participation in students' assignments |
| Helpful feedback | The growth of creativity |
| | Flexibility and freedom of action of students |

## 4.1. The first main theme

facilitating learning, this theme includes the sub-themes of helping students learn, helping the teacher communicate with students.

## 4.1.1. The first sub-theme: helping students learn

The analysis of the statements of the interviewees indicates that the cooperation of mothers in educating their children in the era of Corona and in a virtual way is very important. One of the cases of mothers' cooperation with teachers is to create a suitable learning environment and help in the education and teaching of students. Interviewee 14: *"In order to help my child learn through virtual space, before the teacher starts the lesson, I read the contents of that lesson myself so that I can help my child more easily during the lesson."* Interviewee 18: *"I always take the time to help my child so that if he does not know a*

*subject, I will teach him and help him learn."* Interviewee 19: *"After finishing the virtual class, I review the lessons with my child again and explain to him the issues that the teacher raised and he did not understand based on what the teacher said."*

### 4.1.2. The second sub-theme: helping the teacher to communicate with students

First of all, teachers should be aware of the student's personality traits, such as mental and temperamental traits that are related to the student's education, in order to perform the appropriate behavior according to the student's personality traits and to the development of personality and Help him morally. The analysis of interviewees' statements indicates that cooperation with teachers means helping the teacher to communicate with their children. Interviewee 4: *"Because the teachers should know the moral characteristics of my child so that they can communicate with him better."* Therefore, I *always try to give them the necessary information so that they can make the best decision regarding the education of my child."*

Interviewee 15: *"I was always in contact with my child's teachers and I talk to them about my child's personality and temperamental characteristics, such as his introversion and quietness."* I think that telling these issues will help teachers in how they deal with them and also in using the appropriate teaching method."*

### 4.2. The second main theme: Mother's supportive duties

This theme includes the sub-themes of continuous communication with the teacher and the school, follow-up of the student's academic status and participation in the students' homework.

### 4.2.1. The first sub-theme: continuous communication with the teacher and the school

The continuous relationship between parents and the educational staff can help to create a favorable relationship between home and school. The analysis of the statements of the interviewees indicates that mothers' cooperation in education is done through continuous communication with the teacher and the school. Interviewee 14: *"I am always in contact with the teacher, principal, and school counselor for my child's education and I try to participate in solving my child's curricular and non-curricular issues through continuous communication with them."* Interviewee 1: *"When my child is weak in a lesson and cannot do his homework correctly, I call his teacher, consult him and get the necessary guidance."*

### 4.2.2. The second sub-theme: follow-up on academic status

The relationship between parents and the teaching staff can have a significant effect on the motivation and academic status of students. Interviewee 18: *"When the teacher warns me that your child has dropped in terms of education and learning or says that he should try harder, I try to be more helpful and supportive than before and more persistent in doing homework. And I will teach him".*

Interviewee 6: "*I always follow my child's lessons and I am with her from the virtual start of the class until the end and I guide her where necessary and if she does not understand something, I immediately send a message to the teacher to repeat some material if possible. explain*".

### 4.2.3. The third sub-theme: participation in students' assignments

The cooperation of mothers with teachers at home has led to more interactions between children and their parents and has caused more parents to monitor the homework and educational activities of students. Interviewee 17: *"The virtualization of education and teaching has increased parents' monitoring of how students are taught and learned." Also, parents, especially mothers, are more involved in getting their children's homework. Because if there is no participation and supervision, the children cannot handle their homework on their own."*

Interviewee 20: *"In this era of Corona when education is done virtually, I am always in contact with my child's teacher and based on his emphasis on completing the curriculum on time and correctly, I try to follow up on most of the curriculum issues and I will monitor and participate in the correct performance of his tasks. "*

### 4.3. The third main theme: collaborative feedback

This theme includes the sub-themes of developing students' creativity, flexibility and freedom of action.

### 4.3.1. The first sub-theme: the growth of creativity

Virtual education and the interaction of mothers with teachers has caused innovative and creative ideas to be given to the teacher by the mothers, and also the children themselves do creative things in some ways. Interviewee 6: *"Corona period has made students' ideas and creativity grow. For example, in lessons such as crafts and science, my child does creative and new things that surprise me."* Interviewee 10: "*This type of education and the interaction of the children's parents with the teachers has made us take initiative and creativity, and sometimes the parents have given interesting ideas to the teacher, and also the children themselves have done creative things in some ways and They come up with interesting activities in the field of classroom and laboratory work.* "

### 4.3.2. The second sub-theme: flexibility and freedom of action of students

Online education gives the opportunity to students to study wherever and whenever it suits them. Interviewee 9: "*During this period of Corona, children have more freedom of action and the teacher allows them to do their work in any way they want in class exercises such as science experiments and send them to their class.*" Interviewee 11: "*Because education is done on the phone and does not require a school space, and my child was interested in studying outdoors, I always took him to an open space like a park whenever possible.*"

### 5. Discussion

The emergence and relentless spread of the Coronavirus across the globe presented an unprecedented challenge to nations worldwide, including our own. Among the myriad issues that arose during this tumultuous period, one of the most pressing was the disruption of education. To confront this formidable crisis, the National Headquarters for Combating Corona was established, tasked with orchestrating decisions to manage the pandemic effectively. One of the pivotal decisions made by this headquarters, mirroring actions taken by many countries, was the implementation of a social distancing policy,

which necessitated the temporary and widespread closure of educational institutions—from schools to universities. However, this directive did not herald a complete cessation of educational activities. Schools were deep into the academic year, while universities were embarking on the latter half of their curriculum. In response to these challenges, the Ministries of Science, Research and Technology, Education, and Health and Medical Sciences collaboratively resolved to transition to virtual education. They recognized the merits of leveraging social networks and digital platforms as a pragmatic solution. Consequently, traditional face-to-face instruction evolved into non-traditional learning modalities for students across all levels. The focus of the present study was to explore the lived experiences of mothers collaborating with primary school teachers in Ahvaz during the Corona era. Employing a phenomenological research method, the study was grounded in interviews that yielded rich data, eventually analyzed through Van Manen's six-step method. This rigorous process revealed three prominent themes and seven sub-themes, aligning consistently with findings from previous research conducted by notable scholars such as Dehghan & Serajian (2017), Assare (2012), Hiatt-Michel (2005), Garbe et al. (2020), Fontenelle - Tereshchuk (2021), Hasler Water & Leong (2014), Barger et al. (2019), Boonk et al. (2018), Feng & Cavanaugh, (2011), Salehi et al. (2019) and Liu et al. (2010) Jaspen (2012), Vahedi (2010), Lawson (2003) and Patal et al. (2008) Is aligned and consistent.

The insights gleaned from this research illuminated a critical finding: mothers' collaboration with teachers was predominantly driven by their commitment to facilitating their children's learning. Learning, an inherently complex process, is influenced by a myriad of variables, each interlinked and affecting one another. It is not merely an individual endeavor; rather, it unfolds within the larger context of classrooms, schools, and society. In this intricate web, teachers play a vital role as "mediators," guiding students through the myriad learning variables present both inside and outside the academic environment. Throughout the Corona era, as education shifted to virtual platforms, mothers emerged as essential facilitators of their children's learning. Their active involvement was crucial—without their support, the educational process would have encountered significant obstacles. This underscores the importance of fostering a dynamic interaction between parents and teachers, as cooperation and alignment between these two pillars are vital for the effective education and nurturing of children, a view supported by Hasani & Jahandideh (2015).

## 6. Limitation and Recommendation

1. The research method is phenomenological, which typically relies on small and limited samples. As a result, the findings may be partial and difficult to generalize to larger populations. 2. The phenomenological research method primarily focuses on gaining a deep understanding of individual experiences. However, it may not adequately consider various social, cultural, or economic factors that can influence those experiences. 3. The research population was limited to elementary schools and cannot be generalized to secondary schools.

Based on the findings and results of the article "Mothers' Experience of Helping Teachers During the Corona Pandemic," several suggestions are made to enhance the education system and promote ongoing collaboration between parents and teachers. 1. Programs should be designed to equip parents, especially mothers, with the skills necessary to

effectively support their children's learning processes. 2. Educational institutions should establish appropriate virtual infrastructures that provide access to digital tools and essential technologies, such as online classes with interactive features. 3. Schools need to work closely with families to identify the most effective learning methods, ensuring continuous interaction between parents and teachers to sustain an effective learning environment. 4- Holding regular meetings between teachers and mothers to exchange information about students' academic problems and methods of improving them. 5- Providing solutions to encourage parents to actively monitor their children's homework and academic status. 6- Schools and teachers should encourage parents to participate directly in educational matters, including advising on academic planning, by creating tangible opportunities. 7- Designing creative educational activities that foster students' ideas and innovation, and ensuring that parents are continuously involved in this process. 8- Developing blended learning styles (face-to-face and virtual) that give students more freedom to choose where and when to learn.

## 7. Conclusion

One of the findings from the research indicates that collaboration between mothers and teachers has fostered better communication and empathy, allowing mothers to understand the complexities of teachers' jobs as well as the challenges and issues they face. Shahpanah et al. (2017) argue that traditional teaching methods are no longer sufficient for educating students; instead, new and modern teaching approaches—such as online education and parental involvement at home—can significantly enhance student learning. Another key finding from the research highlights that a mother is often the first teacher and role model in a child's life. There is substantial evidence that strong communication between parents (especially mothers) and teachers positively impacts students' academic performance. By establishing open lines of communication, mothers become more informed about their children's classroom experiences and school-related issues, which in turn strengthens and improves their education. Additionally, the research emphasizes the importance of collaborative feedback. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, families had a limited role in their children's education, as most learning activities occurred within the school environment. However, with the transition to online learning and remote education, the role of parents— especially mothers—has become much more significant, effectively turning them into "teaching assistants." This new role requires parents to acquire new skills and competencies. The more effectively parents can fulfill this role, the higher the quality of the educational process will be.

## 8. Author Contributions

In the present study; the research design, the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation of the findings, was done by all researchers.

## 9. Acknowledgment

## 10. Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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