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Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Ministry of Education

Afghan Children Read

Challenges and Contradictions in Parental Involvement in Early Literacy Development: A Study in Nangarhar and Kandahar, Afghanistan

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Abbreviations

ACR	Afghan Children Read
CBE	Community Based Education
DED	District Education Department
DSMS	Directorate of Social Mobilization and School Shura
EGR	Early Grade Reading
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
KAP	Knowledge, Attitude and Practice
KII	Key Informant Interview
MoE	Ministry of Education
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
PED	Provincial Education Department
RERA	Rapid Education Risk Analysis
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
SMS	School Management Shura
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Challenges and Contradictions in Parental Involvement in Early Literacy Development: A Study in Nangarhar and Kandahar, Afghanistan

Abstract

This study was conducted with eighteen (18) third grade school children (boys and girls) along with their parents, teachers, school principal, and school Management shuras (SMSs) in four, mostly rural, school communities in the Jalalabad district of Nangarhar province, and the Daman district of Kandahar province. This study is an effort to understand parental involvement in their children's learning in the Afghan context while focusing on how such involvement intersects with early literacy development.

It looks at three key elements of parental involvement: motives, perceptions, and strategies, while focusing on both structure and agency to understand the complex context impacting parental involvement in the early literacy development of their children. Under the post-conflict circumstances of Afghanistan, schooling and education service delivery involves more actors and structures that shape the everyday interactions between schools and communities impacting the role of parents. This study explored multiple levels within the household, the community and the school; the boundaries between these levels; the interaction between actors; and the structures and surrounding post-conflict situation shaping and complicating such boundaries and interactions.

Parents, in the context of this study, generally understand the value of their children's education and what it means for their future and wellbeing. Conflict, insecurity, illiteracy, and poverty cripple parents' capacity to turn this understanding and their aspirations for their children's education into actual strategies. Gender politics intersectionality with parental involvement in early learning in the two provinces shows the ambivalence of parents and other stakeholders between, the patriarchal social structures that are rooted in a harsh rural life, and the growing awareness about girls' education as a result of the tireless efforts of MOE and the donor community over the past two decades. Despite the establishment of the SMS structure to ensure parental involvement and improve school governance, the SMS role within the school is scrutinized and limited by education authorities to access related efforts and infrastructure improvement. Student access issues such as enrollment, absenteeism and discipline are easier and more convenient for school actors to address as compared to quality learning issues. Finally, parents are devoted to enrolling their children to religious lessons at a mosque and the *Madrasas* that have grown beyond the Afghan state's control. Thus, the Afghan children's early literacy experience embodies several contradictions that are brought about by their enrollment in both public schools and forms of Islamic education.

1. Introduction: Study Purpose and Inquiries

In 2016, USAID Afghanistan in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE) initiated the Afghan Children Read project designed to improve equitable access to education and generate measurable reading outcomes for girls and boys in Afghanistan. Afghan Children Read supports education service delivery through building MoE capacity to provide an evidence-based early grade reading (EGR) program in Dari and Pashto for students in Grades (G) 1-3 in both formal and Community Based Education (CBE) schools.

Afghan Children Read's EGR research and learning initiative aims to produce a body of knowledge that to improve the design, implementation, sustainability, and scaling up of EGR programs in Afghanistan. Afghan Children Read sponsors and supports research projects that study the dynamics of EGR in Afghan schools and communities to provide evidence for developing a sustainable EGR model that works in the Afghan context. Afghan Children Read has conducted several studies to explore key topics of relevance to the Afghan education system and context such as Social Emotional Learning, Struggling Readers, The Use of Instructional Time, Minority Children language Experience, and Educational Feedback Loop Mechanisms. This study focuses on Parental Involvement in Early Literacy Development.

Parental involvement in their children's learning has been and continues to be amongst the priority interests of education development and research in different contexts in the global south. This study is an effort to contextualize parental involvement in the Afghan context while mainly focusing on how such involvement intersects with children's early literacy development.

This study focuses on three key elements about parental involvement in their children's early literacy development:

- What motivates and shapes parental involvement?
- What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, school administrators, shuras, and educational leaders about parental involvement?
- What are the strategies adopted by parents, school administrators, shuras, and teachers to encourage parents' involvement?

2. Education in Afghanistan: A Brief background

Education today in Afghanistan is mandated by the country's post-war constitution (particularly sections 13, 14, and 44), which obliges the government to provide equal access to basic education to all citizens in order to promote individual and collective development and progress as crucial parts in nation-building. According to Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Afghanistan's National Education Plan (NESP) III (2017-2021) reports significant achievements since 2001 with regards to access and girls' education. Since 2001, the number of children enrolled in General Education (grades 1-12) has risen by almost nine times, from 0.9 million (almost none of them girls) to 9.2 million with 39% girls. The number of schools has also increased from 3,400 to 16,400. Despite these achievements, NESP III recognizes that there is still much to do with regards to equity, girls' education

and improving access and efficiency. NESP III highlights the importance of implementing strategies to identify out of school children and those at risk of dropping out.

CARE's knowledge, attitude, and practice (KAP) Survey Report (CARE 2011) describes the management of Afghan public schools to be a top-down with principals fully in charge with limited space for parental / communal involvement. Parents, mostly agriculture laborers, had very limited voice about the educational their children receive or even to visit schools. The gap caused by this educational management approach between parents and the schooling practices resulted in many parents unsure of the value of public education for their children and skeptical that schools were appropriate or safe for girls.

Since 2004, the Afghan Ministry of Education has adopted several strategies to maximize enrollment and local community involvement in supporting schools. Building on the Afghan traditional community governance or *shuras*, where community members gather to discuss and build consensus around local issues and decisions, school management shuras (SMS) were initiated.

Article 48 of the Afghan Education Law encourages parental involvement in education by emphasizing that parents, teachers, and the community should participate in the educational process to resolve learning problems, improve quality, prevent misuse and violation of legal and discipline of students, teachers, and employees of the MoE (Education Law, 2008). The law mandates that the principals, headmasters and teachers have the responsibility to involve parents in sports or academic events, cultural (?) exposures, or in creating rules and regulations. In this way, parents can play their essential role. The establishment of SMS engages parents and communities in decision-making and improvement within the school. This model of school governance was designed to encourage communities to engage in the educational experiences of their children and feel empowered to affect the provision and quality of that education.

Council of the Parents, Students, Teachers, and the Community People

Article Forty- Eight:

The council of the representatives of student's parents, teachers, and residents, to achieve the following objectives, shall be established, in the public and private schools and educational institutions:

1. *Active participation of the students' parents, teachers and the local residents in the process of education and training, in order to resolve educational and training problems, improving educational and training quality, prevention of misuse, legal and disciplinary violations of students, teachers and employees of the ministry of education.*
2. *Oversee and supervise from education, moral, edification and social interactive of the students' and employees of the ministry of education.*
3. *Protect the students and educational personnel from violence and destructive activities in the family, inside and outside of the educational institution.*
4. *Active participation in management and implementation of development programs of the ministry of education for improvement of education and training system in the country.*

Public schooling grew rapidly in Afghanistan after the fall of Taliban as did female enrollment. The donors-supported community-based education (CBE) schools were initiated around 1994 and grew rapidly after the new government took power in 2001. Such state supported forms of community schooling aimed at expanding the government's reach to areas and villages with small populations, and where establishing a public school was not possible.

There is, usually, at least one Mosque in any Afghan village or neighborhood, which provides religious education to children. Mosque lessons promote adherence to Islamic teaching, Qura'an and basic literacy in Arabic following the approaches of traditional Qur'anic *Kuttab, Madrasas* or Maktab. Islamic education through the locally initiated and supported *Qur'anic* mosque lessons and different forms of Madrasas is an ancient tradition in Afghanistan and other south Asian countries. With the Soviet's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and throughout the Taliban era, such forms of local Islamic education were mostly t transformed to state supported schooling to prepare *jihadists* against foreign invaders.

The post-war Afghan government prioritized the provision of MoE delivered Islamic education so that Afghan students would not have a reason to seek religious education elsewhere. However, due to intensifying military clashes with the anti-government militancy for the past years, many public schools closed. While *Madrasas* should be functioning officially under the supervision of the MoE, around 5,000 unregistered *Madrasas* have been reported recently (Tolo 2021). UNESCO (2016) reports that the curriculum of Islamic education dedicates 60% to religious subjects, including the Arabic language; 20% to social studies, English, and national languages; and 20% to mathematics and science.

Govt Plans to Bring Madrassas Under State Control (Tolo 2021)

Years of conflict have increased the level of poverty in Afghanistan, which has been aggravated by several severe droughts, political insecurity, bad governance, ongoing violence, and the building of a large illicit economy based on poppy cultivation and drug trafficking. Health indicators such as maternal mortality ratio, infant mortality rate and under five mortality rates are among the highest worldwide. Poor access to health, education, safe drinking water and income generation was, and still is, endemic in rural and urban Afghanistan where the condition of children and young adults is particularly troubling at a variety of levels. Accordingly, more girls under fourteen would help in household chores and child labor among boys is common - mainly in fieldwork and animal husbandry. A large proportion of the under fifteen population, especially girls and vulnerable children, are not accessing school (Biggeri and Trani 2010).

3. The Structure-Agency debate in Parental Involvement in Education in Afghanistan

Educational research (Rigby, Woulfin and Marz 2016) provides evidence that educational policies and laws are rarely implemented as written nor, necessarily, as intended. Yet, while the policies rarely frame exactly how educational services materialize in school communities, they do shape the daily work of educational stakeholders. Bénéï (2009) asserts that within the renewed social research trends, education has emerged as a crucial political arena that is subjected to competing views and monopolizations by different political stakeholders within a given context. The theoretical framework of this study, in trying to unpack parental involvement in early literacy development in Afghanistan, benefits from the renewed sociological and anthropological interests in the tension between agency and structure within the field of education. Levinson and Holland (1996) argue that "schools have proven themselves a contradictory resource" (Levinson and Holland 1996: 1). Similarly, the Jeffreys (2008) draw attention to the importance of moving beyond the binary choices propagated in contemporary social science and development literature as to whether or not education reproduces social inequality, supports democratization, or transforms societies. The Jeffreys call for the need for more attention to "the ambivalent, contradictory and partial social change" (Jeffrey et al 2008:198) in the nature of schooling.

Agency implies that actors (educational stakeholders in the case of this study) can reflect on what they do or the attention to intentional (willed, reflexive) actions. It implies that actors know and are self-conscious of their actions. As for "structure", while, obviously, actors make decisions and act, they are bound by structural preconditions for their actions (Eriksen, 2001). Rigby, Woulfin and Marz (2016) explain that "Structural accounts usually explain action as limited by cultural, economic, political, and social contexts, whereas agentic accounts look for human motivation and understanding to explain behavior" (Giddens 1979). Notions of choice and freedom are important in this discussion of actor-centered accounts of social life. Thus, the importance of Bourdieu's concept of culturally conditioned agency or "habitus" (1977). Bourdieu argues that "no doubt agents do have an active apprehension of the world. No doubt they do construct their vision of the world. But this construction is carried out under structural constraints" (Bourdieu 1989: 18).

This study looks at both structure and actors to understand the complex context impacting parental involvement in early literacy development in Afghanistan. Educational systems in emergency contexts have become increasingly complex (Rigby, Woulfin and Marz 2016), with the controversies of greater involvement of non-system actors and heavier centralization at the same time, while being surrounded by post-conflict circumstances. As a result, schooling and education service delivery involve more actors and structures that shape the everyday interaction between the school and community, role of parents and the work of teaching and learning. To explore the complicated case of parental involvement in early literacy development in Afghanistan, this study will intentionally explore multiple levels within the household, the community and the school, the boundaries between these levels, and the interaction between actors, structures and the surrounding post-conflict situation shaping and complicating such boundaries and interactions.

For example, it is claimed that across several decades of conflicts and changes to the landscape of the schooling in Afghanistan, most of the Afghan population have not stopped considering the importance

of Islamic education through *Qur'anic* lessons or *Madrasa* as an essential construct for children's moral upbringing and education. Under the Taliban, from 1997-2001, girls were banned from schools and unable to access formal education facilities. Nonetheless, informal or community-based schooling continued to exist in some areas mainly through humanitarian organizations' support. Local understandings of gender, conservative gender norms, notions of family honor and traditional daily practice all contributed to the considerable control of women's and girls' lives. During the many years of violence and instability, concerns over security and family standing within communities has led to increasingly strict interpretations of appropriate female position and girls' education. (CARE 2011)

Also, in such a heavily socially constrained patriarchal society, accepted gender roles leave little space for deviation. Male gender roles include responsibility for public family affairs, economic livelihoods, and governance of the household. Female gender roles focus on the family and private space, being good wives and mothers. It is against this background that decisions over whether to send sons and daughters to schools are made. As part of the Afghan context and social norms when a daughter marries, she moves to her new families' home and is then a member of that household and no longer expected to contribute to her own family's wellbeing. This has implication for the decision making over whether to invest in a girl's education since the value of that education is transferred from one family group to another (CARE 2011).

4. "Parental Involvement" in Afghanistan and beyond

The parental involvement concept covers a variety of activities that brings the home, school, and community together (Fan and Chen, 2001; Epstein, 2011; Okten, 2016) for children's learning. Parental involvement is defined as participation of parents in the educational processes and experiences of children. It is about parents' collaboration with school and in supporting children's learning (Epstein et. al., 2002). Parental involvement is manifested in the support of the different family members (e.g., father, mother, sister, brother, uncle, aunt, cousins, guardians) for the learners' academic growth (Bailey, 2017). This 'support' has diverse aspects in different contexts. For instance, Toldson and Lemmons (2013) suggest various forms of involvement: participation in school governance, attendance in classes and school meetings, checking their children's progress, monitoring homework, and instilling discipline.

According to the syllabus of Early Grade Reading curriculum for Afghanistan (USAID 2020-A), there are five core components that contribute to reading and writing which a student must develop to become a proficient reader and writer – a student will be able to use his/her reading and writing skills to learn other subjects. These five core components are: phonological Awareness[1], graphophonemic Awareness[2], fluency[3], vocabulary[4], and comprehension[5]. These skills are primarily learned and

[1] The ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words.

[2] The ability to link sounds with symbols (graphemes – letters), and then to use this ability to sound out, or decode, words.

[3] The ability to apply phonological awareness and graphophonemic awareness to read with automaticity (quickly and accurately).

[4] Recognition/knowledge of words and their meaning.

[5] The active process of understanding concepts through text.

cultivated between the ages of three and five and can be enhanced through parental involvement during this stage and throughout early grades (Mullis, Mullis, Comille, Ritchson, & Sullender, 2002). Research work on parental involvement in early literacy development confirm that the literacy-related experiences that young children have at home-before they begin formal schooling provide a foundation for the development of their reading and writing skills (Robins, Rosales, Treiman 2014). Children who experience literacy-rich home environments have more opportunities to practice in more complex language skills and diverse vocabulary (Im, Kim, Kwon 2015). They add that the increased vocabulary will consequently result in early proficiency of decoding skills (Im, Kim, Kwon, 2015). Other researchers argue for the importance of parents' collaboration with teachers, and the advantageous to plan a training program for parents to assist with home reading instruction (Faires, Nichols, Rickelman, 2000).

Stanikzai (2013) finds that "Afghan parents have different parenting styles and given the large family sizes, they may be forced at times to adopt an authoritarian style where parents have high expectations from their children and expect their children to obey them unconditionally" (p.8). The same study finds that the Afghan parents' role in the education of their children and communication with their teachers is very limited. Given the low literacy rate in Afghanistan (39 % for men and 14 % for women), parents who themselves are not highly educated or are illiterate could not support their children's education (Ibid). When parental involvement does take place, it does not go beyond persuading and pushing children to study and do their homework, providing school supplies when needed, or walking, driving, or sending children particularly girls to get to school safely. The researcher argues that "the combined impact of poverty, decades of war, and high illiteracy rate among Afghans make effective participation and involvement for families challenging" (p.4). Lack of time, low level of education/illiteracy for fathers and cultural and traditional barriers to mothers are the strongest barrier in parental involvement in Afghanistan (Stanikzai, 2013).

The Rapid Education and Risk Analysis (RERA) conducted by Afghan Children Read (USAID 2017) reports that poverty and illiteracy in Afghanistan adversely affects the involvement of parents in their children's learning. Similar to Stanikzai (2013), the RERA study finds that although children receive support from parents, such support is limited to providing materials such as books and stationeries as well as sending children to supplemental courses.

In 2018, Afghan Children Read conducted qualitative research (USAID 2020-B) to explore the experiences of Uzbek and Pashai minority language children in early literacy development in the sample schools, how their teachers and parents supported them in this process, and parents' perceptions regarding mother-tongue based education. Findings show that the students were often marginalized, had low classroom participation with verbal interactions with their teachers limited to short answers, and that many students repeated the first grade in order to learn the official language. In both languages, the students often memorized textbook passages without comprehension. Teachers either ignored the language issue, felt unable to help, or used few practices to help students understand the content rather than the official language. The study reports that mismatch between language of instruction and students and parents' mother tongue, and parents' illiteracy negatively affects the involvement of parents in their children's literacy development. The study finds that parents have resorted to unhelpful practices in an effort to overcome challenges related to school-home language

mismatch. For example, some parents from a minority language background make their children repeat Grade 1 as they believe this will allow their children to learn the language of instruction-(Dari). Other parents from same group do not send their children to school as they realize that their children cannot learn as effectively as Dari speaking students. (USAID, 2020).

Afghan Children Read introduced a struggling readers study (USAID 2021) to explore the characteristics of struggling readers as compared to non-struggling readers and the factors associated with non-proficient level of reading among EGR students. Findings indicated that struggling readers are low achievers in all reading subskills leading to comprehension, and in reading comprehension itself. The study identified several key trends creating a context for the differences between struggling and non-struggling readers. The majority of parents of struggling readers as compared to non-struggling readers had no schooling at all. The data suggest that struggling readers have less interest and motivation than non-struggling readers towards reading. At school entry, struggling readers are perceived to have a slightly lower level of readiness in most areas of skills as compared to non-struggling readers. Parents of struggling readers seem to provide less support than parents of non-struggling readers. This is expressed in terms of the lesser value they attach to reading at home, thus less time devoted to help their child to read, and less focus given to answering questions asked by their child.

Home facilities seem to be available more to non-struggling readers. Parents of non-struggling readers are involved more than parents of struggling readers in checking homework, teacher remarks, workbooks, and in communicating and visiting schools. Storytelling by parents was negatively associated with reading outcomes, suggesting that the tradition must be refocused to support the acquisition of reading skills rather than telling memorized stories. The study proposes that special initiatives targeting the improvement of attitudes and knowledge of families of struggling readers to provide more family support to reading at home must be launched using IVR/SMS, radio, and other possible media. These programs must encourage a pedagogy that embraces more of an independent, "learning-by-doing" or "active-learning" pedagogy than the one which mostly keeps struggling readers dependent on their parents. To encourage the participation of the parents of struggling readers in school affairs, it is proposed that a new model involving a teacher-parent reciprocity be introduced. This model requires that the teacher visits or meets parents as parents must also visit schools to create a more dynamic relationship between parents and schools (USAID 2021).

Several studies (Bodovski & Farkas, 2008; Cheadle, 2008; Lareau, 2004, Hill, 2001) in Asia and Africa reported that family income, parent's level of education, as well as parents' occupation are strong factors in motivating and shaping parental involvement. Parents with high income and access to resources to support their children are more engaged in deliberate forms of parental support to learning. Poverty, a critical socio-economic issue is a significant focus that should align with policies and interventions aimed at supporting families. Bridgemohan and Staden (2005) suggest that many early grade schoolteachers perceive low-income parents to be less interested in their children's education with negative implications for home-school communication. Another study suggests that involved parents view their role as not less important than the teacher's and that children face fewer difficulties to learn if they are sufficiently involved (Grolnick, et. Al., 1997). Another study indicates that teachers describe parental involvement as both providing resources (fundraising and donating

toys and materials) and engaging in the child's education through formal and informal meetings (Wolf, 2020). Several of these studies suggest that increasing engagement and communication between parents and teachers may be critical to align expectations in children's development and learning.

5. Methods for studying Parental Involvement

As discussed earlier, under the theoretical framework, this study will look at both actors and structure to understand the complex context impacting parental involvement in education in Afghanistan. The contemporary history and context of education in Afghanistan involves more actors and structures that shape the everyday schooling practices and roles played by those actors. The methodology of this study intentionally explores multiple levels of the actors and structure within the study context, the boundaries between these levels, the interaction between actors and structures and the surrounding conflict / post-conflict situation shaping and complicating such boundaries and interactions. Accordingly, this study adopts a qualitative design towards generating an in-depth understanding of parental involvement of early literacy in Kandahar and Nangarhar, Afghanistan. This approach is meant to allow navigating the complexities involved in the historical backgrounds, cultural values, habits, networks, and meanings embedded in the participants narratives (Marshall &Rossman 2016).

5.1 Sampling and Data Collection

This study was conducted in four public schools and two CBE classes in Jalalabad district of Nangarhar province, and Daman district of Kandahar province. Two public schools (one urban and one rural) and one community-based education (CBE) classes were selected in each of the two provinces. Schools were purposefully selected to ensure, gender representation, safety and accessibility, and urban and rural participation. Four out of the six sampled schools were rural (two rural public schools and two CBEs[6]). Eighteen (18) third grade school children (boys and girls) were randomly selected (three in each school/CBE) along with their parents, teachers, school principal, and school/CBE Management shuras (SMSs). Randomly selected students and their parents were asked for their willingness and accessibility to take part in the study. When the selected participant was not willing to participate, s/he was replaced with the next student.

The study adopted a multiple data collection methodology, namely: interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), short-term observations and documentary review (Annex 1: data collection tools):

I**n-depth interviews** were conducted with the various study participants: students, parents, teachers, and principals. Care was observed in the interviews of children due to likely issues of power inequality, power differential between adults and children, including parental gatekeeping (Kutrovatz, 2017).

Focus Group Discussions were conducted to highlight diverse opinions on parental involvement among SMS that by default included natural leaders and parents from the local community.

[6] CBEs are dominantly rural based as they are established to provide access to education in underserved areas

Documentary review of the meeting records of SMS regarding what issues around parental involvement were brought for discussion and how they were addressed.

Observation of students' daily life environment within the family and school settings were conducted. The community based cultural centers, mosques' activities, and educational centers were also observed. Detailed field notes were taken for all conducted observations.

All stakeholders of the study were properly and officially approached for their participation through official letters. Orientation briefs were provided prior every instance of data collection and participants' questions were answered.

5.2 Ethical Considerations

To ascertain and safeguard the integrity of the study, all the necessary protocols were observed and followed from the information, orientation, actual conduct of the study to data analysis including the confidential treatment of participants and their identities. The results of the study were reported to the legitimate scientific bodies and academic communities for research contribution in the disciplines of interest. The researchers have obtained first the official local government unit clearance, the consent of the children and their respective parents, schools, and community stakeholders before the conduct of the study. The researchers observed all extra precautions and procedures in dealing with the children during the research process, ensuring their protection and rights. The time and days agreed upon by all stakeholders were followed, including the considerations not to disturb them when they had to play with friends or extended family members or when they were at school. After the careful selection of participants based on the set criteria, the researchers approached the student-participants twice: a day before the interview at school to build rapport, explain the purpose of the interview and the terms of confidentiality, get their informed consent, and describe the format and length of the interview. This was the time where the researchers explained to them that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw anytime during the interview. The second time was for the interview proper. To put the child at ease, the field researchers who were trained in child-friendly methodologies followed Kutrovatz (2017)'s suggestions: they ensured not to harm the children in any way. The questions were designed to be child friendly. Additionally, the children were interviewed at the place of his/her choice such as their respective homes, where they felt comfortable and safe. The interviews were conducted in a child-friendly manner expecting short answers from the children for each question. In addition to the children, consent was taken from their parents after building trust and providing a full description of the study purpose. Finally, the interview then took place out of the parents' earshot.

5.3 Limitation of the Study

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the study was limited to two provinces of Afghanistan instead of the initial study site of six provinces. It did not include upper socioeconomic families nor private schools and concentrated more on a thorough or intensive probing into the attitudes, perceptions, and practices towards reading by the sampled study participants from the public schools and CBEs, and the role of their parents in their development of reading skills. The study population was limited to a

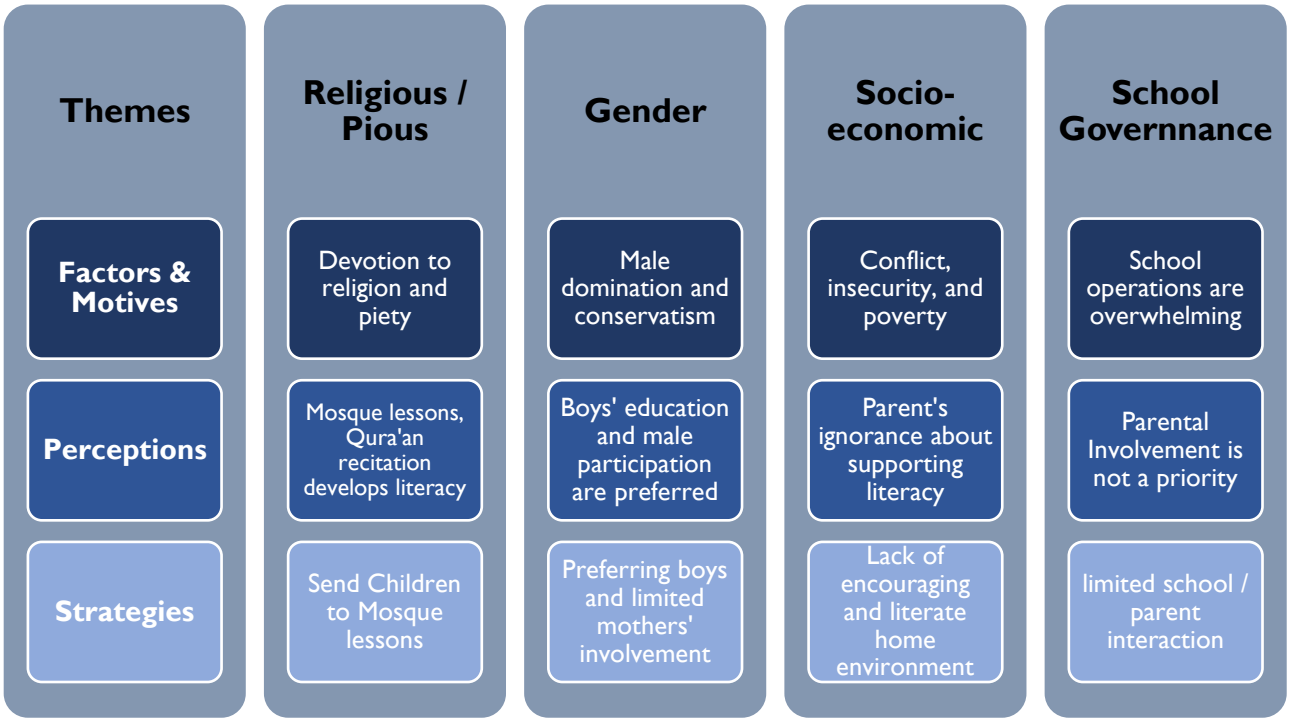
small group of learners; henceforth, the sampling procedure was not representative of a majority cluster.

5.4 Data Analysis

The data collected through interviews, FGDs, documentary review, field notes, and observations were analyzed throughout the period of data collection to ascertain reliability of results and to provide a more thorough understanding of the findings. The audiotapes of the interviews and FGDs were transcribed verbatim following predefined transcription rules. The content and thematic coding were utilized to analyze the data in which ideas, sentences, paragraphs, and key context were grouped together to come up with recurring themes. The codes were based on the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the emerging recurrent themes. The recurring themes and the analysis which led to the discussions and results underwent several counter checking and review to ensure the accuracy and validity.

The recurring theme-related factors and motives, perspectives, and strategies from the three interrelated contexts of household, school, and community around parental involvement were triangulated throughout the data analysis. Such exploration of the complex web of variables allowed for the in-depth discussion and understanding of parental involvement in the early literacy development among the studied Afghan early grade students as illustrated in the next section of this document.

Figure 1: Themes around Parental involvement



The data analysis indicates four key themes, as illustrated in Figure, 1 that navigate the complexities around parental involvement in early literacy development in Kandahar and Nangarhar. These four themes shaping parental involvement in early literacy development relate to (1) the role of religion in

children upbringing, (2) the role of gender in shaping such involvement, (3) socioeconomic conditions' effect in affording such involvement, and (4) school governance related factors impacting the magnitude of such involvement. These themes will be discussed in the following sections of this document inspired by the narratives of students, parents, teachers and educators in the selected school communities in Kandahar and Nangarher:

1. A Pious theme: Mosque lessons as a parental and communal early literacy strategy
2. A Gender Theme: Gender politics intersectionality with parental involvement
3. A socioeconomic Theme: Is parental involvement affordable to the Afghan household?
4. A governance theme: School governance and the challenge of engaging with parents

These theme-related factors and motives, perspectives, and strategies stem from analyzing the data obtained through researching the interrelated contexts around children literacy development at the household, the school, and the local community, and how they are linked with parental involvement.

Parental involvement in the processes of children acquisition of literacy skills in the Afghanistan context emerges and manifests the complex cultural, gender, socioeconomic and governance dimensions. The following four sections will discuss these dimensions in detail.

6. Mosque lessons as a parental and communal early literacy strategy

This section explores the religio-moral theme of the Afghan parents' involvement in children upbringing at large and particularly in early literacy development. The exploration of this theme addresses multiple parental and communal perspectives and strategies that are motivated by the extent of religious dedication. It tries to unpack the position and role of religion in the Afghan family in relation to education and early literacy development particularly in Kandahar and Nangarhar through understanding the position of literacy within the Islamic morality, the importance of *Madrasa* and mosque lessons for the upbringing of children in the Afghan family, and the literacy practices at the Madrasa and the mosque.

Despite the significant differences between Arabic and official languages of instruction in Afghanistan (Pashto or Dari), participants generally consider that the early exposure of children to learning the Arabic alphabet and script at the *Madrasa's* Qur'an lessons provides them with foundations to follow lessons later when they join the public school.

> "Arabic script enjoys a great respect and religious significance in Afghanistan due to the fact that the Holy Quran is written in this script. The alphabets are taught at home by the parents of children or Madrassa-- religious school, from a very early age so they are able to learn the recitation of the Holy Quran and perform other religious duties in the Arabic language. The attachment of Afghans with Arabic alphabets is based on a very strong bond of religion which ties them with the rest of the Islamic nation. The Arabic language and script are seen as the language and alphabets of God thus giving it a sacred status." (Hayat 2019)

Early grade children, in the context of this study, learn Quran (in Arabic language) and receive Islamic education in the mosques. In households, the recitation of the Qur'an is an observed daily family practice. It is seemingly a traditional practice in both provinces that parents send their pre-school

children to the mosques for religious education and enforce their religious practices at home. These practices are apparently due to the important position religious devotion occupies in their worldview. The majority of the participants reported mosque schooling as the most accessible places for children's education as they are located inside the villages. Young children start to study the basics of religion and religious textbooks even before they enroll in public schools. They also continue their mosque and madrasa education after enrollment in school.

Many of the participants claimed that mosque education builds a good foundation for the public-school learning process. There is a widely accepted assumption that students who attended mosque lessons before enrolling in public school can easily follow school lessons and actively participate in classroom activities. A member of an SMS in Kandahar spoke of the positive impact of mosque education on school lessons,

> "*… those children who are going to both mosque and school have improved a lot. These children can read, the teachers can make them catch and understand the lessons easily….*"

Participates in Kandahar and Nangarhar also noted that the verbal communication between the Mullah and students at Madrasa might also help preparing students to school. A teacher from Kandahar praised her students for being good at Pashto and religious subjects because of religious education in the mosque. The teacher associated student's intelligence in school subjects with their learning exposure at the mosques and *madrassas*. Parents and the local community at large presumed the mosque education as a sort of initiation rite where children receive moral and spiritual guidance and acquire and foster the fundamental literacy skills.

A Shura member explained that the early exposure to religious instruction in the mosques and *madrassas* to learn more of the Quran and religious subjects facilitates the development of a habit and culture for reading among the children. The basic first lessons to jumpstart reading and writing are provided in the mosques/madrassas and this is an effective strategy to helping beginning readers become familiar with the alphabet, spelling, and orthography.

Students, already enrolled in the public school, go to the mosque or madrassa either in the morning or afternoon based on their school schedule. At the Mosque, they learn prayers, study religious texts, Arabic Alphabet, Noorani Qaida, Separa, attend communal prayers, and learn the basics of the Holy Quran. A parent described the process of enrolling children at mosque:

> *"…It is common in the village that when a child reaches 4 or 5 years old, the families send him/her to the mosque. Mullah Imam (religious scholar) of the mosque teaches the children Separa (rule and manners of reading Quran); after that, he helps the children to learn reading Quran, and then religious issues from the Islamic books like Shurut Alsalatin (terms of prayers), and Quduri. Eventually, the children at the age of seven are enrolled in the school. So, besides learning from school, we send our children to the mosque for learning the Quran and Islam."*

Local communities where this study was conducted provide support to the mosque education. A Shura member from Nangarhar stated:

> *"The Mullah at the mosque instruct our children. Lessons are carried between two to four pm. They even extend their learning session until the evening. The Mullah are paid by the people in the community."*

Students mentioned that their parents also extend in kind contribution and provide boards, markers, and other teaching materials to the Mosques and *madrassas.*

In several cases, students attend the Mosque's weekly ceremony to encourage students' learning progress and self-esteem. Parents are invited to attend the ceremony and to check on their children's progress. The *Mullah* facilitates the ceremony's program that is supported by the community. A Shura member narrated:

> *"…We have prepared the stage, microphones, and loudspeakers. Our children stand on the stage. Topics are given by the Mullah to them. Some students recite Naat Sharif (Praise of the prophet and his decedent), some students give speeches about an Islamic topic. Some students present Hadith Sharif (Prophet's words) or interpret a verse from the Holy Quran. The younger students go on the stage and recite one or two verses from Quran. Or they recite the small Sura (chapter) of Quran. These activities keep the students encouraged."*

Besides sending children to the mosque lessons, parents were highly involved at home in educating their children the basics of social behavior and religious practices rather than reading and writing. To illustrate, a parent in Kandahar expressed: "*I help my child learn how to do ablution and do pray."* Another parent expressed his involvement to help his child learn religious practices: *"I have helped her to learn the Holy Quran, helped her to learn Islamic Creed (Kalima), and also sent her to a Madrasa."* Similarly, a Shura member described a parent's job to help their child learn religious practice and social behavior and then follow on their learning at school:

> "*First of all, the responsibility of parents is to build his child's character. Give their children basic Islamic education, the pillars of Islam like faithfulness to prayer; besides these, the parents must have followed upon their children's lessons in school ..."*

A parent explained how he shows the children at home how to prepare for prayers to influence their commitment to routine prayer:

> "*when it is time for prayer, I emphasized to my son to pray. I showed him how to do ablution, how to pray and I showed him everything step by step."*

Parents and other adult members within the extended family ensure the role modeling of valuing the daily reading of the Holy Quran, observing religious rites and practices with respect. These home-based practices are intended to promote positive perceptions, attitudes, and habits among children to embrace religion and religious practices as a lifestyle.

Parents in Kandahar and Nangarhar know and are self-conscious of their actions towards the Islamic upbringing of their children. Such agentic position is manifested in the devotion to observing the pious practices at home, and enrolling children at the mosque lesson the and *Madrasa*s that have recently grown out of the control of the Afghan state (Tolo 2021). Since Arabic is the language of all such religious practices, it occupies a significant position in the Afghan children early literacy experience. The effect of the enrollment in Islamic education at the *Madrasa* and the Mosque and the early exposure to Arabic language on the Afghan children learning and acquisition of foundational literacy in mother tongue worth further empirical exploration.

7. Gender politics intersectionality with parental involvement

Issues of gender, and the role and rights of women and girls in Afghanistan have been in discussion both internationally and locally, particularly around education access, and enrollment. Local understandings of gender, conservative gender norms, notions of family honor and traditional daily practice all contribute to the considerable control of women and girls lives, their existence in the public space, and their education opportunities. During the years of violence and instability, concerns over security and family standing within communities has led to increasingly strict interpretations of appropriate female behavior.

According to the Afghan MOE's "NESP III" (MOE 2017), girls often do not enroll or stop attending schools and other centers because of the lack of female teachers. There are no female teachers in almost 80 out of 364 districts, and there are few qualified female teachers in most districts. Though the number of female teachers has increased in the urban areas during the last few years, in rural areas there are very few female teachers at schools. In many cases, it is not acceptable for the families of females for their daughters to study under a male teacher.

Teachers, school principals and Shura-members have spoken of the fact that many girls leave the school earlier than boys, often after the grade sixth. Mothers of early grade students in the context of this study expressed frustration of being illiterate hence not confident to face with the school staff. They could not be actively involved in the issues related to their children's learning particularly when addressing issues which required their presence at schools. A mother in Kandahar stated:

> "*I cannot reach the teacher; I can't go and ask about my child. I am a housewife; how can I go to school while I am (socially) not allowed to... My child asks for my help with the school homework. I am illiterate and not able to help. I ask my brother to help him.*"

Mothers were also culturally and customarily not allowed to connect or communicate with the male school staff or the male teacher of their children. For instance, a mother from Nangarhar when asked whether she visits her child's school, she replied:

> "*They beat our children at the school. I could not complain to anyone. How can I go to school where they are all men? We do not have the courage to face men."*

School administrators did not offer a very welcoming reception for women or mothers to visit their children in school and interact with their teachers. It is almost universally socially accepted across Afghanistan that a family's social position is integrally connected to the public behavior of its female members and the communities' impressions of that behavior. Acting outside of, or beyond the accepted social norms and roles, risks local censure and potentially social exclusion; men, women and families are under considerable social pressure to conform and behave according to locally acceptable practices (CARE 2011). Mothers' direct interaction with male school staff about their children's learning, in several cases in the context of this study, was considerably limited by their compliance to the accepted social norms regarding women existence and socialization in the public space of schools. Nonetheless, some teachers and school principals in both provinces mentioned instances when mothers have visited the girls' schools on their own to ask about the performance of their children and spoken with teachers and school principals.

The Afghan parents' prevalent bias in favor of sons' education compared to daughters was confirmed in several interviews. A principal in Nangarhar said:

"*Some parents did not allow their girls to continue with their studies when they got older; they said, it is enough; what would she do with further studying? We don't expect anything from her, anyway.*"

In the context of this study, it is confirmed that many parents do not invest in education equally for boys and girls and that there is a gender bias or pro-male bias in case of parental investment in children's education. It appeared that parental gender-biased investment occurs particularly when parents have limited/lower income and resources, causing girls to leave school earlier than boys. It also appeared that parents would expect their educated sons to financially support them while there were no such expectations from girls who would be married and financially separated from the family.

The individual and societal interpretation of the role of religion in determining what is and is not socially acceptable for females to do is another important factor that shapes bias against girls' education. A teacher pointed to a community's assumption that girls' education, and contributing to their ability to use technology, will eventually increase their vulnerability that could lead them down a path of wrongdoing *"sin"*:

"…, *because of religious beliefs, some people say it is the mobile phones that deviate girls from the path of religion. They say, those girls who go to school, are not good girls.*"

Although the prevailing community climate in the context of this study confirms the priority and preference for boys over girls' education, stakeholders repeatedly expressed the growing desire to provide a good education for all. Observed schools had classes full of female students demonstrating there seems to be a growing interest and desire towards girls' education.

Gender politics intersectionality with parental involvement in children's early learning in the two provinces shows how ambivalent parents and other stakeholders are between the patriarchal social structures that are rooted in a harsh rural life, and the growing awareness about girls' education due to the tireless efforts of MOE and the donor community in the last two decades. Actors sound torn between two powerful structures for determining a contextual meaning of education equity.

8. Is Parental Involvement affordable to the Afghan household?

The increase in school enrolment and retention in Afghanistan has not been the same across different groups, being significantly lower among girls, for children with disabilities and within families where children must work to contribute to the family income (Biggeri and Trani 2010). In the context of this study, realities around parental involvement implies that many parents did not have the affordability nor the capacity to get involved and support the learning of their early grade children.

In several cases parents expressed an inability to afford the school needs for their children. One mother said:

"To be honest, we never bought something for our children. We wanted to buy anything they needed, but we are poor and not able to buy. It has already been a month that my children told me to buy notebooks so that they can have something to write on and learn writing. But to be frank, I have not bought for them because we could not afford it."

Families are forced to, instead of sending their children to school, send their children to work alongside their fathers. Among sampled 3rd grade students of this study, there were several cases where boys were engaged as child laborers to support the family income. A school principal explained:

> *"The children aged eight to nine years old worked with their fathers as peddlers. Many young students assisted their fathers to prepare the ingredients for cooking fast food on the streets. After school, they took care of the needed materials and helped their fathers in the shop. Otherwise, their families could not afford to buy food."*

Time constraint and the nature of parents' occupation made it difficult for them to assist in their children's literacy acquisition. Most parents said they provide a generic guidance to their child to study, "*do your homework*", or "*stay home and work on your school subjects*." They do not observe their child's reading and writing. On the expectation of parents to assist their children in their school homework, one parent said:

> "*I have never checked it; I am busy all the days. I leave home when they are sleep, how can I help them*."

Many children expressed that their parents do not attend to their reading activities at home due to work, especially their fathers. Most of the homes observed, except for one, did not provide conducive studying spaces with proper ventilation, lighting, nor quiet environment for reading. A father said.

> *"We do not have a separate room for our child, nor a separate corner for studying; there are no chairs nor desks in our home. We are not able to provide these."*

Similarly, another parent said:

> *"We have not built a specific room for our children at home which has tables and chairs, nor the room walls decorated with the posters, or drawings; we have not done such a thing for our children."*

The size of the Afghan family which extend beyond the nuclear family complicates parental support for early literacy, particularly, when the extended family, living at the same household, includes many children. A schoolteacher explained:

> *"In one family there are 10 to 12 children; this makes it difficult for parents to manage and help them.*"

However, in some cases, it was indicated that the large family has more adult members who potentially can support children learning.

Generally, students had difficulty to describe parental role in supporting their literacy acquisition. Their responses generally suggested that they considered their parents to be supportive. One student said, "my parents *send me to school and buy me the notebooks and books."* Another student said, *"My father told me to study and go to school and be successful"* while another one said, "*Even if I made a very small mistake, he would make me write it again and correct it."*

Parents had a blurred perception and lacked understanding about the type and extent of their involvement in their children's early literacy development. For most parents, involvement meant providing children with basic school supplies and incentives when the children are hesitant to study. Encouraging the children to read and write at home was not a norm. The following are sample responses from parent when asked how they supported children literacy: "I don't remember giving instruction for my child to read or write." Another parent said, "I only ask him to write a page from the book during the night." Parents implied that their children's education is mostly the sole responsibility of the school. Parents also have not thought about providing their children with extra

learning materials. They were not aware of the importance of supplementary reading materials in improving students' literacy. Some parents confessed their anxieties as to how they could support and assist their children to study and read at home.

It is argued (Grolnick 1994, Kimathi 2014) that parents' literacy behavior at home influences the children to emulate reading practice on their own. A literate environment was rarely observed at the houses within the context of this study. Though the children observed their parents reciting the Holy Quran, they did not witness their parents reading books, magazines, newspapers, or other written material. Following their parents, children were not also into reading, neither experienced hearing stories being read aloud to them by their parents. Parents were not capable of helping with homework nor discussed what the children were attempting to read.

Parents pointed out disappointment and losing faith in the value of education while referred to many graduates who continued to suffer economically for being jobless:

> *"Most people say, look at those who are educated a lot, but have not gained anything. They got educated what have they gained."*

The uncertainties caused by conflict, violence, and religious extremism impacted parental involvement in many ways. Parents did not prioritize children's education when they realized that their children safety is at risk. When the security situation got worse, they withdrew children from school. A school principal confirmed:

> "*Yes, security has affected a lot. If the security is getting worse, then, parents never allow their children to go out of home and attend to school. It severely affects the children learning."*

It was also pointed out that the examples, of those who completed their education and became successful community members, were inspiring for parents about the importance of supporting their children education. A school principal elaborated on this:

> *"Those who were able to finish school, and whose fathers were simple workers, drivers, and shopkeepers in the past and are now a military officer or a successful educated person. When parents see these examples, they get enthusiastic to support their child hoping that they have a better future."*

Hoping for a better future for his son, a father in Nangarhar said:

> *"I said to my child to study hard, otherwise, you will become a laborer like me who works more and gains less."*

Some student indicated that their parents gave them words of encouragement and sometimes goodies and treats. A student, in Nangarhar, said:

> *"My mother always advised me to try hard in my readings so that I learn better and write more to improve my handwriting."*

Some parents offered the children incentives, in response to their good performance in school, in forms of verbal encouragement, food treats, and learning supplies. A parent promised a pair of earrings for her daughter if she did well in her school lessons. Other parents encouraged their children by buying them a complete set of stationaries and notebooks. A parent in Kandahar prepared a separate room equipped with a bookshelf where his children put in their books and stationaries. He also wanted to purchase a computer for his child in the future. Another parent had a board and marker for his child to practice writing. Another parent illustrated his aspirations, echoing his understanding

of the meaning of "involvement" and the necessity of conducive environment for learning at home, by saying:

> *"I have a plan to build a special study room for our children. The room should be equipped with tables, chairs, and cabinets where children will put their books, pens, and bags. I will provide all the facilities in the room. All children of my brothers can come to that room for studying. They can do their homework and study their lessons."*

At the same time, parents expressed appreciation for the educational support provided by aid agencies and donors like the USAID-ACR, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), USAID, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). These organizations provided to early grade students learning materials such as textbooks, stationaries, and storybooks in both Nangarhar and Kandahar provinces. For example, UNICEF provided backpacks to the first-grade students. Swedish Committee for Afghanistan distributed a package of supplies consisting of pens, pencils, notebooks, and other learning materials. USAID-ACR, in Nangarhar, supported the children by providing textbooks, workbook, and grade-appropriate story books.

Parents in the context of this study, despite lack of the specific educational knowledge to support children's literacy acquisition, mostly understand the value of their children's education and what it would mean for their future and wellbeing. Parents aspire for better income and capacity, better and literate home learning environment, as well as more quality time with children to assist with their learning. Conflict, insecurity, and poverty cripple parents' capacity to turn those aspirations into actual strategies.

9. School governance: the challenge of engaging with parents

There is only one school at best in many of the Afghan villages, and parents cannot choose where to educate their children, a mechanism used elsewhere to push for competition for quality education (Trani 2019). Such limitation of educational service provision does not work in favor of the school accountability to parents for children's quality learning. The Afghan Children Read (2017) EGRA baseline Pashto language study in Nangarher reports only eight percent of students in Grade 2 reaching an acceptable level of reading comprehension (of eighty percent or above) which rises to sixteen percent in Grade 3. The mean oral reading fluency (ORF) score is eighteen words- per-minute for Grade 2, while it is twenty-six words-per-minute for Grade 3 students.

School-parents collaboration has proven to have a positive impact on children's learning and school governance under such circumstances. Hence, different forms of parent teacher structures emerged in different context to promote and encourage such collaboration. The more parents interact with teachers of their children, the better they can support their learning at home. The home-school collaboration can take the form of parent-teacher face to face conferences, school-based parent-child activities and using written and virtual means of communication between teachers and parents (Lau and Power 2018). Schools are expected to provide a welcoming climate where the school staff is respectful and responsive to increase parental involvement (Wherry, 2009) and to broaden their scope and definition of parental involvement to include multiple forms of participation (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013).

A mismatch was observed in the context of this study between how parents and schools assessed their interactions and collaboration when it comes to supporting students' learning. Many principals

spoke in general terms of a rosy picture of the school-parents relationship in this regard. One principal said:

> *"We have a very strong relationship with parents. We are applying different strategies to follow up on students' early literacy development with their parents.*

However, the parents depicted a different picture dismissing the claims of school-parents' interactions on students' literacy development. Parents spoke of ad hoc meetings with the schools' administrators due to children discipline problems, absenteeism, or for discussion on the school's physical improvements. Most parents did not confirm any forms of school-parent follow up on students' literacy performance. A parent of a CBE student in Nangarhar said: "*I received a phone call for an informal meeting in the village about the CBE".* Another parent in Kandahar said: *"I received a call from my daughter's teacher that she had a headache".*

In some instances, it appeared that school administrators were trying to keep schools out of parents' reach as they may interfere in the school's daily operation. A teacher in Nangarhar said:

> "*Parents were sometime asked by the administration to come to the school. They talked with them in the office, but we were not involved in their conversations*."

A school principal stated:

> *"Parents did not have a full grasp on how to help their children with their learning and did not have a thorough understanding of the extent of their responsibility for their children. They need training to take part in supporting children with reading and writing."*

School administrators considered the illiteracy of parents as a major barrier impeding school-family partnership. A school principal has asserted that being educated makes a difference to family-school partnership:

> "*Parents who were literate were able to help educate their child, follow up with their lessons, come to the office, and communicate with us. However, illiterate parents did not understand the importance of education, and were not contacting us. We did not also contact them. We could not find them; we did not know who they were."*

A principal in Kandahar considered it very difficult to connect numerous parents of students enrolled in the school, particularly in the absence of a platform in place for easy communication:

> "*We cannot meet all parents. We have not contacted them. They have not also contacted us. We made them satisfied by providing their children with books, notebooks, and taking care of their children attendance."*

Some teachers perceived parental involvement in literacy development as an important duty. A teacher said:

> *"If parents support children learning at home, there is a greater likelihood that children will study harder and make progress. However, uneducated, and financially unstable parents are rarely involved in their children's early literacy development.*

Another teacher added:

"Many of the parents are not aware of the importance of their role in their children's early literacy development. Several of them do not consider it necessary to follow up with children once they are enrolled in school. They assume the school to have the full authority over their children learning."

A school in Nangarhar contacted parents to visit schools because of their children's good performance. A teacher said:*"I contacted parents of those students who were good at reading and writing and were active in the class. I asked parents to visit the school for further student's encouragement."*

Some fathers attended occasional ceremonies and received student's result sheets (report cards). It was based on invitation from the school's principal for some parents only. A schoolteacher said:

"*The administration has invited the parents to the school for the sake of encouraging students, homework, absenteeism and children's discipline."*

Lack of a welcoming school environment towards parents was observed in most schools in the context of this study. School-parent communication was the exception rather than a norm. While parents showed interest to be engaged in their children's literacy acquisition, observations show that there was a gap in actual practice. The teachers and principals had a limited understanding of the importance of parental involvement in the child's educational outcomes. Despite trying to draw a rosy picture, teachers and schools' administrators showed the lack of readiness and willingness to collaborate with parents on the literacy development of children as the task seems quite overwhelming plus the perceived lack of education of most parents as s greater difficulty to strike an effective school-parents coordination.

Article 48 of the Afghan Education Law emphasizes that parents, teachers and the community should participate in the educational process to resolve learning problems, improve quality, prevent misuse and violation of legal and discipline of students, teachers, and employees of the MoE (Education Law, 2008). The SMS body composed of representatives of parents, administrators, teachers, and students of upper grades was established in December 2011 (MoE, 2012). The SMS is tasked to fulfill the requirements of article 48 of the Afghan Education Law towards school development, oversee the school's affairs, create a positive environment for community engagement to support the school, encourage and reinforce students' learning, and liaise with other institutions in the community (MoE, 2012).

A SMS member in Nangarhar described a routine SMS meeting discussion:

"We discussed increasing school enrollment specially to convince people to send their girls to school. We also discussed raising awareness about the importance of school. We try to make the school a convenient place so that parents send their children."

Another SMS member said,

"*We asked the teachers about the students' attendance and discussed how to reduce students' absenteeism."*

It was apparent that the SMSs and parents did not hold meetings nor sufficiently communicated. The SMS rather asked the Imam of the mosque to share their meeting minutes in his speech during the Friday prayer gatherings.

SMS members considered parents as the ones responsible to follow up with their children's progress in acquiring literacy. One SMS members said:

> *"Whether parents are literate or illiterate, they are responsible to ask and follow up on students' literacy progress. Parents' responsibility toward their children must include showing them the alphabets and how they can make words from these letters. Parents must teach their children to make association between words and pictures."*

While SMS member generally understand the role, parents play in supporting their children education, they neither communicate with parents regularly nor put early literacy as a priority. In reviewing documents of SMSs for the last three years, they acted on behalf of parents to address school-related matters such as, students' enrollment, absenteeism, lack of textbooks, improving the school physical environment and maintenance, and the students' discipline.

The school actors of teachers, administrators, and SMS members are overwhelmed by the everyday challenges of school operations. Inclusion of parents and connecting with them about children early literacy does not come among their top priorities in front of the school poor infrastructure, lack of textbooks, shortage of teachers and weak governance. Student's access issues such as enrollment, absenteeism and discipline are more important for school actors comparing to quality learning issues. With a highly centralized education system in Afghanistan that is further reinforced by the conflict environment, the concepts and mechanisms of school-community partnership and school accountability to parents and the community for education service delivery continue to be weak if not absent. Changing the school actors' discourse and realization about importance of parental involvement require reinforcement of the understating and mechanisms of local partnership and accountability.

10. Challenges and Contradictions in Parental Involvement

This study looked at both structure and actors to understand the complex context impacting parental involvement in early literacy development in selected mostly rural school-communities in Kandahar and Nangarher, Afghanistan. Under the post-conflict circumstances, schooling and education service delivery involve more actors and structures that shape the everyday interaction between the school and community and the role of parents. This study explored multiple levels within the household, the community and the school, the boundaries between these levels, the interaction between actors, structures and the surrounding post-conflict situation shaping and complicating such boundaries and interactions.

For parents in this study, children's enrollment and retention in school is in and of itself a great achievement. Classrooms in Kandahar and Nangarhar filled with young girls are impressive in a country that witnessed a complete collapse of the education system during the years of war during which girls were denied such basic human right.

Parents in the context of this study, despite lack of knowledge to support children literacy acquisition, and a minimal literate environment at home, mostly understand the value of their children's education and what it means for their future and wellbeing. Parents aspire for better income and capacity, and a literate home learning environment, as well as more quality time with children to assist with their learning. Conflict, insecurity, illiteracy, and poverty cripple parents' capacity to turn those aspirations

into actual strategies. However, the probability that the children, in the context of this study, will stay in school and continue their future education beyond early grades is questionable. Many of them are already involved in forms of child labor so that their families can meet their basic needs; leading to absenteeism and falling behind in meeting required learning/literacy outcomes. At the same time, gender politics intersectionality with parental involvement in children early learning in the two provinces shows how ambivalent parents and other stakeholders between the patriarchal social structures that are rooted in a harsh rural life that tries to reproduce the gender divide, and the growing awareness about equity and girls' education. Parents and stakeholders are torn between two powerful structures for determining a contextual meaning of education equity. Despite the significant increase in girls' enrollment in the rural context over the past two decades due to donors' investment, many early grade girls, in the context of this study, are at risk to leave the school under the worsening insecurity and economic conditions. Several of them might face the pressures of early marriage upon reaching Grade 6 or the parental decision to sacrifice their education so that their brothers would have a better chance to complete their education.

Today, under a continued conflict / post conflict environment, poverty and insecurity continue to shape and complicate the entire system of education service delivery and the role of different actors and their relations. After almost twenty years since the fall of Taliban, and while many areas are still controlled by them, the highly centralized Afghan state education system is very cautious about opening the schools' doors for parental involvement and school-community partnership. Despite the establishment of the SMS structure to fulfill the education law's requirement, and international donors' efforts, the SMS role within the school is scrutinized and limited to "access" related efforts and infrastructure improvement. In the meantime, the school actors of teachers, administrators, and SMS members are overwhelmed by the everyday challenges of school operations. Inclusion of parents and connecting with them about children's early literacy are not among their top priorities in front of the school poor infrastructure, lack of textbooks, shortage of teachers and weak governance. Student's access issues such as enrollment, absenteeism and discipline are more important for school actors as compared with quality learning issues. With the highly centralized education system in Afghanistan that is further reinforced by the conflict environment, the concepts and mechanisms of school-community partnership and school accountability to parents and the community for education service delivery continue to be weak if not absent. Changing the school actors' discourse about parental involvement require a paradigm shift to start focusing more on quality education and at the same time reinforce the understanding and mechanisms of the school-community local partnership and accountability.

The post-war Afghan government made it one of their priorities to provide students with proper Islamic education so that the Afghan parents will not have a reason to seek religious education for their children elsewhere. The Islamic education dose within the public schooling system is not convincing for parents' expectations and what they envision for their children Islamic upbringing. Parents in Kandahar and Nangarhar know and are self-conscious of their actions towards the Islamic upbringing of their children. Such agentic position is manifested in the parents' devotion to enrolling children to Mosque lessons and the *Madrasas* that have grown out of the Afghan state control (Tolo 2021). The Afghan children's early literacy experience embodies several contradictions that are brought by their enrollment in both public schools and forms of Islamic education. First, the children acquisition of early literacy at the public school is complicated by their exposure to the Arabic language that occupies a significant position in their early literacy experience due to their enrollment in Islamic education. Second, children at the Mosque lessons and Madrassas receive a heavy dose of Islamic

education subjects that might be administered and delivered beyond the control of the Ministry of Education. The effect of the Afghan children enrollment in Islamic education at the *Madrasas* and the Mosque lessons and the early exposure to Arabic language on their acquisition of foundational literacy in mother tongue is worth further empirical exploration.

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Annexes

Annex 1. Interview Protocol for: DSMS Authorities

Instruction of field researchers: This interview should be conducted with the PED, PED and social mobilizers in each sampled province including the representatives of the Directorate of Social Mobilization and School Shura (DSMS) of the MoE. Please explain the purpose of the interview, as described in the introduction below, ask for consent, and then proceed with the interview.

Introduction

Hello, my name is _____ and I work with research department of Avicenna University. I would like to have an interview with you about your work regarding parental involvement in education in general and early grade literacy in particular. We hope to learn information that will contribute to improving educational services.

The interview will take approximately one hour. I will not record your name or identifying information and the information you share with me will not be shared with anyone else. Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. You do not have to participate and there will be no benefits or risk to you if you choose to participate. You are also able to end the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question that I ask you. However, I would like to request to please answer as honestly and completely as possible. Are you willing to participate in the interview?

[If the interviewee answers affirmatively, continue. If the interviewee says no, end the interview]

I also would like to record this interview. The recording of the interview will stay only with the research department of Avicenna University and will be shared only with the team of researchers I work with. It will not be labeled with any information that will identify you personally. Is it okay if I record the conversation?

[If the interviewee answers affirmatively, start recording and continue. If the interviewee says no, please take detailed notes instead.]

I. Warming up questions

a. Please tell me about yourself. (Follow up questions: how long have you been working as (the name of position)? What were you doing before taking this position? What educational background do you have?
b. What have you done in this position to be mostly proud of?

II. How do Afghan parents, teachers, school/CBE administrators, school/CBE shuras, and educational authorities perceive their and each other's roles in developing early grades students' literacy skills?

a. How do you perceive parent's role in students' literacy development? (Probs: Is it important? If yes/no, why?)
b. Please think about the roles and responsibilities of school administrators, teachers, and parents in students' early literacy development, what would be the comparative roles of:
    i. School administrators,
    ii. Teachers, and-

iii. Parents.

c. What are the current practices in parental involvement in early literacy development? Describe it please.
d. How should parents support their children's early literacy development?
e. Think about the MoE policies, is there anything about parental involvement? If yes, please describe. (Probs: is there anything about how the parental involvement be increased? What challenges are there? What actions have been taken so far?).

III. What does influence shaping parental engagement in their kids' education (socioeconomic, security and safety, in-school, community, media, and other factors,) and what does demotivate/disengage parents' engagement? How?

a. What factors influence, positively or negatively, the involvement of parent to help their children learn reading and writing in early grades?
b. Think about those parents who are active in supporting their children's reading and writing in early grades, what differences do they have from other parents who are not actively supporting their children's reading and writing? Give me examples.
c. How does security affects parents' involvement in early grades students schooling?
d. What is community tradition to support early grade reading? (probes: Sending their child to mosque, adult reading group, hiring extra teacher, or something else).
e. Think about the barriers that may demotivate/disengage parents in students learning to read and write? What are barriers at the MoE related institutions that may demotivate/disengage parents in students learning to read and write? What are barriers at community that may demotivate/disengage parents in students learning to read and write?
f. What needs to be done to improve parental involvement in early literacy development in early grades?

Before the interview ends, is there anything I have not asked questions about that you think is relevant for me to know?

Annex 2. Interview protocol for: parents

Instructions for field researchers: This interview should be conducted with parents of the selected students of grade 3. Please explain the purpose of the interview, as described in the introduction below, ask for consent, and then proceed with the interview. Please audio record the interview after the interviewee's consent is taken.

Introduction

Hello, my name is _____ and I work with the research department of Avicenna University. I would like to have a conversation with you about your involvement in your child's literacy development. We hope to learn information that will contribute to improving educational services in the area.

The conversation will take approximately one hour. I will not record your name or identifying information and the information you share with me will not be shared with anyone else. Your participation in this conversation is entirely voluntary. You do not have to participate and there will

be no benefits or risks to you if you choose to participate. You are also able to end the conversation at any time or refuse to answer any question that I ask you. However, I would ask that you please answer as honestly and completely as possible. Are you willing to participate in the conversation?

[If the interviewee answers affirmatively, continue. If the interviewee says no, end the interview]

I would also like to record this conversation. The recording of the conversation will stay only with the research department of Avicenna University and be shared only with the team of researchers I work with. It will not be labeled with any information that will identify you personally. Is it okay if I record the conversation?

[If the interviewee answers affirmatively, start recording and continue. If the interviewee says no, please take detailed notes instead.]

Demographic profile for Data Management	
A. INTERVIEW	
1. Interviewer name: ( )	2. Interviewer assistant: ( )
3. Interview date:	4. Interview time: From to
5. Province	6. District
B. SCHOOL	
1. School Name:	2. School Type (Urban/Rural):
3. School Type (CBE/Public School):	4. School type (Boys/Girls/Coeducation/ Mixed in segregated class or shift):
5. School's Language of Instruction:	
C. PARENT	
1. The interviewee: Mother: Father:	
2. Father's education level:	3. Mother's education level:
4. Father's Job:	5. Mother's Job:
6. Native Language:	7. Number of Children:
8. Total family members:	

Demographic profile for Data Management	
D. STUDENT	
2. Student's ID (Name, father's name, grandfather's name):	3. Age:
4. Grade:	5. Sex: Male ( ) Female ( )
6. Last Year/semester GPA:	7. What is the highest level of education among the members of your household?

I. Warming up questions

1. How is your child (name) doing in her/his school? (Follow ups: are you satisfied or dissatisfied with her/his academic performance? Why?
2. How often do you go to school? (Follow-ups: Do you know your child's teacher? How is s/he doing? Are you a member of SMS/CBE *Shura*?)

II. How do Afghan parents, teachers, school/CBE administrators, school/CBE Shuras, and educational authorities perceive their and each other's roles in developing early grades students' literacy skills?

3. Who are responsible for your child's early literacy (reading and writing) development? (Follow-ups: Do you think you have a responsibility in developing your child's early literacy skills? What responsibility?)
4. What are the roles and responsibilities of teacher/Principal in developing your child's literacy development? How does s/he perform?
5. Apart from sending your child to school, what have you done to help him/her learn reading and writing?
6. What factors, in your opinion, contribute to your child's success in learning to read and write?

III. Do Afghan parents support their children's development of early literacy? If so, how?

7. What have you or your family done to make the home environment suitable for your child's study? Explain.

(Researcher take picture if something is interesting and is not culturally disliked or write description).

8. What kind of learning material or equipment have you purchased for your child when s/he was grade1, grade 2, grade 3 (ask separately)? Give me some examples
9. Tell me about the textbooks available to your child? (Probes: Does s/he have all, most, or some? If not all, why is there a lack of books? If s/he has all, who provided the textbooks?)
10. What (if any) supplementary learning material does your child have access to? (Probes: story books, notebooks, etc). Please describe the books.

Note to researcher: Ask to bring and show the books, take a picture of them.

11. Do you support your child with homework? If so, how? If no, why?
12. What do you do to ensure your child completes his/her homework? (Probes: support, encouragement, punishment).
13. Do you see your child's notebook for his/her teacher's feedback? Please describe. If no, why?
14. How often (if ever) do you/family members read books at home? (Follow ups: How often have you/family members read to your child at home when s/he was grade 1 and grade 2? (Probes: what books, how often). How often do you read now when s/he is grade 3 (what books?) Please describe how you/family support your child in reading (Do you ask questions before, during, and after reading).
15. Do you dictate to your children at home? If so, how often? Show an example of what you dictate (researcher to take a picture and write a description.)
16. Do you support your son and daughter differently? Why?
17. Is there any one in your family who supports your child in learning to read and write? If yes, who they are? How do they support?
18. Have you ever visited your child's school this year? If yes, what for? Did you go yourself or the school had invited you?
19. Who, from your family, is more involved in the child's schooling? (father, mother, someone else?)
20. What kind of information does the school share directly or indirectly with you about your child's learning? Give me some example.
21. How do you come to know your child's educational performance?
22. How do you recognize that your child has challenges understanding the text?
23. How do you follow up with your child's teacher on your child's literacy performance? How does the school/teacher react to your follow-ups?

24. How do you communicate your child's problems and challenges in learning and in school environment to his/her teacher or principal? Give me example?
25. Is the child's first language different from the school's language of instruction? If yes, does it affect your involvement in his/her reading and writing?

IV. Influential factors in shaping parental involvement

26. What is your occupation? how does your occupation influence your involvement in your child's learning to read and write?
27. How does security affect your involvement in your child schooling?
28. What is community tradition to support early grade reading? (Probes: adult reading group, hiring extra teacher, establishing community library)
29. Does your child go to mosque for learning? (Follow up: What other education centers/supports are available for your child in the community?)
30. What are barriers at your home (e.g. extended family, economic factors and so on) that demotivate/disengage you to be involved in your child's learning to read and write?
31. What are barriers at school/institution that demotivate you to be involved in your child's learning to read and write?
32. What are barriers in the community that demotivate you to be involved in your child's learning to read and write?

Annex 3. Parental Permission for Children Participation in Research

My name is … We are here to conduct a study to understand how Afghan parents are involved in their child's early literacy development. We are seeking your permission to have your child participate in this study. If you allow your child to participate in this study, s/he will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview will be around an hour and will be audio-recorded. The records will remain with us and will not be shared with anyone except with the team of research we work with. This is volunteer participation. You or your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with the school in any way. Your and your child's participation in this study helps to improve education quality in Afghanistan.

Will you allow that your child be interviewed?

Yes ☐

No ☐

(if s/he says no, thank him and go for next child, if s/he agreed, proceed with the interview).

Will you allow that we record our conversation with your child? (if s/he says no, thank him and take detailed note.)

Yes ☐

No ☐

Annex 4. Protocol: School's Principal Interview

Instructions for field researchers: this interview should be conducted with school principal. Please explain the purpose of the interview, as described in the introduction below, ask for consent, and then proceed with the interview.

Introduction

Hello, my name is _____ and I work with research department of Avicenna University. I would like to have a conversation with you about your work, the communication and collaboration of school and community/parents. We hope to learn information that will contribute to improving educational services in the area.

The conversation will take approximately one hour. I will not record your name or identifying information and the information you share with me will not be shared with anyone else. Your participation in this conversation is entirely voluntary. You do not have to participate and there will be no benefits or risks to you if you choose to participate. You are also able to end the conversation at any time or refuse to answer any question that I ask you. However, I would ask that you please answer as honestly and completely as possible. Are you willing to participate in the conversation?

[If the interviewee answers affirmatively, continue. If the interviewee says no, end the interview]

I would also like to record this conversation. The recording of the conversation will stay only with the research department of Avicenna University and be shared only with the team of researchers I work with. It will not be labeled with any information that will identify you personally. Is it okay if I record the conversation?

[If the interviewee answers affirmatively, start recording and continue. If the interviewee says no, please take detailed notes instead.]

IV. Warming up questions

1. Please tell me about yourself (Follow up questions: how long have you been working as a school principal? What were you doing before taking this position? What educational background do you have?
2. What have you done in this school to be mostly proud of?
3. How are yours/schools' relations with the community and parents?

V. How do Afghan parents, teachers, school/CBE administrators, school/CBE Shuras, and educational authorities perceive their and each other's roles in developing early grades students' literacy skills?

4. What initiative have you taken to help early grade students learn reading and writing?

5. Who are responsible for child's literacy development in early grades? (Follow-up: What roles do they play in literacy development?)
6. How parents are involved in their child's literacy development? Describe it please.
7. Do you think parental involvement is important in students' early literacy development? If yes, why? If no, why?
8. How does your school ensure parents are involved in students' early literacy development? What activities (if any) do you perform so far to encourage parents to support developing early grade students' literacy skills? (follow ups: ask about the activities of Shura and teachers too.).

VI. Do Afghan parents support their children's development of early literacy? If so, how?

9. What support do students at early grades receive from their parents to learn reading and writing? Provide detailed example.
10. What support do students at early grades receive from their parents about their homework? Provide examples.
11. Does your school communicate with students' parents in early grades about their homework? (Probes: What are the issues related to homework for which you communicate with parents? Tell me examples, what was the feedback etc.)
12. How do you or your school communicate with parents of students in early grades? (Probes: what communication tools/mechanisms do you use?)
13. How do you keep parents informed of their children's performance?
14. Which of parents, father, or mother, often communicates with school? Why? For what purpose? Give examples.

VII. What does influence shaping parental engagement in their kids' education (socioeconomic, security and safety, in-school, community, media, and other factors,) and what does demotivate/disengage parents' engagement? How?

15. Based on your experience in this school, what factors influence parental involvement in their children's early grade reading and writing? (Follow ups: what factors motivate them? What factors demotivate them? Why? Provide examples.)
16. Think about those parents who are active in supporting their children's reading and writing, what differences do they have from other parents? Give me some examples.
17. How does security affects parents' involvement in students schooling?
18. What are the barriers at home that may demotivate/disengage parents in students learning to read and write?
19. What are barriers in the community that may demotivate/disengage parents in students learning to read and write?
20. What are barriers at school/DED/PED/MoE that may demotivate/disengage parents in students learning to read and write?

Annex 5. Interview protocol for: School Teacher

Instructions for field researchers: this interview should be conducted with school/CBE teacher who teach students in grade 3. Please explain the purpose of the interview, as described in the introduction below, ask for consent, and then proceed with the interview.

Introduction

Hello, my name is _____ and I work with research department of Avicenna University. I would like to have a conversation with you about your teaching at schools and communication and collaboration of your students' parents with schools. We hope to learn information that will contribute to improving educational services in the area.

The conversation will take approximately one hour. I will not record your name or identifying information and the information you share with me will not be shared with anyone else. Your participation in this conversation is entirely voluntary. You do not have to participate and there will be no benefits or risks to you if you choose to participate. You are also able to end the conversation at any time or refuse to answer any question that I ask you. However, I would ask that you please answer as honestly and completely as possible. Are you willing to participate in the conversation?

[If the interviewee answers affirmatively, continue. If the interviewee says no, end the interview]

I would also like to record this conversation. The recording of the conversation will stay only with the research department of Avicenna University and be shared only with the team of researchers I work with. It will not be labeled with any information that will identify you personally. Is it okay if I record the conversation?

[If the interviewee answers affirmatively, start recording and continue. If the interviewee says no, please take detailed notes instead.]

VIII. Warming up questions

1. Tell me about your educational background?
2. How is your teaching going on? How long have you been teaching? What were you doing before starting this position?
3. How is your relationship with your students' parents?

IX. How do Afghan parents, teachers, school/CBE administrators, school/CBE shuras, and educational authorities perceive their and each other's roles in developing early grades students' literacy skills?

4. What do you do for your students to learn reading and writing?
5. Do you think parental involvement is important in students' early literacy development? If yes, why? If no, why?
6. How does your school ensure parents are involved in early literacy? What activities (if any) do you perform to encourage parents to support developing early grade students' literacy skills? Give me detailed explanation.)
7. What do you expect from students' parents to support child's literacy development in early grades? (Follow-ups: What roles do they play in literacy development of their children? What roles they do not perform?)

X. Do Afghan parents support their children's development of early literacy? If so, how?

8. Tell me about the textbooks available to your students? (Probes: Do they have all, most, or some? If not all, why is there a lack of books? If they have all, who provided the textbooks?).
9. What (if any) supplementary learning material do your students have while coming to school? (Probes: story books, notebooks, etc.). tell me about them.
10. Do your students complete their homework regularly? If no, why?
11. Based on your experience, do students receive parents' support in learning to read and write? If yes, how? If no, why? Give me concrete examples.
12. Do you communicate with your students' parents about their homework? If yes, how to do you communicate? (Follow ups: What are the issues regarding homework, for which you communicate with parents? Tell me examples, what was the feedback etc.)
13. How do you keep parents informed of their children's performance? Examples.
14. What kind of information do yourself or school share directly or indirectly with parents about their child's learning? How? Give me examples.
15. Have you asked parents to dictate to their children? (Follow up: based on your experience, do parents ever dictate to their children at home? (if yes, how do you know this)
16. Which of parents, father or mother, often communicates with yourself and school?
17. Have you ever been contacted by students' parents about their children's learning (homework, grades, issues)? Ask for example.
18. Have you ever invited your students' parents to school this year? If yes, what for? When? How many times?
19. Which subject(s) do you think is more interesting to the parents to be involved in? Why?

XI. What does influence shaping parental engagement in their kids' education (socioeconomic, security and safety, in-school, community, media, and other factors,) and what does demotivate/disengage parents' engagement? How?

20. What factors influence parental involvement in their children's reading and writing?
21. Think about those parents who are active in supporting their children's reading and writing, what differences do they have from other parents? Give me examples.
22. How does security affect parents' involvement in students' schooling?
23. What is community tradition to support early grade reading? (Probes: adult reading group, hiring extra teacher)
24. Do your students go to mosque/other learning centers for learning? What do they learn?
25. Tell me about the barriers at students' home that may demotivate/disengage parents in their children learning to read and write?
26. What are barriers in the community that may demotivate/disengage parents in students learning to read and write?
27. What are barriers at school/DED, PED, MoE that may demotivate/disengage parents in students' learning to read and write?

Annex 6. Focused Group Discussions with School Management Shura

Instructions for FGD Facilitator: This FGD should be conducted with the members of School Management *Shura* (SMS) and CBE *Shura*. Please explain the purpose of the FGD, as described in the introduction below, ask for consent, and then ask the participants if they have any questions. All the participants should agree to participate in the FGD. During running the FGD, you must encourage all the participants to take part and express their opinions.

Start by explaining the ground rules as follows:

Before we start, I would like to remind you that there is no right or wrong answer in this discussion. We are interested in knowing what each of you think. So please feel free to be frank and to share your point of view, regardless of whether you agree or disagree with what you hear. It is very important that we hear all your opinions.

Introduction

Let's start by going around the circle and having each person introduce herself. (Members of the research team should also introduce themselves and describe each of their roles). My name is _____ and I work with the Avicenna University's research unit. As part of the research we are conducting FGD with SMS/CBE Shura and that is why we are here to discuss with you about the research subject.

The discussion will take approximately one hour. I will not record your names or identifying information and the information you share with me will not be shared with anyone else. Your participation in this conversation is entirely voluntary. You do not have to participate and there will be no benefits or risks to you if you choose to participate. You are also able to end the conversation at any time or refuse to answer any question that I ask you. However, I would ask you that please answer as honestly and completely as possible. Are you willing to participate in the conversation?

[If FGD members answer affirmatively, continue. If the FGD members say no, end the interview]

I would also like to record this conversation. The recording of the conversation will stay only with us and be shared only with the team of researchers I work with. It will not be labeled with any information that will identify you personally and your group. Is it okay if I record the conversation?

[If the FGD members answer affirmatively, start recording and continue. If the members say no, please take detailed notes instead.]

XII. SMS History

a. How long has this SMS/CBE Shura been active? How long have each one of you been working as SMS/CBE Shura member?
b. What are the main responsibilities of the SMS?

XIII. SMS Management

a. Did the members of the SMS hold an official meeting in the last year to discuss issues related to reading and writing in early grades? If yes, how many meetings? What are the issues discussed in the meetings? what decisions are made?
b. Do you specifically discuss how to involve parents in early grade students' learning at school/community/home?

c. To what extent are parent's perception and concerns heard and considered in Shura's decisions? Give me examples.
d. How do you and parents communicate on the children's education?
e. Are there any documents (meeting minutes) that SMS can show you as evidences? Any sign of their involvement in early literacy development?

Note: Researcher, please look at the meeting minute and take pictures.

XIV. How do Afghan parents, teachers, school/CBE administrators, school/CBE shuras, and educational authorities perceive their and each other's roles in developing early grades students' literacy skills?

a. How parents are involved, in some ways, to their children's early literacy development in early grades? Describe it please.
b. How should parents support their children's early literacy development?
c. How do you perceive parent's role in students' education?
d. What do you do for students' literacy development in early grades? Give me examples.

XV. Do Afghan parents support their children's development of early literacy? If so, how?

a. Do parents support Shura in its responsibilities? Please explain how they support you.
b. How parents provide resources (material, volunteer teacher) for school to support early literacy development in early grades?
c. Do early grade students have access to storybooks at the community? If so, What books? Describe those books.
d. Do you think parents have adequate involvement in early literacy development? Why/why not? What needs to be done to enhance that involvement?

XVI. What does influence shaping parental engagement in their kids' education (socioeconomic, security and safety, in-school, community, media, and other factors,) and what does demotivate/disengage parents' engagement? How?

e. What factors influence parental involvement in their children's reading and writing? (Probes: security, works, economic status, school barriers, gender of students at school, and so on.)
f. Think about those parents who are active in supporting their children reading and writing, what differences do they have from other parents who are not active in supporting their children to learn reading and writing? Give me examples.
g. What is community tradition to support early grade reading? (prob: sending their child at mosque, adult reading group, hiring extra teacher, sending to a supplementary course…)

Before the FGD ends, is there anything I have not asked that you think is relevant for me to know?

Annex 7. Interview Protocol for: Students

Instructions for field researcher: this interview should be conducted with selected students of grade 3. Please explain the purpose of the interview, as described in the introduction below, ask for consent, and then proceed with the interview.

Introduction

Hello, my name is _____ I came here to have a conversation with you about your studies at school. This is just a conversation. It is not a test. We will not share your answers to anyone. We hope to learn information about the way your parents help you study at school and learn better.

Your participation in this conversation is entirely voluntary. You do not have to participate and there will be no benefits or risks to you if you choose to participate. You are also able to end the conversation at any time or refuse to answer any question that I ask you. Do you want to participate in this conversation?

[If the child answers affirmatively, continue. If the interviewee says no, take a detailed note.]

I would also like to record this conversation. The recording of the conversation will stay only with me and my colleagues. It will not be shared with school, parent or anyone. Is it okay if I record the conversation?

[If the interviewee answers affirmatively, start recording and continue. If the interviewee says no, please take detailed notes instead.]

REGISTRATION FORMS	
E. INTERVIEW	
7. Interviewer name:	8. Interviewer assistant:
9. Interview date:	10. Interview time: from to
11. Grade	12. District
13. Province	
F. SCHOOL	
6. School Name:	7. School Type (rural, urban):
8. Number of students in the class:	9. School type (boys, girls, coeducation, mixed in segregated class or shift):
G. STUDENT	
8. Student's ID (Name |father's name| grandfather's name|)	9. Age:
10. Grade:	11. Gender:
12. Last Year/semester GPA	13. Birth/Age order among siblings:

XVII. Warming up questions:

a. Tell me a little about yourself? How old are you? How are you doing with your school? How far is it get to school?

XVIII. Parental support in children's early literacy development

a. What do you do in a typical day? (Probs: work, study, play game, doing sport…)
b. How much time do you spend reading at home after school? (follow ups: Do you often learn subjects at school or at home? How much time do you spend doing homework at home every day?)
c. How your parents helped you to learn reading and writing in grade 1, and grade 2? How do they help you now?
d. What sort of learning material do your parents provide to you? (Follow ups: who has provided you the textbook? Pen? Pencil? Notebook? Bag? School Uniform?)
e. Which one, father or mother, usually provide necessary educational materials? Segregate the materials provided by mother and father.
f. Do you have story books at home/community to read it? (What are the titles of those books? How many do you have?)
   Note: researcher, ask for those, and take picture/write detailed description.
g. Is the home environment comfortable enough to study? Provide detail.
h. .
i. What do you expect from your parents to provide you to learn reading and writing? (Do they provided them for you? Why, if not?)
j. What support do you receive from other family members, such as siblings? Give example.
k. Do you do your homework alone or your father or mother helps you? Do they see your homework?
l. In which subjects do your parents often help you? (Follow ups: What help do you get in Language? What help do you get in Math? What help do you get in Islamic Education? Provide examples.
m. Is your mom or father visit your school? How frequent they come? What is the purpose of their visit?
n. Have you ever had problem in school? Explain. Have you raised the problem with your parents? Have they come to school to solve the problem? Give some example.
o. Which one of parents are frequently visiting school, your mother or father? Why?
p. Do you go to mosque/other educational center in your area to study? If yes, explain the study area in detail.

Thank you for your time

Annex 8. Observation Checklist for student's home

Data Management

Province	

District/PD	
School	
Type of school (Male, Female, Coeducation, Mixed in segregated classes or shifts)	
Students' name, father's name and grandfather's name	
Date of observation	
Observer's Name	

Students' daily life environment at home

Describe if child has access to suitable place for reading or studying (e.g. room, disk, room has picture or other type of artwork, decoration is appealing to children, the interior of the house or apartment is not dark or perceptually monotonous. All visible rooms of the house are reasonably clean and minimally cluttered.)

……
……

Describe if child has access to school uniform, food, and other basic needs

……
……

How parents react (praise, punish, do nothing) when child do something?

……
……

Describe if child is (praised, punished) to read or write during your visit?

……
……

Describe if you see any evidence of parental support to child's homework, dictation, reading habits, and so on.

……
……

Describe if child has access to reading material (textbook, supplementary material, storybooks…)

……
……

Describe if parents have reading habits (buys books, newspaper, recite Holy Quran…)

……
……

Family provides lessons or organizational memberships to support child's talents by accessing to library, mosque, gymnastic lessons, music lessons, art lessons, membership to art/cultural center).

……
……

Other observation

……
……

Annex 9. Observation Checklist for school

Note 1: Observations will be conducted in the focal student's daily life environment, especially in her/his family activity setting. The goal is to detect consistent patterns of parental involvement and discern its contextually perceived practice. Students' home setting and school s/he studies will be observed when researchers are conducting interviews with children and parents in their home and collect data from school/CBE.

Please use the following checklist while observing a school/CBE. Remember that checklist contains main areas to be covered, however, there might be more themes that will come up during actual observation. If you observe any variations by gender, grade, and school type in each of the following sections, please describe them in detail.

Note 2: While observing the following list at school, specifically focus on early grades' literacy development.

Section 1. Data Management

Province	
District/PD	
School	
Type of school (Male, Female, Coeducation, Mixed in segregated classes or shifts)	
Approximate number of families under school coverage	
Number of students registered	
Number of regular present students	
Number of registered students in early grade	

Number of regular present students in early grades	
Date of observation	
Observer's Name	

Section 2. School's Environment

Indicators to Observe		Explanation
Describe schools' physical environment (Describe facilities that government or other institutions has provided.)		
Geographic locations considering population density around it		
Any sign of community support to schools' physical environment (If government or NGOs provided such a facility leave this blank)	School building	
	Library	
	Playground	
	Lab	
	Heating/Cooling material	
	Garden	
	Water well	
	School surrounding wall	

	Tents (if available)	
	School maintenance	
	Carpet	
	Protection wall against flood	
	Others (specify)	

Section 3. School-Parent Communication

Indicators to Observe	Response	Evidence
Training (by school, MoE or NGOs) parents on how to monitor students' progress, how to help them learn?	Yes No ☐ NA ☐	Evidence if yes
Training/consultation (by school, MoE or NGOs) of personnel to interact with parents?	Yes ☐ No ☐ NA ☐	Evidence if yes
What is the communication means between school and parents?	Yes ☐ No ☐ NA ☐	Explain it (Phone? Letter? Sending student to invite someone? Sending school janitor Other)
Any written policy or common practice to increase parental involvement?	Yes ☐ No ☐ NA ☐	Evidence
SMS meeting during the academic year?	Yes ☐ No ☐ NA ☐	If yes, how many times?

		( )
Meetings recorded in the Journal of SMS	Yes ☐ No☐ NA ☐	Top five core topics 1…… 2…… 3…… 4…… 5……..
Apart from SMS, other meetings with parents (Specify…)	Yes ☐ No☐ NA ☐	If yes, how many times? ( )
Meetings recorded?	Yes ☐ No☐ NA ☐	Top five core topics 1…… 2……... 3……... 4…… 5……..
Other form of school-parents engagement such as ceremonies?	Yes ☐ No☐ NA ☐	Evidence
Are parents being member of other school committees? (Specify…)	Yes ☐ No☐ NA ☐	Evidence (chart, records…)
Have you seen fathers/mother from the early grade students visited school	Yes ☐ No☐ NA ☐	If yes, how many? ( ) What was the reason of their visiting? (Write as many as you observe.)

during your five days visits to school?		(…… …… ……)

Section 4. Volunteering & Supporting

Type of Volunteering	Response	Evidence/explanation (If yes)
Does parent teach in early grades as a teacher replacement when required? (when teacher is absent or is on leave)	Yes ☐ No ☐ NA ☐	
Does parent pay for teacher at school?	Yes ☐ No ☐ NA ☐	
Have parents donated monetary, financial assistance or goods for school's needs such as heating/cooling to the school?	Yes ☐ No ☐ NA ☐	
Have school invited parents to contribute?	Yes ☐ No ☐ NA ☐	
Have school invited parents to take part in school-based learning activities?	Yes ☐ No ☐ NA ☐	

Other observation

_____
_____
_____