

Parental Involvement and Student's Academic Achievement (The Case of Primary School grade 5-8 Students in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia)

Sintayehu Ambachew Worku
Lecturer at Debre Berhan University, Department of Psychology

Introduction

It has been generally accepted in the field of education and psychology that maximizing the potential and performance of students to the expected level strictly requires the full involvement of parents both at home and school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Large number of research conducted in the past several decades showed a strong association of parental involvement and students' academic achievement; students whose parents involved actively in their education perform much better in their schooling than peers whose parents did not involve (Hsu et al., 2011; Phillipson & Phillipson, 2010; Chen & Gregory, 2009). Thus, parental involvement has been identified as a dynamic force influencing student academic success (Hsu et al., 2011).

Parents have all-encompassing roles and responsibilities for their children including the roles of teaching (LaRocque, Kleiman & Darling, 2011). The term 'parent' in the phrase 'parental involvement' conveys both mother and father of a child. Therefore, both mother and father have responsibilities to involve in their children's education. However, empirical evidences have shown that the extent and effect of mother's involvement is greater than that of father. For example, a study conducted by Hsu et al. (2011) indicated that mothers were more involved than fathers, and that mother involvement had more effect on students' academic achievement, but as measured in terms of limited aspects of involvement: discussion, listening, monitoring academic progress and participation in school activities. Further, limited amount of studies have been done in comparing the extents and effects of mother's and father's involvement on students' academic outcome (Hsu et al., 2011). This lack of research means the effect of father's involvement might be covered with mother's involvement in the field of parental involvement. For better understanding, these researchers suggested the need to conduct more research measuring different dimensions of involvement of both the father and the mother.

Moreover, parental involvement and the effect of such involvement on students' academic achievement are often confounded by ethnic and cultural factors (Lee & Bowen, 2006). There are substantial cultural differences in parental interaction with their children and the effects of parental interaction on children's achievement between Western and Chinese contexts (Hsu et al., 2011). Chan, Chan and Chan (2013) found that more westernized parents value nonconformity significantly more than conformity, whereas less-Westernized parents placed more emphasis on the importance of unconditional respect for elders and interdependence than unconditional respect and child independence. Because parents' psychological beliefs about how they interact with their children stem from their cultural values that they believe and practice within their home and community (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2010). It has been suggested that the need to investigate the contexts that are believed to be different to understand parental involvement and its effects on students' education (Zhang, 2006, cited in Hsu's et al., 2011). The Ethiopian culture is unique in which parents communicate orally with their children (Rosemarin, 2011) though collective like Chinese culture. However, parental involvement and its effects on students' education not yet studied in Ethiopian context. Thus, it is important to understand parental involvement and its effects on students' academic achievement in Ethiopian context and to compare with Western and Chinese contexts.

Various authors commonly conceptualized parental involvement as having multiple dimensions with distinct influences on students' academic achievement (You & Nguyen, 2011; Fan, Williams & Wolters, 2012; Wilder, 2013). While researchers tend to draw on different combinations of dimensions in their studies, the field of parental involvement has been shaped by two leading theories developed by Epstein (1995) and Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1995) emphasizing on different but interrelated aspects (Chen and Gregory, 2009). Epstein argued that home-school cooperative behavioral practice can optimize students' academic achievement by promoting consistency and mutual reinforcement of learning-related practices in the two environments (Chen & Gregory, 2009). This model contains involvement types such as volunteering or attending school events; communicating with school; participating in school-related activities at home by helping with homework or checking that homework; and collaborating with the community (Epstein 1995). Unlike to Epstein, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model focuses on psychological constructs such as role construction, self-efficacy, perceived invitation from students and teachers/school and perceived life contexts and mechanisms influencing students' academic achievement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In the present study, the behavioral involvement and psychological dimensions of parents are reflected in three areas: parents' participation at school such as communication and volunteering; parenting and learning at home; and parents' role construction and

perceived life context.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler argued that parents' role construction represent motivators of parental involvement in their children's education (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Accordingly, parental role construction includes a sense of personal responsibility for the child's educational outcomes and concurrent beliefs about whether one should be engaged in supporting the child's learning and school success. If parents believed that it is the responsibility of schools and teachers to educate students, they will not be involved. Parents are likely to get involved in their children's education to the extent that they view it as part of their role and job (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). An appropriate parents' role construction will come to nothing, their perceived life contexts determine their involvement.

Life contexts such as time and energy, and skills and knowledge that parents bring to the possibilities of involvement influence their choices and activities related to their children's education (Walker et al., 2005). Parents would not get involved in helping with school related tasks and homework if students' subject matter supersedes their knowledge and skills (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). This is in part due to parents' perceptions that their own knowledge and skills are not sufficient (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995). Here one could see the importance of parents' education level. Moreover, involvement in parent-school communication, volunteer at school, helping with school related tasks and homework could be challenged in part by parents' time and energy (Antonopoulou, Koutrouba & Babaliset, 2011). Parents' perceptions of demands on their time and energy, particularly as related to job and other family responsibilities, are often related to their thinking about involvement in their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). This implies that role construction and life contexts have direct effect on parental involvement, and indirect effect on students' academic achievement.

Moreover, perceived life contexts affect the extents and types of mother's and father's involvement. Time related to job and other responsibilities could affect the mothers' and fathers' involvement. Parents with heavy time and energy demanding job and responsibilities tend to be less involved (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). If father's job is time and energy demanding, he might not volunteer at school and communicate with school, and less in helping with homework. In such conditions, mother might get involved. It has been suggested that such parents' psychological constructs have to be understood within the specific cultural context (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2010). Understanding mother's and father's role construction and perceived life contexts, and their extent involvement in association with students' academic achievement has paramount importance for intervention practices by schools, policy makers and the education sectors to enhance parental involvement and ultimately to improve students' learning achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Achieving learning outcomes at the expected level remains a critical challenge for most students of Ethiopia. As clearly seen in the reports of 2004, 2008 and 2012 national learning assessment of nationally sampled grade four and eight students, the average scores in each assessment fail to reach the benchmark- 50 set by the education sector (MoE, 2004, 2008, 2013). Researchers have suggested varied explanations to explain this poor students' learning outcome. So far most of the suggestions revolve around schools in terms of educational inputs and instructional processes. However, according to LaRocque, Kleiman and Darling (2011), schools, even well-intentioned ones, cannot educate students on their own. Educating students is a complex endeavor that demands the collaborative efforts of both parents and school/teachers (Kincheloe & Jr., 2007). That is parental involvement is very critically important to educate students to the expected level.

The education sector's action plan encourages parental involvement in terms of providing financial support to school, and participating in school events and in parent-teacher association (MoE, 2010). However, such parental involvement at school has little effect on students' academic performance. Studies have shown that rather than at school, parental involvement at home is more beneficial for students' academic achievement (Wilder, 2013) which highly depends on parents' role construction and perceived life contexts. Thus, the main objective of this study is to examine the association of parental involvement with the academic achievement of second cycle primary school students. More specifically, this study intended to:

- Examine the relationship of parents' role construction and life context with their involvement, and with students' academic achievement.
- Compare the extent and effect of mothers' and fathers' role construction and perceived life context on their involvement and on students' academic achievement.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research is adapted from Epstein's, and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model. Parents become involved as volunteer and parent-school communication at school, and as parenting and learning at home based on their role construction and perceived life contexts. The extent and effect of involvement by mother could differ from father due to differences in their role construction and perceived life contexts. This reflects the relationship of involvement and psychological constructs of mothers and fathers, and

students' academic achievement. The conceptual research framework is presented in the following diagram.

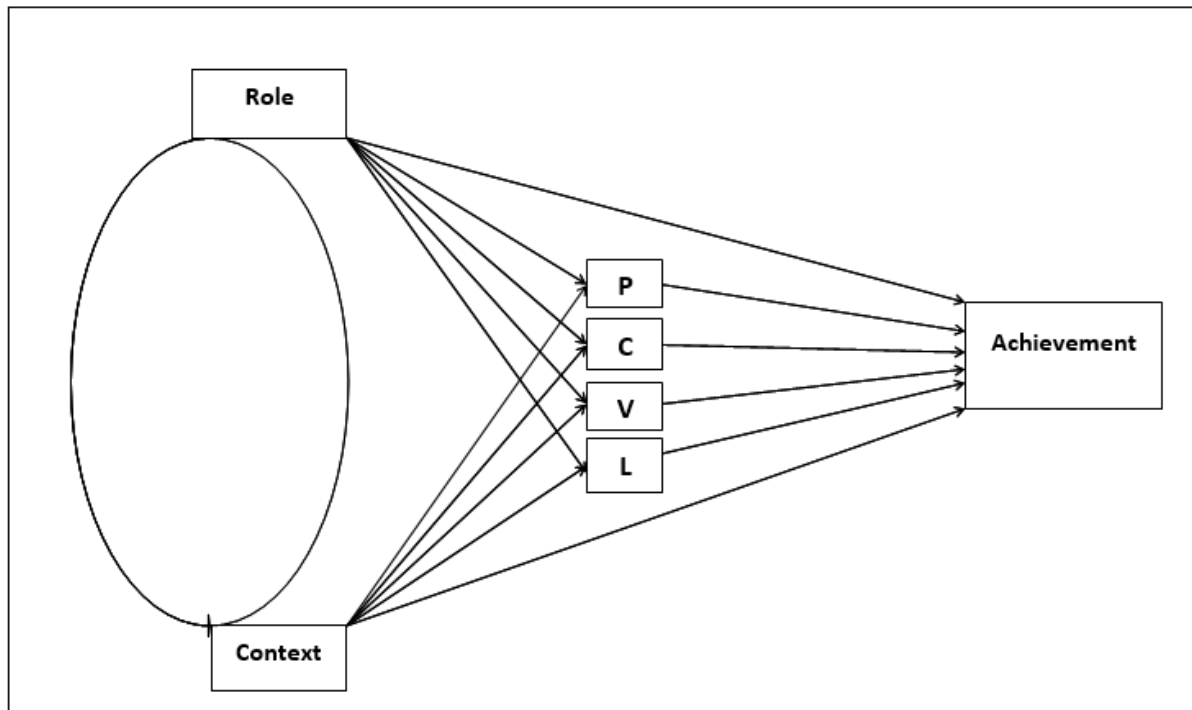


Figure 1: Conceptual research framework

Notice: P = parenting, C = parent-school communication, V = volunteer, L = learning at home, Role = parents' perceived role construction, Context = parents' perceived life context.

Research Design

Correlational design was employed in this study because it helps to examine the effects and association of parents' role construction and life contexts with parental involvement and with students' academic achievement; and to compare mother and father of students in these variables against students' achievement in Bahir Dar city.

Population and Sampling Technique

The population of the study included all second cycle primary school students and their parents of Bahir Dar city. Currently there are 29 public and 22 private, totally 51 primary schools in Bahir Dar City. From these, one public and one private school was selected randomly by using lottery methods. Based on their first semester results, from top ten and bottom ten grade five, grade six and grade seven 100 students were selected by systematic sampling methods. Then, the both fathers and mothers of these students, (100 fathers and 100 mothers, totally 200 parents) were taken to be participants of the study. However, only 108 of them turned usable questionnaires which made the response rate to be 54%.

Measures

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler proposed commonly used indicator scales of parents' role construction and life contexts that correlate with parental involvement. Their proposed scales that contain 25 items were used to measure parents' perceived school-focused, parent-focused and partnership-focused role construction, and perceived knowledge and skills, and time and energy. Epstein proposed indicator variables of parental involvement that correlate with students' academic achievement. From Epstein's proposed instrument, 16 items were selected to measure parental involvement at school: parent-school communication and volunteering, and at home: parenting and learning at home. All items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = partially disagree, 4 = partially agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree). Note that items that are primarily described in English were translated in to Amharic.

Regarding academic achievement, first semester academic assessment results were used as measure of students' academic achievement. The academic assessment results were aggregated academic records on tests and final exams in all academic subjects. Parents' gender was measured on nominal scale (mother = 0, and father = 1).

Data Collection Procedure

The selected students were contacted with the help of the school directors and the school counselor. Code was given for each student's academic result in the mark list to match the achievement level and their respective parents' responses to the questionnaire. The students were given the coded questionnaire to be filled by their parents. The questionnaires were collected in the next days.

Data Analysis

A structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to examine the hypothesized structural relationships among parents' perceived psychological constructs, parental involvement and academic achievement as it permits simultaneous examination of numerous causal links of exogenous variables to the identified endogenous variables in the hypothesized conceptual model. The data-model fit within the hypothesized model was assessed based on several criteria. Specifically, chi-square test, comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used. The hypothesized relations and effects of the exogenous variables on the endogenous variables were assessed over the whole sample and separately for fathers and mothers to examine differential effects. Amos version 20 was used to conduct all analysis in this study.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the parental involvement scales. Parents of students in general reported to have a sense of responsibility, and time, energy, knowledge and skills to be involved in their children's education. Additionally the parents reported that they had supported their children to succeed in their education at home through parenting and learning at home, and at school through parent-school communication. However, parents of students generally reported not to be volunteer in supporting the school of their children.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Parents' psychological constructs and Parental involvement Scales

	Mean	SD
Role construction	4.48	0.99
Life context	4.62	1.02
Parenting	4.51	1.02
Parent-school communication	4.54	1.00
Volunteer	3.13	0.88
Learning at home	4.49	1.00

Association of psychological constructs with parental involvement and with academic achievement

According to the results of the study, the model contained 28 sample moments and 22 parameters to be estimated, and therefore, has positive degrees of freedom ($28 - 22 = 6$). The hypothesized model fit the data well by the chi-square test, $\chi^2 (N = 108, df = 6) = 8.834, p > 0.183$, because the $\chi^2/df = 1.47$, was within the acceptable value of less than 2.00. The CFI and the NFI yielded impressive indexes of 0.998 and 0.994 respectively, whereas the RMSEA reported a value of 0.066, indicating a moderate fit of the model. All these indexes indicated that the hypothesized model presented in this study describing the relations among parents' psychological constructs, parental involvement and students' academic achievement appeared to describe the data moderately well.

Effects of parents' role construction, Parents' role construction for their involvement in their children's education was found to be a strong and positive predictor in general. The results showed that parents' role construction was positively and significantly associated with parenting, parent-school communication and learning at home, but insignificantly associated with volunteer at school. The association of parents' role construction with students' academic achievement was found to be insignificantly.

Effects of parents' life contexts, Parents' life context was found to be a strong and positive predictor of their involvement in their children's education at home. The results demonstrated that parents' life context was significantly associated with parenting and learning at home, while insignificantly associated with parent-school communication and volunteer at school. As life context increases by 1 SD, parenting and learning at home increase by 0.603 SD and 0.383 SD respectively. Moreover, the results also showed parents' life context significantly associated with students' academic achievement. That is as life context increases by 1 SD, academic achievement increases by 0.524 SD.

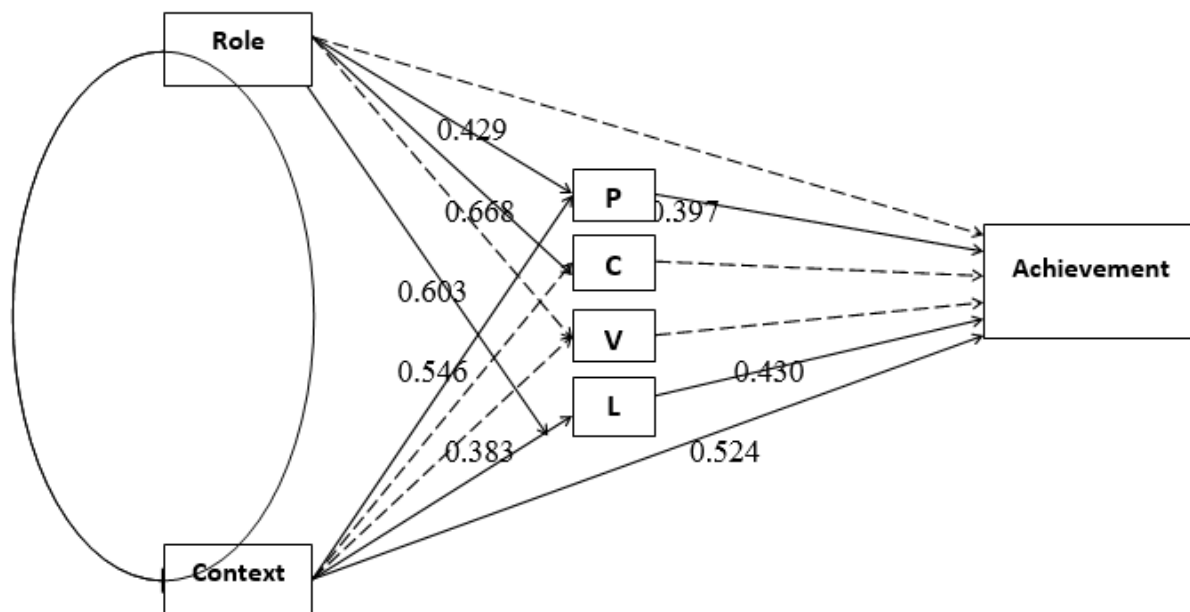


Figure 2: Conceptual research framework

Note: paths that are significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ level are the solid lines, and the dashed lines indicate that paths are not significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, and the values are given. P = parenting, C = parent-school communication, V = volunteer, L = learning at home, Role = parents' perceived role construction, Context = parents' perceived life context.

Effects of Parental involvement. Significant effects of parental involvement at home on students' academic achievement were found. The results showed that parenting and learning at home positively affected students' academic achievement. However, effects of parental involvement at school on students' academic achievement were not significant. That is as parenting and learning at home increases by 1 SD, students' academic achievement increases by 0.397 SD and 0.430 SD respectively. The results demonstrated that parent-school communication and volunteer affected students' academic achievement negatively and slightly at $p < 0.05$.

Table 2: Standardized Parameter Estimates of the model

Parameter		Estimate
P	<--- Role	0.429*
C	<--- Role	0.668*
V	<--- Role	0.297
L	<--- Role	0.603*
P	<--- Context	0.546*
C	<--- Context	0.285
V	<--- Context	0.527
L	<--- Context	0.383*
Achievement	<--- P	0.397*
Achievement	<--- C	-0.010
Achievement	<--- V	-0.075
Achievement	<--- L	0.430*
Achievement	<--- Role	-0.348
Achievement	<--- Context	0.524*

Note. Only estimates with * are significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ are provided in the table. P = parenting, C = parent-school communication, V = volunteer, L = learning at home, Role = parents' perceived role construction, Context = parents' perceived life context.

Differences between fathers and mothers

Mothers' role construction was found to be stronger and positive predictor of involvement than fathers in general. The results indicated that the effects of role construction on parental involvement were stronger for

mothers than fathers. Mothers' role construction significantly associated with the four aspects of parental involvement. Fathers' role construction significantly associated only with learning at home.

However, fathers' life context tended to be stronger predictor of involvement in their children's education than mothers in general. The results demonstrated fathers' life context affected positively and significantly parenting, volunteer and learning at home while mothers' life context affected significantly only learning at home. The results also showed that mothers' life context affected indirectly students' academic achievement significantly.

The effects of mothers' involvement on students' academic achievement were found to be more significant than fathers' involvement. The results indicated that mothers' engagement in children's education in terms of parenting and learning at home significantly and positively affected students' academic achievement. However, mothers' involvement in terms of parent-school communication affected students' academic achievement negatively. The results also showed that all aspects of fathers' involvement had insignificant effects on students' academic achievement.

Table 3: Standardized parameter estimates for Father and Mother

Parameter			Estimate	
			Father	Mother
P	<---	Role	0.290	0.686*
C	<---	Role	0.548	0.795*
V	<---	Role	-0.076	0.823*
L	<---	Role	0.626*	0.631*
P	<---	Context	0.692*	0.283
C	<---	Context	0.374	0.187
V	<---	Context	0.919*	-0.018
L	<---	Context	0.366*	0.347*
Achievement	<---	P	0.036	0.770*
Achievement	<---	C	0.078	-0.725*
Achievement	<---	V	-0.091	-0.040
Achievement	<---	L	0.200	0.626*
Achievement	<---	Role	0.490	-0.460
Achievement	<---	Context	0.246	0.724*

Note. Only estimates with * are significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ level. P = parenting, C = parent-school communication, V = volunteer, L = learning at home, Role = parents' perceived role construction, Context = parents' perceived life context.

Discussion

One of the purposes of this study was to examine the association of parental psychological constructs with parental involvement and with student academic achievement. Two aspect of parental psychological construct (role construction and life context) connected with parental involvement, and four aspects of parental involvement (parenting, parent-teacher communication, volunteer at school and learning at home) linked with students' academic achievement were used in the hypothesized framework to examine the association. The SEM analysis presented a picture of parents' psychological constructs in their involvement and in students' academic achievement in Ethiopian cultural context. The findings support the argument that the extent of parental involvement in students' education is partly a function of parents' role construction and life context (Hoover-Dempsey, et al, 2005), and the level of students' academic achievement is partly a function of parental involvement (Hsu et al, 2010).

As parents' psychological beliefs about how they interact with their children stem from their cultural values (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2010), the findings of this study showed the link among parents' psychological constructs, parental involvement and students' learning outcomes. Although the Ethiopian culture is different from Western and Chinese culture, the positive associations of parents' psychological constructs with parental involvement and then with students' academic learning outcomes hold true in Ethiopian culture.

The results of the present study showed the differential effects of exogenous variables on the endogenous variables. Parents' role construction meaningfully associated with the three aspects of parental involvement: parenting, volunteer and learning at home. Parents' life context has significant association with only the two types of involvement: parenting and learning at home, and indirectly with students' academic achievement. In other word, parents feel more responsibility in supporting the child's learning by involving through parenting, volunteering at school and learning at home. They view supporting their child's education as part of their job. However, parents' life context such as time, energy, skills and knowledge could influence their

choices and activities related to their children's education (Walker et al 2005). Due to this, the life context of limit them to get involved in supporting child's education only at home through parenting and learning at home.

The results of the study also showed the differential effects of four aspects of parental involvement on students' academic achievement. The two aspects of parental involvement, parenting and learning at home significantly affected the students' academic achievement. It corresponds with previous research suggesting that parental involvement is a multidimensional construct and has varied effects on students' academic achievement (Pomerantz, Moorman & Litwack, 2007; Bempechat, 2008; You & Nguyen, 2011; Fan & Williams 2010; Fan, Williams & Wolters, 2012; Wilder, 2013). Further, the results also support previous research findings that parental involvement at home, such as parenting and learning at home, has more effects than at school, like parent-teacher communication and volunteer at school on their students' academic achievement (Wilder, 2013).

The results confirmed that parental involvement has significant impact on students' academic achievement. This is consistent with a body research outcome indicating that parental involvement is a significant predictor of students' academic outcome (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2010; Fan, Williams & Wolters, 2012; Wilder, 2013). Students whose parents were involved actively in their education perform much better in their schooling than do peers whose parents were not involved (Hsu et al., 2011; Phillipson & Phillipson, 2010; Chen & Gregory, 2009).

The second purpose of study was compared the extent and effect of mothers' and fathers' role construction and perceived life context on their involvement and on students' academic achievement. It was found that mothers were significantly more responsible and involved in children's education than fathers, whereas, fathers had significantly more time, energy, knowledge and skills to involve in children's education than mothers. That is mothers were more likely to view supporting and to engage in children's education as part of their role than fathers though the life context limited them. This could be cultural sense of responsibilities and believes assigned to fathers and mothers In Ethiopian cultural context, fathers assume more responsibility in generating family income, and mothers assume more responsibility to nurture children. Mothers pay more attention to and get involved in children's schooling, even if they have limited time, energy, knowledge and skills. Generally, mothers' involvement affects students' academic achievement more significantly than fathers' involvement. This is consistent with previous studies that show mothers tend to be more actively involved in their children's education than fathers (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Hsu et al, 2010; Cooksey & Fondell, 1996).

Limitations

The first limitation concerns the generalizability of the findings. Data examined in this study were collected from Bahir Dar second cycle primary school students and their parents. Although results indicated that parents' role construction and life context, parenting and learning at home were strong predictors for this particular group and school age population, the same results may not apply to students and their parents from diverse groups or other levels of schooling. The current findings in this study should be interpreted with caution in regards to parents' psychological constructs and parental involvement. Further study is needed to confirm this across the nation or to examine cross-regional or cross-ethnic differences in the role of parents' psychological constructs and parental involvement. Another limitation of this study related to variables such as parents' socio-economic status and education level that moderate the association of parents' psychological constructs with parental involvement and with students' academic achievement. Further study should consider parents' socio-economic status and education level to explore factors that moderate the association among parents' psychological constructs, parental involvement and students' academic achievement.

Conclusions

Large number of researches has investigated the association of parental involvement student learning outcomes. And few studies have examined the effect of mother's involvement and father's involvement separately in Western and Chinese context. However, no study has examined the association of parental involvement with student academic achievement in Ethiopian context. Further, although considerable numbers of studies have examined the psychological constructs of parents that motivate them to get involved in their children's education, few studies have investigated the interrelationships among parents' psychological constructs, aspects of parental involvement and students' academic achievement. This study examined the associations among these variables through structural equation modeling, and differences between fathers and mothers. The study found that parents' role construction and life context strongly predicted the two aspects of parental involvement, the involvement of parents in parenting and learning at home strongly affected students' academic achievement, and mothers were more responsible and involved in their children's education than fathers though the life context of fathers was strong predictor for more involvement than that of mothers. Schools, teachers and other relevant stakeholders need to promote psychological constructs of parents in general and fathers in particular to involve in their children's education both at school and home by providing adequate training, ultimately to improve students' learning outcomes.

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