

Experiences of Ethnic Minority Parents Learning at home

KEY FINDINGS

- 93% of parents felt that parental involvement was important
- 84% of parents reported helping their children with homework- help includes support to understand questions, reading, spelling, maths and checking that the child has done it
- Barriers to supporting their child with learning included language barrier and lack of knowledge around the Scottish education system
- 32% of parents reported having spoken to the teacher about problems with their child's homework
- When asked what help parents would like to enable them to better support their children's learning at home, parents cited more information about what and how their child was being taught, opportunities for them to learn English and better communication between home and school

LEARNING AT HOME

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 explicitly recognises the importance of parental involvement with their children's learning

The Act recognises the vital role that parents and other carers play in children's learning and development. Parents are the first and ongoing educators of their own children and, as such, should receive information and support to help develop their child's learning at home and in the community.¹

¹ http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/parentalinvolvementguidance_tcm4-374238.pdf

This follows research by Berla and Henderson that found

The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status but the extent to which that student's family is able to . . . become involved in their children's education at school and in the community²

This is particularly relevant to ethnic minority families, these parents may need additional supports to be able to become involved due to language barriers, being unfamiliar with the education system and style of teaching and not having the social supports to access information around education.

ATTITUDES TO LEARNING AT HOME

In the questionnaire we asked if parents thought their involvement with their children's learning at home and in school was important. 93% of the parents felt that their involvement was important and a significant number spoke about the partnership between home and school

Yes, because teachers and parents have to work alongside each other. Education doesn't stop when a child leaves the school building. I need to be aware of my children's needs so that I can boost their development (Mother, Greece)

Yes; if you want to encourage your child to learn, you have to involve yourself in what the child is doing at school. You also need to repeat at home what they are doing at school- teachers can only do so much (Both parents, Poland)

While parents recognize their role in supporting their children's learning, several parents also described feeling helpless due to the language barrier

Maybe- only if you can speak English otherwise you would feel lost (Mother, Lebanon)

This sense of being unable to support their children's learning at home, because they did not speak English, was again highlighted when we asked respondents if they helped their children with homework.

No because we do not have enough English and it is different from education that we had back home (Both parents, Syria)

² Henderson & Berla (1994) "A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement" Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens Education

Yes, but with very basic help because we are both not educated here, so we don't know much about the subjects (Mother, Iraq)

From the comments above it can also be noted that parents can find the Scottish education system very unfamiliar, resulting in them feeling unable to support their children's learning. From previous work the Gathered Together project has done around the experiences of EM parents, the way in which children are taught maths and reading (using phonics) is often unfamiliar to parents and can result in parents having low confidence in their ability to help and support their children with homework.

Sometimes I need to learn the method the school uses to avoid confusing my kids, I learnt in a different way in my country (especially maths) (Mother, Iraq)

LEARNING AT HOME IN PRACTICE

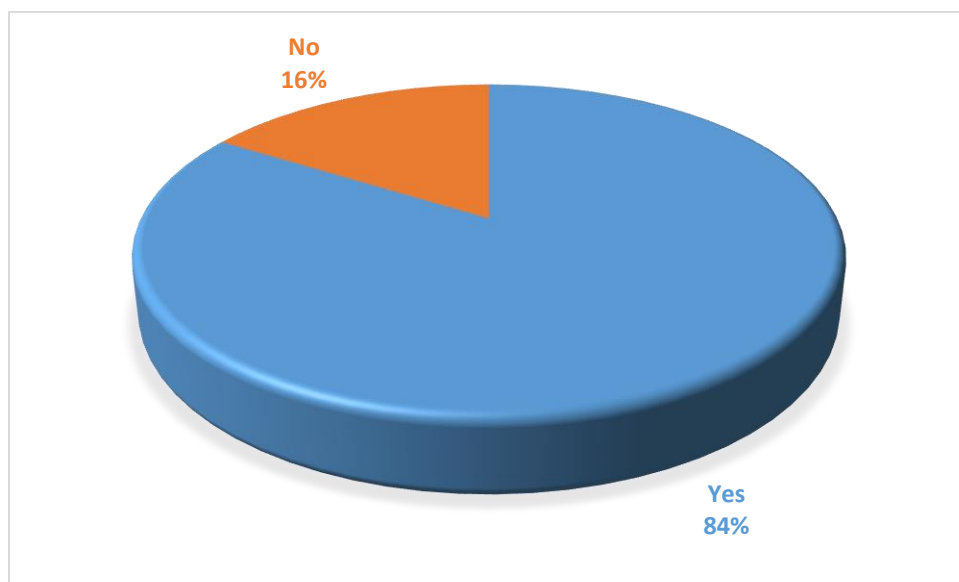


Figure 1: Do you help your child with homework? (Sample size: 155)

The vast majority of parents interviewed reported having some involvement with their children's learning at home- this often took the form of supervision or reminding children to do homework but other parents described taking a more active role

Of course, for spelling and handwriting I test him. We do extra maths from different books. Look things up on the computer, print them out for him (Mother, Latvia)

Yes- I sit with him, TV off, no phone etc. I explain the instruction in Polish and I translate all the words (eg. spelling words) into Polish to be sure he understands them. He does his own writing, counting etc. We do homework everyday (Mother, Polish)

Parents reported helping their children in a wide range of areas, unsurprisingly parents take a more active role in supporting their children when they are younger with activities like listening to them reading, helping with maths and spelling. As children become older parents are less involved, partly because children are expected to take more responsibility for their own learning and also because the work becomes more complex and parents are less confident to help.

Yes I helped them in primary school but my older children are in high school, so I can't help now as the system is harder, I don't understand the subjects. I found this hard (Mother, Palestine)

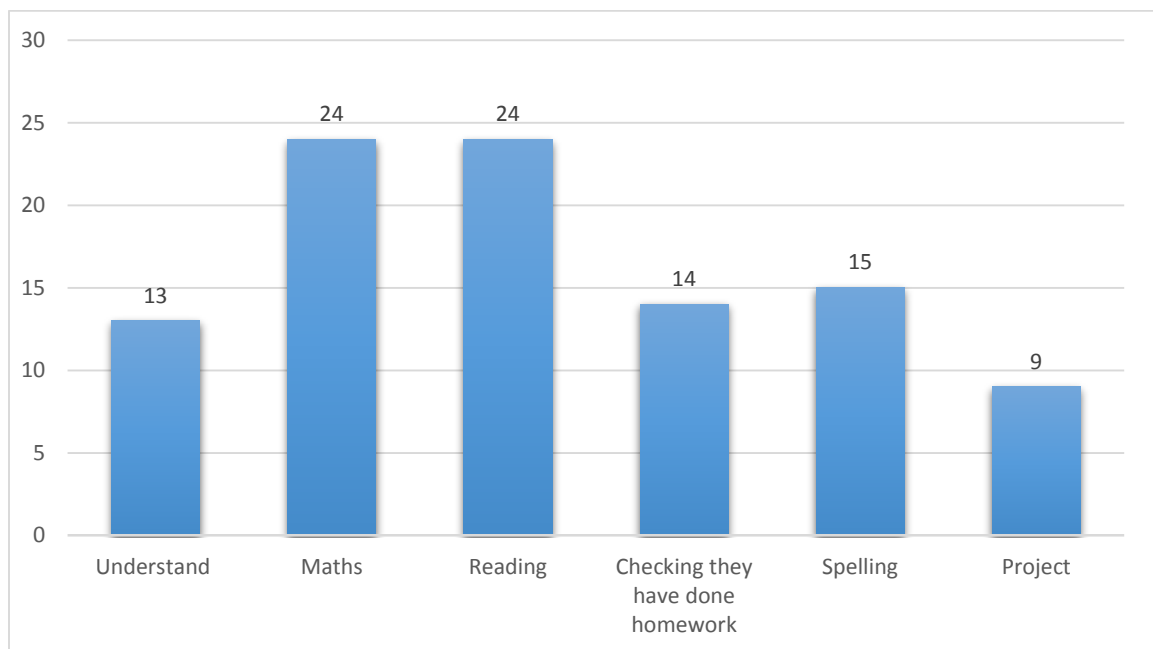


Figure 2: How do you help your child with homework? (Sample size: 99)

The majority of parents reported feeling fairly confident to help their children with homework, with 33% of the parents stating they felt very confident in helping with homework. It should be noted that of the respondents interviewed 123 had a child in primary school compared to 48 respondents with children in secondary school- from the comments it

is clear that parents feel more able to support their children's learning in the early years of education.

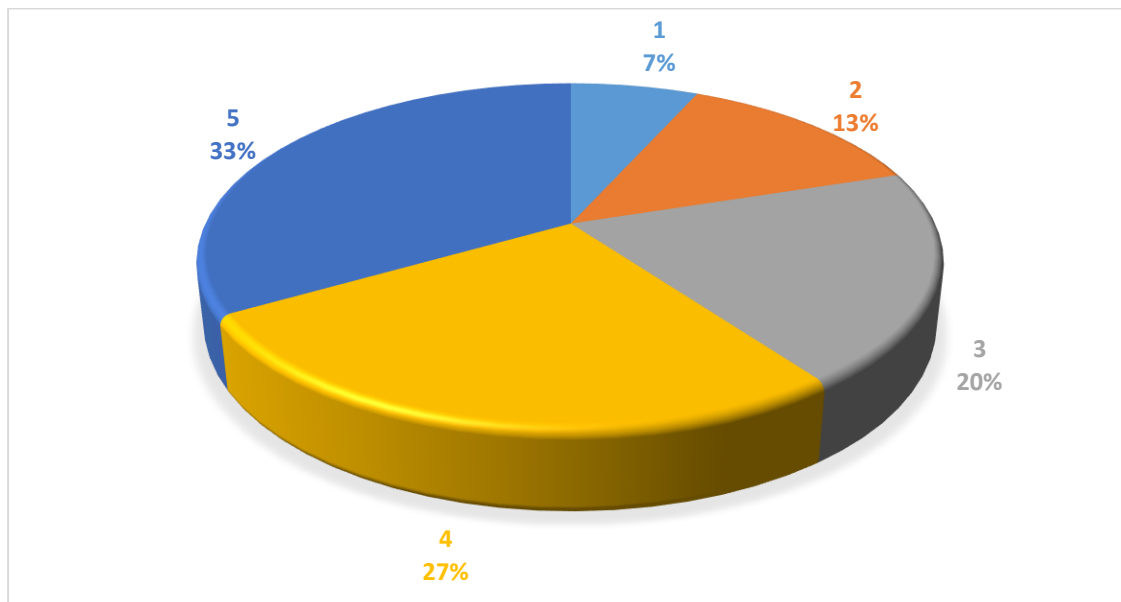


Figure 3: On a scale of 1-5 how confident do you feel helping your child with homework? (Sample size: 163)

When asked what the barriers were to helping their child with homework the majority of parents felt there were no problems. For those who did identify barriers the biggest challenge was language, with 37 respondents stating this was a barrier for them.

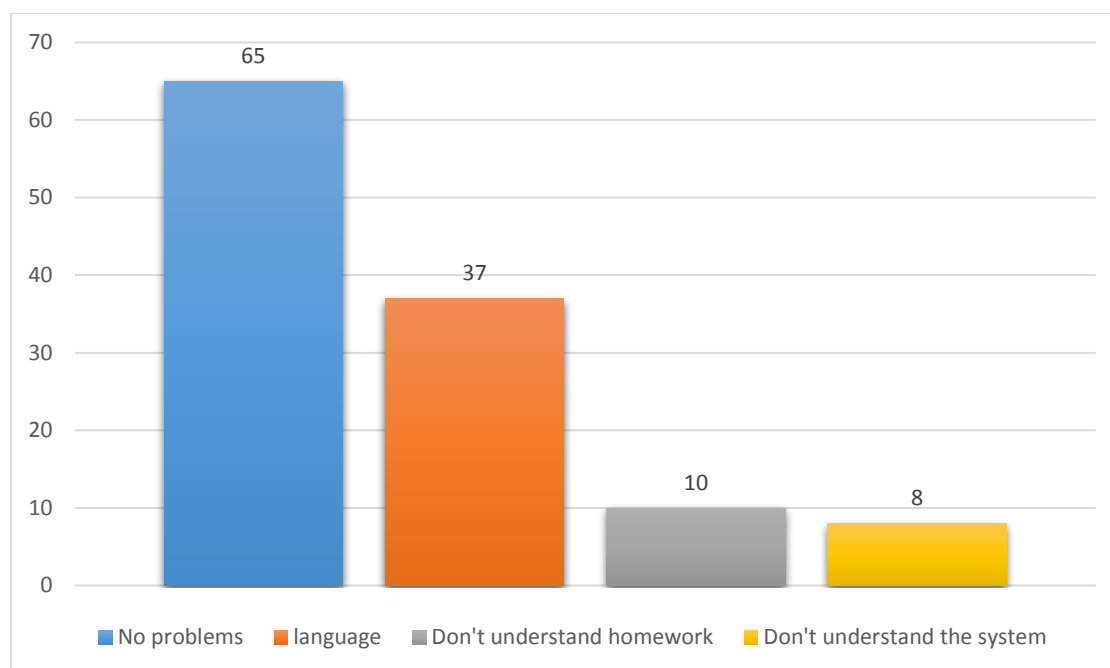


Figure 4: Are there any problems you encounter in helping your child with homework? (Sample size: 120)

The issues around language varied significantly, this included parents feeling uncertain of their pronunciation when doing reading with their child

A little worried about my accent, afraid it may confuse her (Mother, Greece)

Some parents, particularly those with children in secondary school who were newly arrived in Scotland reported feeling very unequipped to support their children's learning

We can't because we don't speak English, we are quite new in the country- don't have enough knowledge of how the education system works here. It is hard to be able to help (Both parents, Syria)

Several parents cited their lack of knowledge of the education system in Scotland which impacted on their confidence to help with homework- not understanding how their child was being taught.

For primary school is manageable but high school is difficult for me because I studied abroad and I don't have knowledge about high education in UK (Mother, Algeria)

Some parents also raised their own levels of education, they had not had experience of secondary level education and felt unable to support their children as they progressed further up the school.

My lack of education and difference in curriculum (Mother, Pakistan)

One parent also identified not having the cultural knowledge to support her child

Sometimes language barrier, sometimes because of lack of knowledge about Scottish culture, history (Mother, Poland)

SUPPORT FOR LEARNING AT HOME

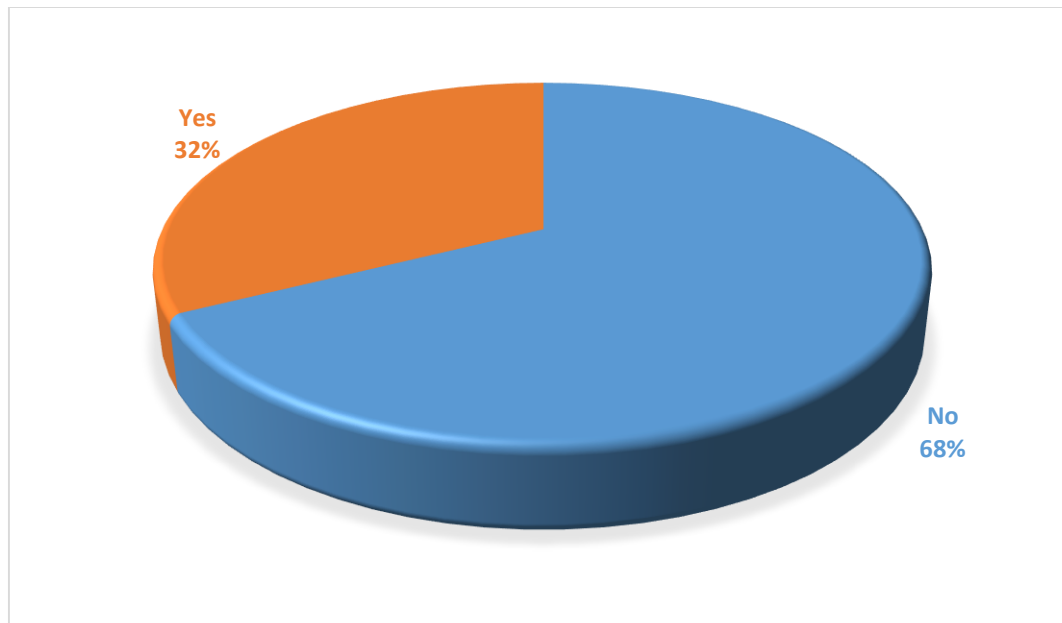


Figure 5: Have you ever talked to the teachers about the problems? (Sample size: 111)

Over two thirds of the parents interviewed said that they had not spoken to their child's teacher about problems—in many cases this was because the parent did not feel there were any issues that needed particular help and they felt confident to be able to support their child's learning. Of the 35 parents who did speak to the teacher 14 parents reported finding the advice helpful

Yes, I asked about my son's progress and was advised to get books and stories from the library. The advice was helpful because since then my son has improved (Mother, Palestine)

One parent said that the school provided a workshop for parents, explaining how they can support their children with homework. Two parents also requested specific support for their children around language. Several parents reported being told not to worry

I've talked once and the teacher told me to not worry too much as the school will help her with everything (Mother, Poland)

This response does not help parents develop the capacity to better support their child with homework or empower parents to become partners in their children's learning. Three parents said that they would feel shy or embarrassed to ask a teacher for help.

No; I feel embarrassed, being a father and not fully understanding (Father, Pakistan)

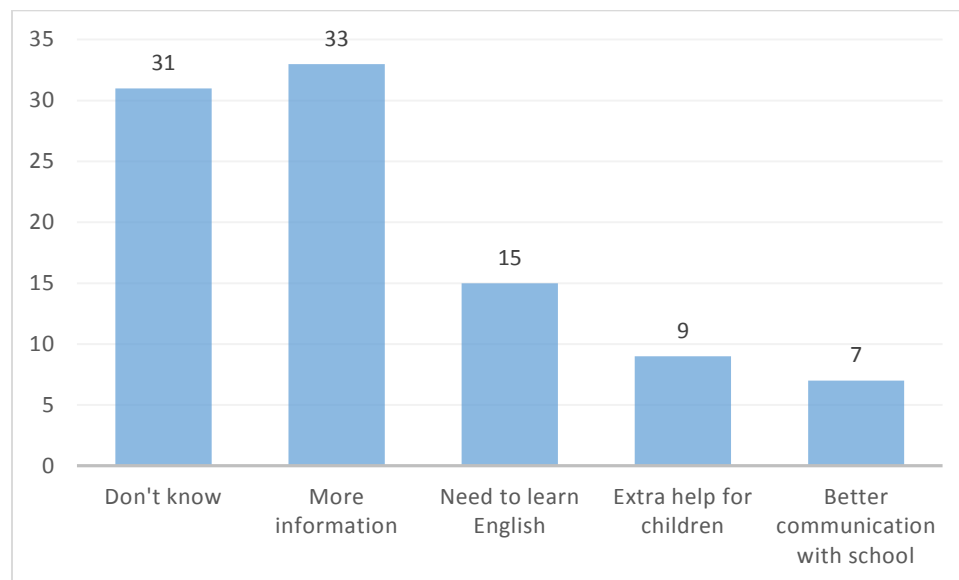


Figure 6: What kind of support or information would you require to be able to help your child more with homework? (Sample size: 95)

When asked what kind of support or information they would need to better support their children's learning at home the majority of parents suggested more information and materials on how their children were being taught.

Maybe spelling- would like to know who they explain the rules, what "soft g" is etc. They explain it to the children but not to the parents and there is no textbook to look at (Mother, Slovakia)

Give web links, give us information on what's being taught, give/provide short courses to train parents (Mother, UK-born)

In discussing the supports they need, several respondents raised the issue of language barrier and stated that they would benefit from information that was in a simple and accessible format or translated into their native language.

Sometimes questions or words which I can't understand. It would be helpful if words are simplified (Mother, Pakistan)

Information in other languages I understand (Father, Pakistan)

Parents were very conscious of the fact that they needed to learn English to enable them to better support their children.

I first need to learn English (Mother, Afghanistan)

Some of the parents who felt unable to support their children's learning themselves suggested that the school should provide additional help in the form of homework clubs for their children to ensure that they were not disadvantaged by their parents.

Will be good to have an after school club (Mother, Pakistan)

Communication with school, particularly to enable parents to have a better understanding of what was happening in class and how they could support their children's learning as also highlighted.

I would like to know more about topics they are currently studying at the class
(Mother, Pakistan)

In the homework survey I asked for more info about what they learn in maths
at the moment- examples for practice at home (Mother, Poland)

Several parents suggested that the school should provide workshops for parents to help them understand the way their children were being taught and develop their capacity and confidence to help their children.

*School maybe could provide support to parents e.g. services to deliver
information on how to help with difficult homework and where to go for support
(Mother, Eritrea)*

*Help to educate parents too; who have very limited knowledge or provide some
classes for parents and children on homework (Mother Pakistan)*

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents are entitled to receive information and support to enable them to help develop their children's learning at home and in the community under the Parental Involvement Act. This is particularly important for parents who are new to Scotland and will not necessarily have the same knowledge and understanding of the education system and how their children are being taught that native parents will have. Where parents are able to become involved in their children's learning at home children's attainment improves

Of all the intervention types studied ‘parental involvement in their child’s learning’ was the only area with sufficient evidence to suggest a causal model for impact on pupil attainment (Gorard et al., 2012)³

As this report makes clear the ethnic minority parents we interviewed clearly felt that they had an important role in supporting their children’s learning, however often lacked the skills and knowledge to be able to take an active role in supporting their children to learn and achieve their full potential.

In order to develop ethnic minority parents’ capacity support learning at home we would suggest the following actions:

- There needs to be greater awareness in both school and home of the value of the home language to children’s learning and development. Resources and guidance for ethnic minority parents to be able to support their children’s learning in the home language
- Parents expressed less confidence in helping their children at a secondary school level- there needs to be more information for parents to enable them to provide support and guidance on areas including making subject choices, understanding options available once they leave school etc.
- Schools with the space and significant numbers of ethnic minority parents to explore hosting ESOL classes for parents. As well as providing an opportunity for parents to develop their English ability this can help improve communication between home and school and for parents to develop a clearer understanding of what their children are working on in class.

³ Gorard et al (2012) *The impact of attitudes and aspirations on educational attainment and participation*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/education-young-people-parents-full.pdf>