Engaging the parents of EAL learners in positive support for their children’s language development

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Summary

This research investigated ways in which education professionals might better harness the power of parental engagement in support of EAL children’s learning. The study was conducted in the London Borough of Ealing, home to the highest number of Poles, Somalis, Afghans and Serbians in the country and the second highest number of Japanese. National Insurance registrations consistently show Ealing to have a higher level of international migration than London overall. There are 150 different languages spoken in Ealing schools. Currently Somali is the most frequently spoken language after English, after which the most common are Panjabi, Polish, Urdu, Arabic and Tamil.

The education and linguistics research community generally accept that parental involvement is crucial in supporting children’s learning and there is a rich body of literature to support this view. However, evaluation of interventions to support parental involvement demonstrates that it is increasingly difficult to scientifically assess the extent of the success of such projects since the range of variables are difficult if not impossible to control.

The purpose of this small-scale study therefore was to listen to the voices of parents themselves and learn from them: to identify the barriers to helping children learn effectively, and use that information to develop strategies, policies, materials and practices to offer effective partnership and support.

Seventy-three parents in three separate research locations – two primary schools and an ESOL community literacy project – engaged with the principal investigator (PI), 53 of whom completed written submissions. Questionnaires investigated a range of topics around parental involvement; subsequent buzz groups and practical activities explored issues relating to education in the country of origin and fears and hopes for their children. It was found that the perceived disinclination of some minority parents to become actively involved in their children’s education was the result of a lack of understanding and knowledge of the curriculum, teaching methods and school policies.
Furthermore, many expressed a profound lack of belief in their own communicative competence when dealing with professionals.

Recommendations for policies to address these issues include: more language support for parents; commitment by schools to enhance communication with parents by operating a ‘language aware’ policy for all staff; publications for parents in plain English, jargon free, with helpful illustration of e.g. uniform items/games kit/school meals and so on; homework clubs including parents, with guidance from teachers about how and in what ways they could support their children’s learning activities; constant revision and development of EAL curriculum; clear explanations of dominant methodological and child development theories including attitudes to reward and punishment, customised to the local demographic.
Introduction and context

This study of parents from migrant communities operates within an action research paradigm investigating how to harness the power of parental engagement in support of their children’s learning. In the London Borough of Ealing (LBE) live the highest number of Poles in England and Wales (21,507), the highest number of Afghans (6,789) and of Serbians (441). Furthermore, the Borough hosts the second highest number of Japanese residents in the country (2,798) and Iranians (2,981), as well as the third highest Somali/Somalilanders population (2,835/535 = 3370) and it was hoped to mine this diversity of communities in search of productive fertile learning. There are 150 different languages spoken in Ealing schools: English (41%), Somali (8%), after which the most common languages (each with over 2,000 speakers) are Panjabi (8%), Polish (6%), Urdu (6%), Arabic (5%) and Tamil (4%).

The study set out to identify socio-cultural learning and teaching behaviours associated with parents’ previous acculturation in an education system outside the UK, which may or may not support children’s learning in the present locus, as well as to investigate the levels of parental awareness and/or understanding of policies operating in their children’s schools in terms of current and developing pedagogical and epistemological practices, with a view to targeting any such lacunae should they emerge.

The underlying belief was that if parents were empowered to contribute to their children’s learning, especially assisting with homework, to see themselves as partners with teachers working to ensure that their children realise their potential, the adults as well as the children would grow in confidence and self-esteem, thereby further increasing well-being and resilience in the children, leading to the realisation of high aspiration and levels of achievement.

Background to the research issues or problems

Most London boroughs, given the dimensions of inward migration, have developed strategies relating to social cohesion and intercultural communication in their communities. LBE is no exception. A crucial plank of the Borough’s strategy in Education, Public Health and
Community Safety is the integration of third country nationals (TCN) to create opportunities for all children to aspire and fulfil their potential and develop positive attitudes towards school and learning. It is also fully engaged in partnership working with other bodies within the European Community such as the Engaging Migrant Parent and Children (EMPAC) project funded by the European Commission. LBE is the lead agency for the project with partners in the Czech Republic and Italy. Action Acton is a charity delivering a wide range of community initiatives including the Integration Citizenship and ESOL Project (ICE) funded through the European Integration Fund for Third Country Nationals. So, connecting with migrant parents and working towards a cohesive society for the benefit of all our children is a priority for this, as with other London boroughs, contextualised within the Every Child Matters agenda supported in legislation by the Children Act of 2006.

Research literature on parental involvement

The research community within education has accepted as axiomatic that parental involvement is crucial in supporting children’s learning. Desforges & Abouchaar, in a comprehensive survey of published research in the field for the Department for Employment and Skills in 2003, concluded that ‘The most important finding from the point of view of this review is that parental involvement in the form of ‘at-home good parenting’ has a significant positive effect on children’s achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation’ (2003: 4–5). Other government reports have supported this view including Ofsted in 2000 and 2001, and Williams, Williams & Ullman (2002) for the DfES.

The effects of ‘race’ and ethnicity on parental involvement in education have been widely investigated, including by Crozier (2001) on ‘deracialisation’, Conteh’s early work in 1996 on Black parents, Conteh & Kawashima (2009) on diversity in family involvement and Conteh in 2012 on multilingualism. Other researchers have focused on individual immigrant communities, such as Sale & Ryan (2008) on Polish pupils in London schools and Iglicka & Ziolek-Skrzypczak (2010) on Polish migration. Lessons from outside the UK are offered by Yan (2000) on African Americans and Mau (1997) comparing Asian immigrants, Asian Americans, and white Americans. It is generally considered, however,
that general good parenting is effective across all social classes and all ethnic groups, as the comprehensive work of the CECER (2014) on dual language learning attests.

It therefore follows that encouragement and support for good parenting in respect of supporting children’s learning in all areas – and specifically for the purposes of this study, language development – is fundamentally constructive and advantageous from the point of governmental and NGO strategies and policies towards those families who may be held back from fully benefiting from the opportunities available in this country.

Although initiatives to promote parental involvement are not uncommon, practitioners and theorists are increasingly aware that the success of these depends largely on the willingness of schools to partner with parents (Ford, Follmer & Litz 1998; Conley and Albright 2004). Many teachers see themselves as highly educated and professionally trained and see themselves as knowing much more about children and teaching than parents. Jeynes (2011: 167) goes so far as to say that ‘teachers recognise the value of parental involvement as a concept but view the actual process of partnering with parents as parental meddling’. Yet parents are regarded in many societies as ‘the first teacher’ and the best, and the influence of parental participation holds across race and gender (Jeynes 2011: 168). Regardless of country of origin, parents know more about their own children than teachers do despite teachers knowing more about education than most parents.

Rose Drury (2007) documents numerous examples of parental anxiety about partnership working with schools, ‘I am sorry I cannot help them [her children] because I am unable to communicate with the teachers in English. … I trust the school and if there is a problem, the school will let us know. So I don’t want to make a fuss’, an opinion borne out by the parents in this study.

Rodriguez-Brown (2009) studied barriers to home–school communication with linguistic minority parents and found that they invariably had great respect for teachers and interest in school yet were inhibited by concerns about their own lack of formal education. She concluded that the hesitancy of some minority parents to become involved did not mean they did not care about their children’s education.
Most parents see their role as teaching the home language and teaching knowledge and skills in the home language. Academics term this ‘invisible learning’ because it is not visible to the class teachers (or indeed policy makers) but is a crucial element of the children’s intellectual development in terms of language acquisition and understanding and concept development. There are also cultural differences operating, for instance Latino parents take their role as teachers very seriously but see that role in terms of teaching children to be good people, moral and honest members of society – one aspect of ‘invisible learning’.

Eight decades of research favours the theory that bilingualism is significantly correlated with cognitive benefits and with differences in the brain for proficient bilinguals (Nanez 2010: 95 in Garcia and Frede), yet negativity and the deficit model continues to operate in the EAL landscape.

In conducting the empirical element of this study, the demographics of the research location were of primary concern. The number of children in London (as, increasingly, in other areas of the UK) living in homes where English is not the main language is mounting; moreover, in some families neither parent speaks English. It can be hypothesised that parents who speak no or limited English are unlikely to read to their children in English, and low-income earners (and it has been established that migrants’ children are more likely to be from low-income homes) are less likely to provide language stimulation of any kind to their children.

A second body of research on parental involvement involves describing and evaluating interventions to enhance and support parental involvement in children’s learning. There is extensive activity in the UK of this type of project working, much of which is highly regarded by the participants, with creative and committed working from the providers. It remains, however, increasingly difficult to scientifically assess the extent of the success of such projects working across a huge range of variables which are difficult, if not impossible, to control.

Thus it is vitally important to learn from the end users of these projects what it is they actually need. When parents have an opportunity to feed into the discussions on and inform the content and workings of these projects, it may be possible to tailor them to parents’ needs.
The purpose of this small-scale study therefore was to attempt to hear the voices of parents and learn from them: to attempt to ascertain from them what the barriers are to helping their children learn effectively, and to base strategies, policies, materials and practices professionals might be able to devise to offer effective partnership and support on these understandings. These insights, it is hoped, will inform the further development of strategies and activities from which schools can develop local solutions to improving parental engagement. The British Council will then be in a better position to contribute to additional supplementary materials development, customised to the local demographic.

Research methodology

The intention was to collect data through a range of typical data collection methods, principally buzz-groups and questionnaires. A number of unstructured interviews took place with self-selected participants, EAL teachers, school leaders and relevant officers from the LA, consultations with community leaders, the manager of a leading charity/social enterprise and a member of the Home Office. These conversations fed into the thinking on how strategies and activities might be developed by schools specifically to provide local solutions to improving parental engagement. At the end of the data collection stage the principal investigator (PI) attended a regional network meeting of EAL leads from across the Borough to triangulate some of the findings with the professional experiences of the teachers.

Action research has been described as an ‘on-the-spot procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem in an immediate situation’ (Cohen & Manion 1994) which faithfully reflects the approach taken. In order to speak directly with as many parents as possible, three loci of research were chosen: a community primary school (CP), a voluntary aided primary school (VAP) and a literacy group offered by the Adult Education Service in Ealing (AE). As time progressed a voluntary sector project, Action Acton, was also visited. The engagement with parents was conducted entirely by the PI in the presence of the EAL teachers and Adult Education tutor.

The work was planned and contacts established during the last weeks of the summer term, including negotiating access to the research locations.
The work commenced at the start of the autumn term, engagement sessions with participants taking place on 20 separate occasions. It was decided that parents were more likely to engage in sessions which were organised directly after they had delivered their children, and before they went back to other chores and tasks. To create a welcoming and informal atmosphere, coffee, tea and biscuits were provided and chairs placed around tables so everyone could see and make eye contact. The organisation and atmosphere resembled a meeting of equals.

Levels of engagement were high from the outset and remained so. The quality and candour of the interactions – with PI and participants, and amongst participants with one another – was very pleasing indeed. Quality data was collected from the first session. Mindful of the danger of circumspection in parents’ comments on the school whilst on the school premises and in the presence of the school’s EAL teacher or head teacher, the Adult Education setting based in the local Children’s Centre provided an opportunity to talk to parents in a venue away from their children’s schools. In the event, this strategy did prove useful because, as anticipated, parents in CP and VAP often prefaced their remarks with, ‘I don’t mean to criticise the school, but …’ whilst parents at AE spoke freely without fear of causing offence.

In total the PI talked with 73 parents, 53 of whom completed a range of written submissions in addition to the questionnaires. Furthermore, 15 mothers volunteered for 121 interviews and more wished to do so had the PI been able to increase her availability. Parents originated from Europe, Africa, South America, Asia and the Middle East and spoke a range of mother tongues including Amharic, Arabic, Dari (Afghan Persian), Farsi, Gujarati, Japanese, Pashto, Polish, Portuguese, Somali, Spanish, Tigrigna (from Eritrea), Ukrainian and Urdu.

The early sessions took the form of buzz-groups so that the PI might identify issues that were not covered in the questionnaires. What was of interest was the identification of socio-cultural learning and teaching behaviours associated with parents’ previous acculturation in an education system outside the UK which may or may not support children’s learning in the present locus. It was of interest also to try to gauge levels of parental awareness and/or understanding of policies operating in their children’s schools in terms of current and developing
pedagogical and epistemological practices, and introduced useful vocabulary like curriculum, pedagogy, methodology and so forth.

The questionnaire
(See Appendix A for verbatim responses and quantification of questionnaire.)

Methodology: The PI distributed then read through the questionnaire with parents and took questions and comments. This was to raise awareness, encourage freedom of expression, relax parents and express affirmation of their thoughts and ideas. Participants were encouraged to discuss their responses should they wish with a neighbour, and were encouraged to ask further questions of the PI and/or elicit help in expressing themselves in writing if they were experiencing difficulties. In short, the activity seemed to be enjoyed and whilst some participants worked silently, others formed pairs or small groups and discussed energetically before committing their ideas to paper.

Parents were invited to disclose information on their own educational qualifications. Responses ranged from Master’s degrees, Bachelor’s degrees, technical and business college qualifications and high school diplomas, whilst one woman from Kandahar had never been to school.

Analysis of questionnaire

From the very outset, the objective was to strive to listen to the voices of parents. It is worth mentioning that all the parents who came forward to participate were women. A number of them worked part-time or flexible working, but it does mean working parents were unable to participate and explains the non-participation of fathers, something which will be touched on later.

The women spoke up loudly and clearly, and with passion and conviction on the issues raised by the PI. They spoke in a thoughtful and principled manner and made every effort to articulate their concerns. Sometimes it was a struggle and they looked to others to help them put their thoughts, ideas, feelings and beliefs down on paper. Their words
have been presented here faithfully and accurately; if there is any lack of clarity it may be that the PI has failed to understand some of the contributions made by the women as they grappled with complex issues in a foreign language. Any errors, therefore, are the responsibility of the PI. Since these women spoke with such conviction, it is certainly possible to learn from them as the analysis below indicates. The full transcript is available in Appendix A.

Q4 Do you believe that the mother/parent is the child’s first teacher? It is incontestable that they were committed to effective parenting: 51 of 53 (96%) embraced teaching as part of the mothering role and gave numerous wide-ranging examples. They recognised the importance of teaching the fundamentals for life in the early years and were aware of the child’s attachment to them and theirs to the child.

Q5 Do you think the mother/parent is the best teacher? This was not quite as universally accepted – 84.9% answered yes, 15% said no – but most responses were ambiguous, most comments qualified with ‘but’. It was clear that the respondents thought carefully and earnestly, demonstrating that they take the parenting role very seriously indeed. There were suggestions that some were harbouring levels of anxiety about parenting in their present environment and looked to their children’s teachers, sadly in vain in many cases, to provide it, referring frequently to children learning undesirable behaviours from friends. Some expressed fear that they might not be up to the task of good parenting, because of their own lack of education.

Q6 What kind of things do you teach your child? The learning they reported taking place in the home was wide-ranging, covering the home language as one would expect, accompanied by instruction and example related to culture and faith. Basic life skills were prominent, but the most prolific comments related to what is described elsewhere in the text (see Appendix A) as ‘manners’. Perhaps more accurately these can be seen as culturally specific ways of being and behaving, like greetings, and relationship with food, family and other affiliations, home life expressed as ‘house rules’.

Q7 When you are with your child do you always speak in your own language?
A large proportion, 81%, said yes, they spoke their own language exclusively in the home; 18.8% said they didn’t. There were no written comments on this question, but in conversations parents revealed that they talked in English together about stories and pictures in books and there were some suggestions that children had fun teaching their parents new words and demonstrating good pronunciation.

Q8 How do you feel about your child’s school?
Four parents chose not to comment and there was a small number of negative or provisional comments. The majority, however, expressed overwhelming support, respect and appreciation of the work of the schools. This is a tremendous foundation on which EAL professionals can build.

‘I am very very happy because my son learning perfect British English’ enthused one mother. ‘we’re new here but I’m so happy to see my daughter enjoying her school life - fantastic!’

Q9 Are you confident talking/discussing your child with teachers in the school?
Notwithstanding the joy at their children’s happiness and evident progress, fewer parents were confident in their dealings with the teachers: 60% said they were confident, 37.7% said they weren’t and one person answered yes and no. It seems it is difficult for parents to talk about children’s progress, about how well the child is doing, especially compared with native British children. This is not just a question of ranking, though this issue will be returned to below, but difficulties in understanding the children’s ability beyond, or indeed in spite of, their communicative competence in English. Only too frequently parents are aware that it is their own lack of fluency in English that is rendering discussions about the children unhelpful, sometimes meaningless: ‘No (I can’t have a helpful discussion) and I am so sad about that because I have little English.’ ‘I can’t express enough what I want to discuss/ Sometimes I can’t fully understand what they are talking’

Q10 Could you suggest ways in which schools can communicate with you?
A third of the respondents didn’t provide an answer. Those who did
tended to focus on what information they felt they needed rather than how the school customarily communicated with them. The usual means – email, SMS messaging, newsletters – were mentioned, and were welcomed by parents. Where communication was less than effective, on the whole parents blamed themselves and expressed many times the hope that schools might direct them towards opportunities for improving their own English. Some parents took the opportunity to simply offer good feedback. *well organized I think/ they are trying so hard and I always admire them/ yes we do appreciate ways to share the experience on child improvement/because parent teacher note is very nice/ Parent mail is good*

Q11 Do you understand the teaching methods in British schools? It was of interest to discover, notwithstanding the expressed positivity about the schools, whether parents recognised how schools go about educating their children, whether they are aware of the pedagogies and child development theories practised, and whether they had knowledge of curriculum content: 56.6% said no they didn’t, with 37.7% saying they did, 5.6% did not respond. Those who said they did understand did not present evidence of their knowledge, for example ‘yes, I understand every day you need read more books more words’, while those who didn’t gave powerful demonstrations of their confusion, indeed, bewilderment, ‘Actually I don’t know what does he do or the methods in British schools’

Q12 Do you understand how the teachers help with your child’s English? Most parents said they did understand how their child’s studies were supported (66%), though again it was not evident from the comments. ‘I just feel yes’ ‘Of course they do listening is very important’

Q13 Is there any information you feel you need to understand better? Parents were not forthcoming: 52% said they did, 28% said they didn’t, but 18.8% made no response whatever and there were few written comments overall. It is difficult for people to know what they don’t know and even more difficult to articulate it.

Q14 How confident do you feel about your own level of English? Parents indicated or implied, above and elsewhere on many occasions, that they were insecure about their own level of English: 37.7% said they
were confident, 43.3% said not very confident and 16.9% said not confident at all. One person did not respond.

Q15 Would you welcome the opportunity to study and improve your own English?
Almost 70% (69.8%) answered yes, 3.7% said no, and 20.7% wouldn’t say. ‘... even though my English is good but no one is perfect’

Q16 Do you help your child with homework?
The majority (88.6%) said yes, 9% no and there was one non-response.

Q17 If yes, how do you do this, what techniques do you use?
There was a high degree of uncertainty and further examples of self-doubt in the responses. Some parents reported that they attempt to practise the songs, poems and stories from the day’s lessons, or rehearse the letters, sounds or words to memorise for the ubiquitous ‘spelling challenge’ to which many referred. More frequently it seems they turn to the internet or dictionaries to provide answers, ‘I’m not good at English so I use dictionary every time’, and there are numerous references to ‘translating’. ‘I am speaking to my daughter in Arabic and asking her, when I know the question I give her the answer and she is writing it in English’.

Others follow the pedagogies of their home country. ‘I base on my own experience in Polish school’, and attempt, for example, to teach mathematics as they themselves were taught but are conscious that this is not the practice in the UK. Others use the Japanese Kumon teaching materials. When a mother doesn’t have the knowledge to help in a practical way she follows the customs of her own country, ‘I have no techniques but when she does homework I am near her’, which is the Japanese way.

Q18 Are you confident that you are helping your child to improve and achieve?
In response, 62% said they were confident they were helping their children, 28% said they weren’t and 11% made no response. There were not many comments in explication and those offered were tentative ‘not sure he feels happy with my help’.

Q19 Are you confident your child is making good progress?
Despite uncertainties about their effectiveness as mentors, 79% said they felt sure their children were making good progress with only 9%
expressing reservations: ‘No because I don’t know how to help her improve/ too early to tell/yes but because of my husband’. A further 9% declined to answer.

Q20 Do you have any suggestions about how we could help you to help your child?

Three clear messages emerged. Firstly, overwhelmingly parents requested opportunities to develop their own skills in English. While many feel secure with everyday social language, and are comfortable supporting their young children in the nursery and reception stages, they are dismayed to find that they are out of their depth as their children move through the school system ‘because every stage up is more difficult than before, especially teen age’. Similarly, they believed they could cope with most situations, but when confronted by English in a professional context, like the numerous women who said they dreaded going to the GP, they find they do not have the vocabulary. ‘Keep pushing the fluids’ said the GP’s receptionist to the mystification of one mother. Another was upset when the school receptionist asked her if she had brought a ‘P.E. kit’ for her son. She was sure she had done the wrong thing until someone asked her what she had brought and she replied ‘T-shirt and shorts’. Similarly, once teachers move on from pleasantries and greetings to talk about the curriculum, criterion-referenced assessment, age-appropriate tasks, multisensory methods, (synthetic) phonics and the like, it is understandable that some parents will freeze mentally and lose the little confidence they had.

Secondly, parents mentioned school issues. There were a number of references to the high numbers of children with EAL. Parents feared those children might hold back their own children or that teachers would be too busy to tend to their children. There was concern also that children would not have the chance to form friendships with British children. Other concerns related to the practice of using more fluent children to support new arrivals. This also created the fear that these child mentors would be held back. Furthermore, parents felt that they needed guidance from the school in respect of homework supervision. ‘It would be good if there was some suggestion from teachers how s/he rather have us parents to assist or help our child to do their homework at home, for example, should we correct their mistake? / Should we let the teacher see where they went wrong?’
The third theme related to more help for the children. Parents were mindful of the enormity of the task facing their children. ‘I believe that more classes could be provided for those children who start English as second language and within school hours as long as required’. Having brought the children to the UK for a better life it seems they feel for their children in their struggles, ‘my son cannot talk about his feelings in English so please help him to talk’. There were a number of suggestions that, other than the specialist EAL teachers, they lacked confidence in the class teachers to empathise with the children, ‘he speaks in Arabic and feels upset when the teacher doesn’t understand what he is saying’. There were requests for homework classes after school and a number of parents requested that they were allowed to be present. A minority called for mother tongue teaching, but most accepted that such a measure was against the prevailing educational philosophy, since in London it simply wouldn’t be practicable with 150 languages spoken.

**Group working on the emerging issues**

Subsequent reflections building on understandings surfacing from the questionnaires were further developed in group discussions and a practical group exercise.

After a warm-up, discussion groups were formed and group leaders appointed. Each group was given a large sheet of paper dealing with one of the four identified themes which were:

- concerns parents may have about their child’s learning
- the differences noted between the schooling parents had in their home country and what happens here in the UK
- ways in which teachers can explain pedagogies to help parents understand better how their child is learning
- information the school can give about British education and the laws which maintain it, so parents can engage with confidence in the life of the school.

These were expressed as questions:

1. What are your main concerns?
2. What are the main differences?
3. How can teachers help you?
4. What information do you need?

Participants wrote their ideas on Post-it notes and stuck them on the appropriate sheet. After an agreed time the groups all moved to the next sheet to debate a different point and so on. The session stimulated a great deal of noise and activity. Occasionally some women were writing passionately in their own language then trawling the room to find others who could translate for them. Major themes and illustrative comments are presented in the table below for convenience of access. The entire transcript of the posters can be found in Appendix B.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are your main concerns?</td>
<td>a. Child’s behaviour</td>
<td>♦ Interacting with misbehaved children</td>
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<td>♦ My son hit a child in nursery</td>
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<td>♦ They don’t listen to me</td>
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<td>♦ Don’t agree with me</td>
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<td>♦ He runs on the road and won’t stop when I tell him to</td>
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<td>♦ When they play outside they learn bad language</td>
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<td>b. (In)ability to provide support and guidance</td>
<td>♦ That I’m not patient enough with my child</td>
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<td>♦ If I’m teaching my child in correct way</td>
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<td>♦ If my knowledge and understanding of education in UK is right</td>
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<td>♦ Homework is a great problem</td>
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<td>c. Child’s progress</td>
<td>♦ I’m concerned that my child needs more time and effort from the teacher to make the same progress English children make</td>
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<td>♦ If my child has the same chances of further education</td>
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<td>♦ Is my child learning?</td>
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<td>♦ Is my child enjoying school?</td>
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<td>♦ I’m worried that because I’m Polish I’m not taken seriously by the teachers</td>
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<td>♦ My child comes home sometimes feeling he is not learning like his friends! Why?</td>
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<td>d. Child’s well-being during the day</td>
<td>♦ Our children ate everything in their lunch box or not?</td>
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<td>♦ Are our children washing their hands at</td>
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<td>Question</td>
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<td>What are the main differences?</td>
<td>a. Own country</td>
<td>◆ Holidays (three months in summer) length and organisation of school day  &lt;br&gt; ◆ We have ‘parents day’ that we observe our children’s class once or twice per term  &lt;br&gt; ◆ If student don’t pass the exams they stay in the same class  &lt;br&gt; ◆ If the student not listen the teacher gave them punishment – like slap and sticks on the hands  &lt;br&gt; ◆ Not much play just only sit and learn  &lt;br&gt; ◆ We learn more things by heart  &lt;br&gt; ◆ Not divided by level everyone has the same stuff to learn  &lt;br&gt; ◆ We buy the books and notes every day take the books and notes home  &lt;br&gt; ◆ In my country we have to pay for education every year</td>
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<td>b. UK</td>
<td>◆ He is praised for his achievements and given awards to take home and hung up at the wall and they can see it all the time and be pleased with himself  &lt;br&gt; ◆ In English school we get description of our children’s progress, in Polish school there is system of marking from 1-6 where 6 is the best  &lt;br&gt; ◆ There are many ethnic groups  &lt;br&gt; ◆ UK schools more interesting and practical  &lt;br&gt; ◆ We like that in English school children are more focussed on understanding things rather than learning by heart</td>
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<td>How can teachers help you?</td>
<td>a. Improve English</td>
<td>◆ We want more English class because live here and we need speak in school, hospital, GP, Council, bank  &lt;br&gt; ◆ We need courses for moms how we can</td>
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<td>Question</td>
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<td>treat right with our children</td>
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<td>♦ Because we need to discuss with son’s teachers at the school</td>
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<td>♦ In order to contact with school smoothly</td>
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<td>♦ Family learning class could help us know about what my child is learning in school</td>
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<td>♦ I like more grammar, more spelling more computer because I like classes help my children with homework</td>
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<td>c. Knowledge of curriculum</td>
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<td>♦ We wanna know how they do progress in EAL class when/what level they are released from that class</td>
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<td>♦ We need to know more about what children will learn in year 1, Year 2</td>
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<td>♦ I wish we could see our kids’ books more often to know what they are learning</td>
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<td>♦ We need to understand the curriculum</td>
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<td>d. Awareness of common pedagogies</td>
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<td>♦ We need lessons about classroom techniques</td>
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<td>♦ We should not teach them capital letters first but small letters</td>
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<td>♦ We have descriptions instead of grades</td>
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<td>♦ We need constructive feedback what child must do to improve/ strengths and weaknesses</td>
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<td>e. School life in general</td>
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<td>♦ I want to look my daughter’s school life</td>
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<td>♦ I wish we could see pictures of the food our children are eating</td>
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<td>♦ I wish there was a way to encourage parents to integrate more to each other and mix with other cultures</td>
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**Discussion**

So much has been written and so much research conducted on issues around migration, assimilation, committed responsible citizenship, economic participation, educational determination and direction of policies in response to these.
This study has attempted to learn from those primarily affected by the above, the end users of the services offered to families in this country, principally the school system. From tentative beginnings in preparation for work on the questionnaires, these women engaged with the enthusiasm and focus of traditional students, so much so that a number volunteered how much they enjoyed the sessions and certainly there were occasions when the atmosphere in the room was comparable to a university seminar. Pair work, group work, practical activities, all caused the women to open up, express their fears, their hopes and their aspirations. In the light of the contributions of these parents the following recommendations are offered for consideration.

More support for parents

✦ Continue to encourage participation of women because we know the education level of mothers is a significant factor in children’s attainment, but begin to target fathers. It is worth mentioning here that, ‘uninvolved fatherhood [has been identified ] as the root of a myriad of contemporary social problems (Yeung 2004: 145).

✦ Language learning opportunities to be increased and intensified. Language acquisition in a three-month period of teaching can be lost after a further three months has passed, so it’s actually a waste of time unless we are committed to continuous study. London, and increasingly other centres of population, is a multilingual city and language acquisition is a lifetime task. We must stop thinking of it as a minority issue as it involves thousands of citizens. Neither is it an issue on which we can impose time limits. It is a multifaceted issue. If we believe in lifelong learning, then that must include, indeed prioritise, English. Even postgraduate students get the opportunity to improve their grammar, proofreading, summary writing and speaking skills. How much more important is it for struggling immigrant parents? We need a government strategy and a London-wide strategy.

✦ Classes, meetings, workshops to be offered (perhaps by schools) on British philosophy and practice of education. Web-based information should be developed as a helpful backup, but this should not preclude discussions and Q&As regarding, for instance,
differences between parents’ own experience of education in the home country and what they perceive to be the salient features in the UK.

♦ Content could be expanded to include British attitudes to child rearing and discipline in the home such as the proscribing of corporal punishment and our understandings of child development. Parents could be offered alternative strategies like the setting of boundaries, the effectiveness of encouragement and so forth.

School issues

♦ Many London schools take the opportunity where possible to employ an EAL specialist, whether teacher or teaching assistant. This is excellent practice, but in a multicultural, cosmopolitan area all staff – teaching, support or admin – must be language-aware. It is essential that effective communication is accepted as the responsibility of all staff and not seen as the purview of the EAL specialist. The National Curriculum for England 2014 and Ofsted guidance make it clear that all teachers are responsible for ensuring that learners with EAL make progress in line with their peers.

♦ Schools should have a language policy and all staff must be trained in communication with visitors, parents and especially children for whom English is an additional language. Too many parents are confused by being addressed in an unhelpful manner. Simple guidance should be given to all staff about using clear accurate and plain English with parents, to refrain from making judgements about parents’ language ability based on their appearance, and without seeming to condescend.

♦ All school publications should be produced in plain English, jargon-free, with helpful illustration of e.g. uniform items/games kit and so on.

♦ A homework policy should be developed with careful guidance for parents as to how specifically to help their children with homework. Parents need to know in advance what children will be covering.
year on year so they can prepare themselves. They must not be running to catch up or be taken by surprise.

- Schools could consider displaying EAL materials and demonstrate to parents how they are used to help their children. Online lessons on set topics should be made available and parents guided in their use.

- It is crucial that parents understand the curriculum their children will be encountering and the teaching methodologies that are used at different stages. We can’t assume that parents are familiar with the concepts of age-appropriateness, criterion-referenced assessment, differentiated tasks and by the absence of ‘grades’ with the substitution of ‘purple table’, ‘elves group’ and so forth.

- Children’s rights and responsibilities and child protection issues must be provided in clear, simple English supported by illustrations if possible. From experience, much of what is provided for parents is beyond the competence of those with Entry Level English.

- Where children established in the use of basic English help new arrivals with whom they share a home language, parents should be reassured that the helpers will not be held back in their own development. Teaching others strengthens learning.

- There is a need to employ highly qualified bilingual staff and train them and indeed all staff in working with bilingual children as, according to a respondent of Drury (2007: 5) ‘… they are left to intuit the ethos of the school’ which is no replacement for their having language facility and knowledge.

**Help for children**

- Schools must be ever mindful of the great diversity of EAL learners including ‘advanced bilingual’ children and young people. The government defines an EAL learner as anyone who experiences language other than English in early childhood. In addition to linguistic history, other factors such as ethnic and cultural background are pertinent to learning as well as previous school experience, if any, including in a different national system. Schools
must be vigilant in continually evaluating their range of EAL provision including ongoing curriculum development.

- Teachers should attempt with tact and discretion to learn as much as possible about the personal journeys of learners, who may have suffered trauma prior to or during their move to the UK. Time taken to establish themselves and subsequent levels of achievement will vary.

- Homework clubs, including with parents, to be organised wherever possible.

- Peer mentoring to be encouraged.

Conclusion

Working together can only be fruitful in a climate of mutual respect. The researcher working on parental engagement and parental support must be mindful that parent–teacher friction is not new. When faced with poor attainment in schools, parents blame poor teaching and teachers claim parents are not sufficiently involved and supportive. The parents in this study, to whom I am extremely grateful, genuinely enjoyed the experience. Some comments volunteered included, ‘It’s been really supportive thank you/ Friends are also very kind and helpful/ I like these meetings / It’s been very helpful’.

The strength of a nation is based on the strengths of the families that form its bedrock. When politicians in the UK describe teachers as ‘the enemies of promise’ it is deeply damaging to the work of schools with families. Moreover, it undermines their successful working, which is crucial to the raising of standards and the maximising of educational outcomes for children.

Countless parents want nothing but the best for their children, but some do not believe they possess the necessary knowledge to engage with their children’s education in the most ameliorative way possible.

A former Albanian student of the writer conducted research on parental attitudes of the Albanian community to involvement in their children’s schooling. Possibly because of the shared language, the women were able to speak to the researcher freely. Whilst having high aspirations for
their children, which is the reason why they are in the country initially, they shared with her ‘I’m afraid I cannot be a good parent in this country because I do not understand the way the schools work’.

Somehow we have to encourage teachers and policy makers to move away from the position that EAL learners are burdened and disadvantaged compared with the monolingual Britons. Moreover, EAL children need to be encouraged to see their language proficiency as an advantage in life. Indeed, dual language learning may well enhance children’s metalinguistic abilities and this can only be a good thing for the schools’ metrics on achievement, as well as for the parents and most especially the children themselves.
References


Iglicka K & Ziolek-Skrzypczak, M (2010) EU Membership Highlights Poland’s Migration Challenges (Krystyna Iglicka, Center for International Relations, Warsaw; and Magdalena Ziolek-Skrzypczak, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich)

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**APPENDIX A : Responses to the questionnaire**

Parents’ responses are reported in italics and verbatim; where exact comments or very similar comments were given they are reported only once in the text. Non-italicised comments are for clarification from the PI.

**Q1 What is your first language? Q2 What other languages do you speak if any?** Range of responses as reported in text elsewhere.

**Q3 What languages are spoken in your home?** Invariably, English was seen as the school language and the parents’ first language is the language of the home.

**Q4 Do you believe the mother (parent) is the child’s first teacher?**

YES 51 NO 2

**COMMENTS**

(Positive): *I help my child, because since mother got pregnant can contact with baby by talking to mother’s tummy and can love each other; because child spends lots of time with mother; because mother teach her children from birth, upbring, love the family; as teacher of home language; for first years of child’s life; usually child is with mother all the time until 3 years old; ‘her dad is work all day P; because child try to achieve the level parents wish; at early age the child much depend on parent; because she is the one the child spends most of his life with; because the children follow their parents.*

(Negative) *no – children listen to others outside the family*

**Q5 Do you think the mother/parent is the best teacher?**

YES 45 NO 8

**YES : mother is always afraid about her children and she tries learn them every thing that’s right and true; the best teacher for upbring; because she is good listening and she was working headteacher (in
own country?); because she teaches and learns the rules of life; she (child) is always together with parents; because parents know their child’s characteristics BEST in the world; because the children follow their parents.

NO: I think the best teacher is schoolteacher and friends; no because she (the mother?) learning every things (has much to learn also??) not dad his work all day/ no sometimes child learn from their friends.

MAYBE: but the parents always need the help from the school/ maybe but not always/ it depends how is mother and hers education/ they learn lots from mother but also from friends teachers and school too/ yes but not too much child needs to rest and play at home with mother/Sometimes child learns from friends/ children tend to listen more to someone outside own family/ sometimes yes sometimes no because we learn together day by day/ yes but the parents also need help from school/ but teachers and friends is a good teacher as well/ but until certain age/ but I think there are mothers who is not good/ sometimes good sometimes not because mother is also human so depends on condition!??/ we also need learn with children.

Q6 What kind of things do you teach your child?

LANGUAGE: words sentences/ my language and culture/reading/ reading books in Persian and English/ They have to help other children who have language disadvantage. They were helped by other Japanese pupils when they came to school and it’s time for them to help other people/ Kumon English, writing word in his story book/ reading stories writing alphabet and numbers/ our language Arabic/ greetings /Basic English, math/ count numbers/ colours teaching letters and numbers from nursery.

LIFE SKILLS play/cleaning/ responsible/punctuality/duty/ don’t worry to make mistakes we always work for solving the problem together/ be kind to others/ I tell her to live independently and to think by herself/ helping with housework/ we teach them about our faith/ good and bad things (right & wrong) tidiness/ discipline/ religion/ how to connect with others/ honesty/ confidence/ social rules about life.

MANNERS how to eat/ speak with people/ speak nicely to people/sharing/ I teach nicely I teach her right and wrong/good behaviour/ how to be polite with other people and help the people/house
rules/ taking care of your sister and children and caring/ eat nicely/
share the toys/ take turns / say thank you sorry and so on/ wash his face
wash his hands/ how to behave in good manner/ Japanese manner
(customs) I’m always try to make my children happy for now and in the
future/ to help others be kind and polite/ I teach my son to be a good
person/ According to social behaviours/ I teach them how to respect
others and to have faith in God always/ table manners, food appreciation

HOBBIES  Swimming and ballet/ drawing

Q7 When you’re with your child do you always talk in your own
language?
YES  43  NO 10

Q8 How do you feel about your child’s school?

NEGATIVE:  she starts nursery too early to say/ no bad/ I feel good but
sometimes I worry if she sits with wrong people/ since she has started
English study recently she is very confused and she has lost confidence/
I almost confident but sometimes not / When my son first entered in this
school he couldn’t understand English . At that time he tried to ask a
teacher but she was too busy/ can’t tell yet

Otherwise comments were overwhelmingly positive.

POSITIVE: I feel very happy with her progress she goes to play in
Children’s Centre in toy library and she is learning poems she really likes
very much. / I feel better/ happy****/very good**/teachers are nice and
friendly/ teacher helps my daughter/ she is very happy when she goes to
school and school is very clever and helpful/ very very happy because
my son learning perfect British English / I have 2 years old girl I am
thinking the better school for her [considering what is the best school for
her?] / I can feel its good from my child’s talk but actually I don’t have
much opportunity to see how they works/ its good for both the child and
me/ we’re new here but I’m so happy to see my daughter’s enjoying her
school life/ fantastic!/ He likes school so it’s ok but I’d like to have more
opportunity to know what my child do at school/ They are happy doing
well/  fantastic I feel and see the change in my children but wish to see
more improvement/ the school gave children good fun English class
when they started school it was good for them starting new life in other
country/ I’m satisfied this school teacher understand our situation/ my
son likes school life so I feel good/ fun/ I think it’s a very good school/ My
daughter feels good so I feel good / I think good there are students from many countries/ he enjoys going to school and getting better his English skills/teacher/ I’m very happy happy the school is doing good to my son / so far I’m happy I hope the school will build confidence in my child and give him a good start in life/ My choice was this school and at the moment I’m happy with it/ very good is Catholic school and near to my house/ I’m happy with this school just sometimes I feel that Polish mothers/parents are not treated like English parents

Q9 Are you confident talking/discussing your child with the teachers in the school?
YES 32 NO 20 SOMETIMES YES, SOMETIMES NO 1

POSITIVE: I discussing with teacher homework/ she is very friendly and polite/ yes confident and happy/ I always talk to my child’s class teacher/ I can understand her teacher at play group/ I think yes but I’m Japanese so …?/ Yes we see the need to talk to school time to time/ Sometimes I told a teacher what my daughter think or worry/ Because I know we (parents & teachers) are working for our children’s improvement and not to criticise them (kids?)/ Yes but I get scared at times I don’t want to be seen as criticising the teacher or school/ teachers are helpful but I don’t think there’s much time at dropping off to school/ sometimes yes sometimes no but I think it’s good we have the opportunity

NEGATIVE No because she is happy when left nursery (child isn’t happy in nursery??)/ No and I am so sad about that because I have little English/ Almost times yes. It doesn't mean my English skill teacher try to understand what I talk/ I can’t express enough what I want to discuss/ Sometimes I can’t fully understand what they are talking/ I can’t meet teachers I can’t have speaking times with teachers/ Actually I don’t know how he understand what teacher says but I always ask him about his school life / because my English is too poor

Q10 Could you suggest any ways to improve how the school communicates with you?

IDEAS: SMS message, letters e-mail/by telephone/Parent mail … to tell me about courses or like that/ events/ we’ve better have a meeting time and school visit day between mother and teacher/ maybe some news letter from each classes so I can know what’s going on/
want to know what child are doing at nursery, I want the time table/ Blue note gives good help/ I think communication through contact – note books is the best way/ personalise by using different languages/ I hope the school communicates teach me about speaking English (English conversation) /I wish there are more letters or memos from teacher of parent’s expectations (what is expected of parents?) I want to come and see my daughter’s class lesson/ I wish to open the English class (conversation) for parents or something / to open a channel on line for parent/teacher/ maybe 5 minutes face to face meeting about weekly progress as by the door/gate there’s not enough time to talk/ I think it would be good to have more stay and play sessions and also would be nice to receive once a month a report of our child’s achievements and also what the teacher finds is difficult for them/ I would like more one to one talk/ If she will have any problem with learning something write down on the paper what she need to practice more

Q 11 Do you understand the teaching methods in British schools?
YES 20 NO 30 WON'T SAY 3

YES: I understand every day you need read more books more words/ It’s OK/ it is so easy ways at the end of the day make notes to ask your child about(?) / yeah when I go to playgroup with my child I understand what they saying about/ we get the information at the beginning of the terms/ yeah … understandable but sometimes I can’t speak well therefore I need to improve speaking and listening

NO: sometimes yes sometimes no/ I would like to no teaching methods/ I don’t know about that very well/ not much/ not everything/ I’d like to see the lesson/ I want to know/ I don’t know well about it so I want to know more/ workshops are always very helpful/ A little not as much as needed/ I understand very early education but don’t know older one/ the methods are good but sometimes the teachers aren’t good/ but I attended homework club after school when we first came . It was very helpful for us/ It is difficult to know how to teach in classroom/ Actually I don’t know what does he do or the methods in British schools

Q12-Do you understand how the teachers help your children with their English?
YES 35 NO 16 WS 2
Comments: very well/ reading and reading in school/ teacher is good/ spelling challenge/ talking with my kids and learning/ class groups/ my child goes to reading on reading method/ she is little but she is learning English poems she is very happy/ I just feel yes/ Every day teacher tells the children phonics method/ my daughter takes EAL her class teacher encouraged her/ My son doesn’t speak about it but he can understand how the teachers help/ by reading more and be confident to speak English/ yes because I tried to attend most of the meetings / of cause they do listening is very important/ I noticed that school has programme for children who need more help/ I know they speak English in a class which is more important

No (reservations): but I don’t know there is the teacher’s help when the difficult subject for the children (like Ancient Rome) in year 3/ not really its to early to say my child is in reception/ I’d like to know about it more / not clearly/ yes the child told us but more English classes are need to upgrade the child’s ability/ I don’t know what my son can do in class and how well or bad is his English/ I don’t understand but her English class was very helpful for her/no my daughter was helped by her friends

Q13 Is there any information you feel you need to understand better?
YES 28 NO 15 N/R 10

I like every day to get information on my child/ I want to learn more/ I need to understand about school/ my first language is different I need to understand more I hope to be better by studying/ need to speak more and more for the best results/ are they pushed enough? Not electronic all the time/ I need to know the rules and laws/ I need to improve my speaking/ another news letter about nursery/ more about what they study in class/ information on paper for parents who read English well but can’t speak well/ I want to know what my son eats in school how he eats (in a group) or is he eats at all or not…. / how my child behave at school and more/ as parents we need to share new experiences/ I need more information because my son can’t explain what he did today even in Japanese/ show movies and powerpoint about methods in school/ I usually spend time with Japanese so I can’t get information from another countries mothers/ I am the person who ask if need information so I am up to date/ I would like to know 1. What I should do 2. What I can do 3. what I shouldn’t do to support my children. Because my English isn’t the
best and I have a Japanese accent in English I’m feeling these 123 are different from native English people.

Q14 How confident do you feel about your own level of English?
CONFIDENT 20 NOT VERY CONFIDENT 23 NOT CONFIDENT AT ALL 9 N/R 1

Q15 Would you welcome the opportunity to study and improve your own English?
YES 37 NO 2 N/R 11

yes please/ yes I am happy if the Government will help me to learn/ very much/ I am doing at office but my wife need English class so that she can help the children when I am not available/ everyone wants to have more information even though my English is good but no one is perfect

Q16 Do you help your child with homework?
YES 47 NO 5 N/R 1

sometimes but always my husband makes [does?] the homework the English very well

Q17 If yes, how do you do this, what techniques do you use?

I do every time help my child read and write correctly / transleyt/ play, reading/ book play, I sit down with my children and ask them to do their homework/ HW reading and writing/ to play puzzle with letters together/ singing by funny way give a fun idea for child/ I try by the internet/ use dictionary internet/ use the phonics and the material I bought at book shop/ I feel its very difficult, I always wish I could/ frankly, I try my best to help my children but not sure about any technique/ I read my child’s homework and correct her mistakes and search internet/ maths and English and any other homework/ in maths I use J methods to help their homework/ use dictionary/ I am speaking to my daughter in Arabic and asking her when I know the question I give her the answer and she is writing it in English/ and grammer textbook/ Kumon English listening English by CD/ writing word in story books/ we try to make homework time more about discussing and try not to force them to write but make them more comfortable and enthusiastic in doing their job/ translating reading repetition/ translating, books computer/ I have no techniques but when she does homework I am near her/ I’m not good at English so I use dictionary every time/ I let him take a lesson of English 1 hr week
listen to English/ CDs watch tv of UK/ try to encourage him to do it first
I’m encouraging him to be independent/ I base on my own experience in
Polish school/ try to teach my daughter through playing because she is
still little and can’t concentrate long sitting next to the table/ I ask her to
do homework on her own then I check it and we try to improve it
together/ try to read her books encourage her to do it on her own/ if my
daughter doesn’t understand instruction what she need to do I’m trying
to explain her clearly what to do

Q18 Are you confident that you are helping to improve and
achieve?
YES 33  NO 15  N/R 6

Comments: because my husband and I are not native/ No I am
Japanese so I cannot teach good English / not sure he feels happy with
my help

Q19 Are you confident your child is making good progress?
YES 42  NO 5  N/R 6

Comments: No because I don’t know how to help her improve/ too early
to tell/ yes but because of my husband

Q 20 Do you have any suggestions about how we could help you to
help your child?

a. EAL support for parents: I want more English know about English
learning/ tell us about sites or by post for learning more courses/
we need more Children’s centres for learning English and nursery
for our children/ lesson of English for mother/ I hope to have
opportunities to learn what to say, how to say it in English for my
child (social situations expressions)/ parent-teacher programme
that we can communicate together to help out children/ English
classes/ I’d like to see the daytime of school [timetable?] during
learning/ I would like to know learning about things a day or a
week (detail) because I (can) help my child more when she doing
homework/ I hope to learn more English classes and complete my
education to help my children in their school/ In first I always think
about how can I help my children how be good with other people
and how they be help the others people. So I need more English
courses and parents courses I think this will help us because
sometimes I can’t talk with my child’s teacher about education and
about how his behaviour with his friends and teachers. This is big problem for me and I always feel sad when I can’t understand other people in the school or in the GP or hospital.

b. School issues: In the nursery 70% of the children doesn’t speak English well, they need help because they need English when they go to reception class. There are many Japanese and easy to talk to them (also kids) and it’s not good that if we want to learn English. We know but difficult! So we need to connect with other people and make effort to speak more. It would be good if there was some suggestion from teachers how s/he rather have us parents to assist or help our child to do their homework at home, for example, should we correct their mistake? Should we let the teacher see where they went wrong? More work in small groups to know what I do is OK, discussions etc. about the day, experience. I think more than one parent evening during the year could help us. I need more information about my child’s progress. Really I want to know where places for parenting classes are. This course is very important for me to learn how can I contact with my children because every stage up is more difficult than before, especially teen age.

c. More help for kids: I think he understands when teacher speaks directly to him slowly easy English but my son cannot talk about his feelings in English so please help him to talk. I believe that more classes could be provided for those children who start English as second language and within school hours as long as required, parents also could be provided if possible to take their part. My son is in reception. He understands English and speaks it sometimes. But most of the time he speaks in Arabic and feels upset when the teacher doesn’t understand what he is saying. All he needs is more time to be able to express himself in English. I want the school to have a homework club after school.

d. Mother tongue teaching: Firstly I would like to say you should be teach them in their own language like my child when she would be able to go to school the teacher teach her in Urdu.

APPENDIX B

Q1 What are you worried about?
a. Child’s behaviour

I worry about my children’s behaviour because they are interacting with misbehaved children/ I’m worried because my son hit his friends in nursery/ I am worried about my children they runs on road and not stop/ They don’t listen me – what I am saying to them/ I always worry about my son’s behaviour because he always don’t agree and listen to me/ I worry about my son because he is running too much [onto the road and failing to stop when mother tells him]/ When my children play at home they speak good language. But when they play outside they learn very bad language – And bad things – I am very worried about these problems. Class teacher doesn’t know about child’s behaviour in lunch time and play time. Children who cannot speak English can’t explain the situation. They feel sad /I can’t catch very well that children do something at school

b. (In)ability to provide support and guidance

That I’m not patient enough with my child/ If I’m teaching my child in correct way/If my knowledge and understanding of education in UK is right/ About ability to help my daughter with the homework /Some time we can’t understand/ How we speak/ And when the time of children homework there is great problem for us/ I need more education in the school

c. Child’s progress

As my child is Polish I’m concerned that my child needs more time and effort from the teacher to make the same progress English children make /If my child has the same chances in further education / I am worried about my children education when I go their school I can’t speak and understand English. What teachers are discussing. How I do explain them/ We have children with exzema – we are worried about their health. Because all the time they feel sick – like itching and washing a lot

I worry if I, as a Polish parent, am treated serious by school staff/ My daughters are shy. Can’t express themselves what they like what they don’t like [this is significant in an environment where children are given choice and their views solicited. It means the British students are advantaged]/ How my child does really feel at school. Is my child
learning? Is he enjoying school and teacher and friends? I ask my son ‘What did you play? Who did you play with?’ But it’s difficult for him to explain to me. [So if child can’t explain in Japanese it means he can’t describe the social behaviours and norms because they are alien?]

My child comes home sometimes feeling he is not learning like his friends! Why? He keeps comparing himself to them. He does not understand he has been learning English for a short time comparing to his friends which were bourne here/ It is very early to talk about sex with children

d. Children’s well-being during the school day

Our children ate everything in their lunch box or not?/ When they feel not good/ aren’t in good condition though they can come to school, can we be absent only from PE class?/ School decides the carer who takes care of our Non-Native student children. We are concerned the work as carer interrupts/ robs their study time/ comfortable school life [some children who are fluent are often given the task of helping new children with whom they share background and/or home language]/ Our children wash their hands before lunch time or not?

Q2 What are the main differences?

a) In my country

We have ‘parents day’ that we observe our children’s class once or twice per term in Japan. There aren’t any in English school/ If student don’t pass the exams they stay in the same class/ someone fail they stay in same class/ If the student not listen the teacher they gave them punishment – like slap and sticks on the hands/ In my country starting school is 6 years old/ start learning English year 6 Homework for everybody/ homework every day/ No uniforms in the school/ Reception not much play just only sit and learn/ Last week June to August holiday in Poland/ Three months holiday in Ukraine/ No half term just only Christmas Easter, All Saints/ All Souls/ Two months holiday/ School time 8-12.30 1-4.30/ School times are 8.00 – 12.45, 8.00 – 14.00/ In Polish school there is 45 mins lesson and 10 min break. Child can spend different amount of hours throughout the week for example one day 4hr another 6hrs
We buy the books and notes every day take the books and notes home/In Poland every child has its own books for literacy numeracy etc keep them at home and carry every day to school / In Poland children need to learn more things by heart/ Here children are divided by levels in one class in Poland everybody has the same stuff to learn/ In this case we find English system better/In Japan if children take a chicken box [contract chicken pox] they can’t go to school But they can go in the UK/ Different method of teaching numeracy/Education in UK is free but in my country you must pay every year/In UK there is no cleaning time by students /PE is shorted than Japanese P.E./In UK usually parents pick up our children but in Japan children go back home theirselves. I think UK practice is better than Japan/Japanese students’ homework is the same. In UK the homework is different of level/ In Japan we have some chance to see our children’s class/In Japan primary school children doesn’t study separately according to their levels of each ability. They have their own textbook and notebooks to bring home every day.

Back in my country parents can have a much closer contact with teachers to find out the child’s development. Children’s book are sent home everyday for parents to follow progress/In Japan students have much homework every day/Group action is popular in Japanese school/ Japanese like washing hand

b. In UK

I feel my son with more freedom to be himself, without being criticised when he tries. He is praised for his achievements and given awards to take home and hung up at the wall and they can see it all the time and be pleased with himself/Children are more confident in UK/Children born in one year start school in September/ When child is sick teachers prefer people at home and justify a parent /In the UK schools and teachers more interesting/ The education in UK best than my country because in UK schools more interesting and practical/My son like his school in UK

We like that in English school children are more focussed on understanding things rather than learning by heart/ I agree with that but would like to be sure that by the end of the year my child will have the same progress and work load completed like the others/In English school we get description of our children’s progress, in Polish school there is system of marking from 1-6 where 6 is the best/There are many ethnic groups/ UK schools teach each study levels
Q3 How can we (schools, teachers, British Council, government) help you? And Q4 What do you need to know?

The answers to these 2 questions are combined since providing helpful information transpired to be one of the key ways of being helped.

a. To improve our own English

We want to learn more/ We want to learn more English classes. Because when we go outside there are many difficulties/ I need more or next course/ I have a problem in the speak/ To speak English with the people. We want learn more English class because lives here and we need speaks in school, hospital, GP, Council, bank etc.

Family learning class could help us know about what my child is learning in school/ Vocabulary lists – learn in home, must remember and speak in next English class, P.E kit, physical education/ I like more grammar, more spelling more computer because I like classes help my children with homework/ I like more learning in English class, in English class more lesson in grammar, vocabulary, computer/ We need to courses for moms, how we can treat right with our children and we need to more English courses because we need to discuss with son’s teachers at the school/ In order to contact with school smoothly we wanna learn English in school with our smaller children. Because private English courses prohibits us who are accompanied with small children. / We need a staff who can speak English to us ???? Japanese?

b. To understand/have knowledge of the curriculum

We need to know more about what children will learn in year 1, Year 2 [they want to know what to expect – and can’t since they don’t have experiential knowledge]/ We need to understand the curriculum/ I wish we could see our kids’ books more often to know what they are learning/ I’d like teachers to make some opportunities that we can know about what childrens do at the nursery/ We wanna know the content of the PE class what they do in PE/ We wanna know the songs they sing in class and the lyrics of it ‘cause we can sing with them in house/ We don’t know what children do, study, freetime, gym. We hope the class letter and so on can be publish/issue/ We would like to go an see that our
children study any time/We wanna know how they do progress in EAL class when/what level they are released from that class
c. Awareness of common pedagogies

*We need lessons about classroom techniques* [e.g. children need the sounds not the names of the letters of the alphabet] *we should not teach them capital letters first but small letters* / I wish we could have more pedagogic education advice to support us parents during adaptation time for children and parents/To be aware of our children’s progress/ To have more productive relationships with the teachers /More information from teachers about our children’s progress/ We have descriptions instead of grades/ we need constructive feedback what child must do to improve/ strengths and weaknesses /In Japan parents can see the lesson of their child per term. I’d like to see their lesson.

d. School life in general

*I want to look my sister’s [daughter’s??] school life/I wish we could see pictures of the food our children are eating* [menus posted up for school lunches not helpful if parents don’t have the vocabulary: ‘shepherd’s pie’ e.g]/ I wish there was a way to encourage parents to integrate more to each other and mix with other cultures e.g. try other friends’ food, encourage their children to meet up with others school friends/I would like children to play the playground in school after school*