

The Role Performance of Grandparents in the Educational Development of Children: A Mixed-Methods Study from Tokha Municipality, Nepal

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Abstract

In many developing societies, rapid economic migration and the increasing trend of dual income families have led grandparents to be at the forefront of child care and educational care in many cases. The study tries to explore the role and challenges of the grandparents (N=50) in Ward No. 3, Tokha Municipality in the context of mixed methods approach based on the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura) in Nepal. Data obtained from structured surveys was analyzed with SPSS, and the data obtained from interviews and observations was used as a means of enriching the data. Results indicate that grandparents have important roles to play: 54% assist with homework on a daily basis, 100% encourage good study habits, and 44% provide emotional support on a daily basis. But there are challenges – for example, limited formal education (58% have only primary schooling or less) and financial constraints (51.3% of respondents find it difficult to afford extracurricular activities). The main actors are the grandmother (76%). The study findings are that grandparents are invaluable learning resources and that a set of specific social work interventions, including digital literacy training, intergenerational mediation, and support for financial resources are in dire need to empower grandparents. The study adds a cultural perspective to intergenerational education in a semi-urban context in Nepal.

Keywords: Grandparents role performance, educational development, intergenerational knowledge transfer, digital literacy, social work intervention.

1. Introduction

Increased life expectancy and the growing global demand, brought about by socio-economic pressures on parents to work long hours or to move, has re-aligned family structures across the globe (Goodfellow & Laverty, 2003). In this new context, grandparents are not simply —grandparents‖ but active co-caregivers and educational supports to their grandchildren. It is a phenomenon especially seen in South Asian countries such as Nepal, where the traditional joint family structure coexists with the contemporary economic requirements. Grandparents' involvement in education is complex as they offer emotional support, instructional support, financial support, and intergenerational cultural and moral knowledge (Buchanan & Rotkirch, 2016; Silverstein & Marenco, 2001).

But this involvement is not equally effective. It is influenced by the grandparents' education, socioeconomic status, health, technological literacy and relationship quality with the middle generation (parents) (Edwards, 2014; Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005). Nepal has a unique context due to the fast urbanization in semi-urban municipalities such as Tokha to the outskirts of Kathmandu. Parents frequently work far away or travel to other countries and children are placed in the care of grandparents who may not have received a formal education themselves, and have limited access to contemporary digital learning resources.

Statement of the Problem

Although emphasis has been placed on the significance of grandparents in recent years, there is little empirical work that looks into the role and challenges of grandparents in semi-urban and

rural Nepali settings specific to this context. The majority of the available literature is based on Western societies and/or an East Asian context (such as China or Japan) and there is little empirical research from Nepal. Specifically, little is known about the interaction between the grandson or grandmother's education level with the curriculum demands of the 21st century and technology and how it impacts their ability to help the grandchildren. In addition, issues such as intergenerational value differences, financial pressures and lack of access to digital literacy are not sufficiently researched issues for grandparents. In the absence of this knowledge, social workers, educators and policy makers cannot design effective interventions that will support these important actors in the family. In this study this gap is filled by examining the following research questions.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the specific activities and roles grandparents perform in enhancing the educational development of their grandchildren in Tokha Municipality.
2. To identify and analyze the difficulties and challenges faced by grandparents in supporting their grandchildren's education.

Significance of the Study

The study is important in a number of ways. It is a theoretical approach that can be applied to the concept of family systems and culture and incorporates elements of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory to a new cultural context, in that the microsystems interaction (grandparent-grandchild) is influenced by the ecosystems (parents' work). In practice, it offers concrete

information that social workers can use to create culturally inclusive programs and services, such as digital literacy classes and grand parenting support groups. The findings call for financial and educational policies that acknowledge grandparents' legitimacy as educational stakeholders for policy-makers.

Scope and Limitations

This study is limited to the grandparents aged 50 years and above in the sample of 50 grandparents of Ward No. 3 of Tokha Municipality (Dharmal area). The results are not necessarily representative of other populations but do provide rich context specific insights. This study relies on self-reported data, which could be influenced by social desirability and the monsoon season when data were collected created logistical problems.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Empirical Review

The empirical research on grandparent visitation can be divided into several themes. Some early Western research (Warren & Hauser, 1997; Erola & Moiso, 2006) indicated that grandparents have only an indirect, mediated role in grandchildren's educational outcomes, through the immediate parental generation, and thus that the immediate parent generation is the most important factor, a —Markovian perspective. But more recent research questions these figures. Chan and Boliver (2013) also discovered a net connection among grandparents' and grandchildren's job classes in England, even when accounting for the parents. However, from a Wisconsin Longitudinal Study study of 53,000 youth, Jaeger (2012) found a small, direct impact of grandparents' education on grandchildren's success, especially for families living in poverty.

The effects of coresident grandparents in the Chinese context—culturally more similar to Nepal—were found to be significant by Zeng and Xie (2014), with the impact of coresident grandparents similar to that of parental education. This is important as it accentuates the mechanism of influence (socioemotional vs economic). The study builds on this by focusing on a Nepali context, where multigenerational coresidence is still a common phenomenon (76% of our sample).

Children's social-emotional development and its impact on academic outcomes: Sear and Coall (2011) show that grandparents' involvement positively impacts children's social-emotional development, which further positively impacts children's academic outcomes. Grandparents are one source of unconditional support which buffers stress.

Practical Assistance and Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer: Peters and Ehrenberg (2008) found grandparents help their working children fill gaps in their homework and school routines. Buchanan and Rotkirch (2016) highlight the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer, cultural stories, traditions and skills, as a special education value that schools cannot offer.

Challenges and Technology: Goodfellow and Lavery (2003) point to challenges with technological change. Grandparents may not be computer literate and able to help with computer-based homework or online learning platforms. A cause of conflict in the family, according to Silverstein and Marengo (2001), is the difference in educational philosophy among generations.

Lack of Research in Nepal: To our knowledge, no comprehensive study quantifies the types of support, evaluates digital literacy, and reports on

financial issues in a social work framework. The majority of the research in Nepal is anecdotal and qualitative. This study addresses this gap by using mixed methods to provide data on role performance in Tokha.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two theories.

Ecological Systems Theory (1979) by Bronfenbrenner states that development of the child is influenced by the layers of nested environmental systems. Grandparents include microsystem (direct interaction with daily living relationship) and also microsystem (linking home and school; e.g., attending parent-teacher meetings). Parents' long working hours in the ecosystem is a need for the involvement of grandparents, and Nepali valuing of the elderly in the microsystem validates the role of grandparents. The chronosystem reflects changes in the past, like the emergence of digital education, which will upset the traditional relationship between grandparent and grandchild. For each of these layers, we have developed survey items that provide operationalization. For each of these layers, survey items have been developed that provide operationalization.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977): This theory focuses on the processes of modeling, imitation, and learning through observation. Grandparents are role models for values, work ethic and perseverance. A grandparent's personal experience with having faced a challenge teaches the grandchild how to be resilient. In addition, positive reinforcement or reward (grandparent praise) promotes study habits. The theory presents how the actions and reinforcement of grandparents, who may have limited formal

education, can impact education outcomes in positive ways.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A descriptive research design using a mixed-methods approach was used. This enabled surveying grandparental activity in order to quantify it and interviewing and observing the lived experience of challenges. This study was carried out in a semi-urban community of Dharmal, Ward No. 3 of Tokha Municipality, Nepal, which has a mixture of traditional and modern family types.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of grandparents, 50 years and older, with grandchild(ren) in school at the time of the study. The respondents were selected through purposive sampling technique (non-probability sampling) and the respondents were 50 who have the following inclusion criteria: (a) resident of Ward No. 3 for at least one year, (b) actively involved in the life of the grandchild, (c) willing to participate. A sample size of 50 was considered adequate for descriptive statistical analysis having a reasonable qualitative depth.

3.3 Data Collection Methods and Tools

A structured questionnaire (see Appendix, original thesis) with 35 items under the following sections was used to gather data: Demographics, involvement in education, emotional support, challenges, use of technology, financial support, practical assistance, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and religious/moral guidance. A Likert scale along with multiple choice and open-ended questions were used in the questionnaire. Interviews were face-to-face and in Nepali. The

data were supplemented by participant observation and photographs. Duration of interviews was 20-25 minutes.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for quantitative data. Descriptive statistics were computed, and included frequencies, percentages, and cumulative percentages. Relationships between variables (e.g., between education level and confidence in homework help) were examined using cross-tabulations. Themes were identified inductively from the qualitative responses given to the open-ended questions, and thematic analysis was used for the analysis.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Consent was given, both orally and in writing. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were assured. They were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Special efforts were made to conduct a grandparent's interview in private if they indicated fear about their son/daughter-in-law.

4. Results/Findings

4.1 Demographic Profile of Grandparents

The majority of the 50 participants were female (grandmothers) reflecting the gendered nature of caregiving. The average age was 57.4 years and 40% were 55 years or less. Educationally, 30% had no education, 28% had primary education, 24% had secondary education up to 10% had higher secondary or above. The occupation of 44% of respondents was self-employed (e.g., farmers, small shops); 40% were unemployed; and 10% were employed. Most importantly, 76% of those interviewed reported living in multi-generational (with children and grandchildren)

households, and 24% reported living in skip-generation (with only grandchildren) households. Stability came in the form of most (84%) not renters.

4.2 Involvement in Grandchildren's Education

26% of grandparents never assisted with homework, 54% assisted with homework every day. Not helping because of lack of knowledge with regard to 28.7% of challenges and language barriers with regard to 24.8% of challenges.

Type of Support: All 50 grandparents (100%) reported that they encouraged good study habits. Additionally, 60% helped with homework, 42% read with grandchildren, and 30% taught specific subjects.

School Meetings: 46% attended School Meetings all the time and 18% attended them often. However, 12% never attended.

Staying Informed: Grandparents utilized school reports (40%), communication with parents (38%) and talking to teachers (22%).

4.3 Emotional and Psychological Support

All grandparents offered emotional support to their grandchildren in some way – through listening (25 per cent), advice (25 per cent), motivation (25 per cent) and empathy (25 per cent). Frequency: 44% of respondents offered emotional support daily, 42% occasionally. Importantly, 60% felt that their emotional support had a positive effect on their grandchild's education.

4.4 Challenges Faced

Educational (28.7%), followed by language barriers (24.8%), technical issues (21.7%) and lacks of time (20.4%) were the most common challenges.

Only 12% were —very confident‡ in their ability to get homework help, 32% were —not at all confident‡ and 28% were —slightly confident‡. Confidence was correlated to education level.

All 50 grandparents (100%) wanted access to educational materials, education on new methods, support groups and financial support.

4.5 Impact of Technology

56% used technology (smartphones, basic apps) to help grandchildren, 44% did not.

Confidence: Only 4% of respondents were —very confident‡ about their use of technology, 50% were —not confident‡.

Perceived Impact: Only 34% felt that technology positively impacted learning, 46% reported that they were not sure. Sixty percent of the responses were to education apps training or fundamental computer skills, with explicit requests for training in education apps (22.7%) and computer skills (33.3%).

4.6 Socioeconomic and Financial Support

The types of support provided were: extracurricular activities (28.1% of financial responses), books/supplies (24.6%), school fees (23.7%), and transportation (23.7%).

Financial Challenges: The top challenge was limited resources to support extracurricular activities (51.3%), followed by a lack of funds for school fees (25.6%).

Impact: 48% felt their financial situation negatively impacted their ability to support grandchildren.

4.7 Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

Storytelling: 70% had some personal stories to share from time to time, and 14% shared them

daily. The most important way to pass on cultural and moral values.

Traditional Skills: 62% taught traditional skills (crafts, farming etc.) sometimes; 24% regularly.

Value of Life Experiences: 38% agreed, 10% strongly agreed that life experiences were valuable lessons to pass on to grandchildren.

4.8 Religious and Moral Guidance

66% always offered religious/moral guidance, while 54% sometimes offered religious/moral guidance. 86% said grandparents helped them to do their best at school. The guidance was perceived as being disciplining and purposeful.

5. Discussion

The results of this study validate and build on the previous literature. Our coresident grandparents (76%) act in a parent-like role and are involved at rates similar to parents, as Zeng and Xie (2014) suggest. In contrast, the effects of grandparents in the West have been minimized (Warren & Hauser, 1997), but our results indicate that grandparents in Tokha are actively and significantly engaged in tackling homework and providing emotional support for their grandchildren on a daily basis. The difference is probably due to the high rate of intergenerational family living and parental absences from work migration in Nepal.

The finding highlighted the gendered nature of the educational support, with grandmothers (76%) being the primary educational supporters, reflecting cultural norms, where women are the primary caregivers, as well as the feminization of eldercare. It has implications for interventions because they have to be accessible and attractive to older women, who are busy and who may not be very literate.

Theoretical Implications

There is strong evidence in support of Bronfenbrenner's theory. The microsystem is in operation through daily homework support. Mesosystem is seen in grandparents attending school meetings (46% all the time). The ecosystem (parents' work) is what leads to the need for grandparent involvement. A surprising finding is the lack of strength in the macrosystem: In the traditional Nepali culture, respect is paid to elders, but this is threatened by changing demands of education which include digital homework, English-medium education, etc., and senior citizens feel not at all confident (32%). This is a chronosystem effect, i.e. historical change is faster than traditional roles.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory is very well supported by the storytelling data (occasionally share stories, 70%). Personal narratives are used to model perseverance, ethics and cultural values with the use of the grandchildren. The absence of digital modeling (4% very confident with digital tools) may mean that grandchildren are not seeing effective use of digital tools for learning from their grandparents, thus creating a learning gap.

The focus of this article is on the practical and policy implications.

The main issue is disconnect between the readiness and ability of grandparents, with 100% describing good habits and low digital literacy and low subject knowledge. This is made worse by financial strain, as 51.3% of people reported that they struggle with costs of their extracurricular. Social work interventions need to bring in three levels: Micro – individual counseling and skill building (Basic computer literacy). Mezzo – establishment of grandparent support groups in Tokha to share strategies and

school involvement to develop —grandparent-friendly volunteering opportunities. Macro – support for the inclusion of government funding for educational materials for grandparent-headed households and digital literacy classes targeted to older adults.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the role played by the grandparents in the educational development of the grandchildren of Tokha Municipality is irreplaceable and they have various roles in education, such as giving them homework guidance every day, giving them emotional support, financial support, handing over cultural and moral values from one generation to the next. The primary education supporters are grandmothers. Their ability is, however, significantly impeded by three concurrent challenges: (1) low formal education (58% ≤ primary), meaning limited assistance available when learning about subjects; (2) digital illiteracy (50% not confident with technology), excluding them from modern online learning; and (3) financial precarity (51.3% cannot afford extracurriculars), meaning limited ability to afford assistance when learning about subjects. These problems are not just a lack of skills on the part of the individual student, but systemic problems that need attention.

The study provides answers to its research questions: grandparents are engaged in education, but are facing challenges because of gaps in their generation's education approaches and technologies. Targeted support can help preserve the positive role of grandparents, otherwise this role may be diminished and negatively affect children's academic paths. The long-term impact

of grandparental involvement on children needs to be explored further, and pilot intervention programmes (such as digital literacy workshops) to be assessed in comparable semi-urban settings in Nepal and South Asia.

7. Recommendations

The following is a summary of practical and policy recommendations based on the findings:

1. Develop —Grandparent Digital Literacy Bootcamps with Social Workers and NGOs in Tokha on simple use of a smartphone, educational apps (e.g. YouTube educational channels), and using online homework portals. Utilize peer-learning models, with tech-savvy grandparents teaching others.
2. Schools: Make ‘Grandparent-Teacher Meeting’ tracks different from parent meetings, use materials presented in simple Nepali and visual aids. Provide volunteer opportunities for grandparents to share traditional skills (crafts, stories) in classrooms, and recognize their knowledge and experience.

For Local Government (Tokha Municipality): Create a budget item for —Intergenerational Educational Support including support for school expenses and for supplementary expenses for families in which grandparents are guardians. Offer tax benefits for businesses hiring grandparents on a part-time basis.

4. For Families: Facilitate frequent family mediation meetings to be able to outline expectations and minimize disagreements among parents and grandparents regarding education.

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