

# Young children's online homeschooling during Covid-19 closure in the United Arab Emirates: Parents' experiences

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Parents assume a vital role in supervising young children's online homeschooling and daily classes. This empirical retrospective study investigates the home supervisors' influence on young children's online class attendance and engagement, from the perspective of supervisors' perceptions of e-learning methods. Using a quantitative research method, this study was conducted post-pandemic, employing survey techniques to collect data from 100 parents supervising their young children's online classes in the United Arab Emirates. The findings reveal that parent interference, guidance, and involvement during their young children's online class attendance negatively affected class success. Conversely, supervisors' cooperation and efforts to control children's engagement during class positively impacted class attendance and engagement.

## Introduction

The pandemic has required online homeschooling supervision (OHS) to ensure continued education for young students during school closures. Researchers have emphasised the importance of online learning and the adoption of digital academic communication technologies (Lederman, 2020; Almaiah et al., 2020; Almaiah et al., 2021; Mailizar et al., 2020; Faherty et al., 2019). However, technology usage in online learning poses risks and limitations (McManis & Gunnewig, 2012; McPake et al., 2013; Plowman et al., 2011). Families have undertaken OHS, with parents and siblings, dynamically participating in their children's education and supervising their online classes. However, researchers have raised issues regarding the risks of online behaviour, addiction to videos, social isolation, and physical health problems (Radesky et al., 2016; Dong et al., 2020; Orgiedes et al., 2020; Brigden et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2020; Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). Some studies have indicated that parents found homeschooling challenging and beyond their capabilities (Colizzi et al., 2020; Stephen et al., 2020; Ferri et al., 2020; Schmidt et al., 2020; Parczewska, 2020; Thorell et al., 2022; Abuhammad (2020), including challenges related to the accessibility of equipment and software usability (Kouroupa et al., 2022). Parents in Gulf countries are unfamiliar with OHS (Saxena, 2020). Mothers are more likely to be "teachers" in online homeschooling (Bariola & Collins, 2021; DesRoches et al., 2021; Del Boca et al., 2020; Miller & Tsai, 2020; Saxena, 2020).

Research on online homeschooling experiences in the Gulf region is limited (Slimi, 2020). In Gulf countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait, parents are unfamiliar with homeschooling and home supervision, and young students aged 5-11 have not experienced online learning or the online homeschooling supervision (OHS) method. The impact of culture on technology-adopting e-learning systems has been highlighted by Almaiah et al. (2020). Saxena (2020) stated that conducting classes efficiently requires correct protocols and directions for students and parents to facilitate adaptation to this novel learning channel. Bhamani et al. (2020:23)

identified a limitation concerning "... how parents with different educational backgrounds will follow through the instructions". This study aims to fill this research gap by investigating parents' perceptions of OHS in the UAE during the pandemic, through a retrospective analysis. It investigates the factors impacting parental supervision in online classes and their effects on children's attendance and engagement in e-learning environments. The research identifies five factors: involvement, interference, cooperation, guidance, and control. The research begins with a literature review and research questions followed by a discussion of the research method, data analysis, and presentation of results. The study concludes with implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

## **Literature review**

### **Home supervising and online classes**

The role of parents in influencing children's learning is critical, particularly in providing digital technologies and media environments (Dong et al., 2020; Erdogan et al., 2019). Additionally, online delivery of lessons poses challenges for teachers and supervisors (Brock et al., 2021). Integrating technology in education fosters collaboration among parents, children, and teachers, enhancing the teaching and learning experience (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). The pandemic has imposed the adoption of online teaching methods globally, posing challenges for teachers in creating effective learning materials (Martinez, 2020; Agrahari, 2016). Young students may experience negative emotions due to the educational conditions caused by the pandemic (Wei et al., 2020). Parents must monitor and supervise their children's online classes to ensure they participate effectively and engage with the content (Schroeder & Kelley, 2010). According to Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020), introducing a virtual learning environment accompanied by comprehensive guidelines for parental support could foster a positive relationship between children and their parents. However, the collaborative interaction between teachers and parents is crucial for the success of online classes (Adams et al., 2016). Technology usage in education facilitates collaboration among parents, children, and teachers in the UAE; homeschooling and online tools, such as live classes and email communication, have become prominent in the UAE (Al Sumaiti, 2012; Al Ahababi, 2020). Multiple factors in the (UAE), including cultural context, parents' education level, and domestic helpers' positions, impact the level of parental support for schools (Al Sumaiti, 2012; Al Ahababi, 2019).

### **Supervisors' involvement**

Supervisors play a vital role in ensuring the success of online classes for young students, particularly those who face technical challenges and limited access to online learning tools. However, young children may still lack online access or experience with computers, requiring additional attention (Fedynich, 2013; Wedenoja, 2020). Emotional support from parents is also beneficial, as it increases children's confidence and supports their educational efforts and achievements (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). While women have predominantly taken on the role of homeschooling during the pandemic (Del Boca et al., 2020; Shafer et al., 2020), the level of parental involvement in online classes can vary

(Antipkina & Ludlow, 2020). Wang et al. (2020) suggested that parents should be equipped with interventions to provide emotional support to their children during uncertain times.

### **Supervisors' cooperation**

Online classes can be an effective alternative for engaging students from diverse backgrounds who cannot attend physical classrooms (Kim, 2020). Homeschooling can negatively impact students' education (Brigden et al., 2020). However, the collaboration between online supervisors, teachers, and homeschooling supervisors is crucial to ensure the success of online classes elaboration, as highlighted by Lee et al. (2008), Reed et al. (2012), Zhao et al. (2020), and Chen (2020). Borup et al. (2013) emphasised that it is essential to recognise that higher levels of parental interaction do not always guarantee improved student learning outcomes. However, it enhances young students' access to online classes and promotes their engagement and focus. Teacher-parent collaboration can optimise student monitoring and learning, enabling them to reach their full potential and achieve academic success, as Wajdi (2020) and Carvalho et al. (2020) emphasise. Additionally, such collaboration offers opportunities for more in-depth explanations, additional tasks, extra-academic activities, and homework.

### **Supervisors' interference**

Parents' involvement in their children's online classes during the pandemic has been significant, with varying degrees of interference (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Wilder, 2014; Lau et al., 2021). While some parents have reported satisfaction and acceptance of online learning arrangements, excessive interference by homeschooling supervisors can disrupt the learning process (Wilder, 2014; Lau et al., 2021). To address this issue, implementing parental support guidelines within the online schooling system can improve the parent-child connection (Spinelli et al., 2021; Bhamani et al., 2020). Homeschooling supervisors must balance involvement and excessive interference to create a conducive learning environment (Dettemers et al., 2019; Mahoney, 2021).

### **Supervisors' guidance**

As per the guidance of online supervisors, parents have a crucial role in supporting their children's engagement and learning during online classes by directing the teacher's attention toward their children (Kim et al., 2020). Despite this, the effectiveness of online supervision has raised concerns (Kim et al., 2020; Wilder, 2014). To address this issue, Wilder (2014) suggested that parents can be involved in their children's online learning by checking homework, providing homework assistance, setting education expectations and aspirations, and reading with their children. Borup et al. (2013) cautioned that parents' increased interaction levels following poor student performance may not necessarily reflect the actual impact of parental interactions on individual student learning, but parental involvement can still significantly positively impact student achievement.

## **Supervisors' controlling**

Nieman and Shea (2004) stated that parents may employ control to discipline their children or adopt a more precise and guiding approach to their children's behaviour during classes. However, there is limited research on parents' attitudes towards controlling online classes for young students, as supervising them at home was different before the pandemic. Cultural expectations, parental roles, and education levels can influence parents' attitudes toward online class supervision. Hammer et al. (2007) suggested that parents' attitudes toward controlling and monitoring their children's education vary. Parents often acknowledge that the tasks teachers assign are challenging and require their support, especially in primary school starting from the 5th grade. Despite these challenges, providing structure and guidance during online classes can benefit children's academic performance (Khan, 2021). Furthermore, actively engaging in their children's education can foster positive attitudes toward learning, communication skills, and a sense of responsibility (Pomerantz & Kempner, 2013). Thus, parents should balance providing support and allowing their children to take ownership of their learning.

## **Research problem**

A literature review indicates limited research on the factors influencing online classes for young children school students during and post pandemic, specifically from the perspective of online homeschooling supervisors (OHS) in the Gulf region. To bridge this research gap, my study builds on prior research by König et al. (2020), Daniela et al. (2020), DesRoches et al. (2021), and Bhamani et al. et al. (2020). This research investigates the impact of five variables – supervisors' involvement, cooperation, interference, guidance, and control – on students' attendance and engagement in online classes. These factors are observed under the supervision of parents, siblings, or maids. To direct the study, the following research questions (RQ) were formulated for investigation.

- RQ1: To what extent does supervisors' involvement influence students' attendance in online classes?
- RQ2: To what extent does supervisors' cooperation influence students' attendance in online classes?
- RQ3: To what extent does the supervisors' interference affect students' attendance in online classes?
- RQ4: To what extent does the supervisors' guidance affect students' attendance in online classes?
- RQ5: To what extent does the supervisors' control affect students' attendance in online classes?

## **Research method**

### **Target population**

The study included various individuals supervising young students, such as fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, and house helpers during their daily online classes. These

students, aged 4 to 11, attended public or private schools. Recent data from the Ministry of Education in the UAE (MoE, 2018) revealed that 144,240 students enrolled in kindergarten and primary schools. Among them, 38,903 students belonged to the 4-5 age group attending kindergarten, while 105,337 students were in the primary level, aged between 6-11.

### **Data collection**

This study targeted homeschooling supervisors of young students in the UAE during the pandemic. Data collection involved an online questionnaire survey administered through *Google Forms* and *WhatsApp*. The survey was designed for supervisors or parents responsible for monitoring the online class attendance and online class conduct for students in grades 4-11. Its purpose was to delve into online class attendance and conduct from the perspective of these supervisors. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring a diverse range of backgrounds and inclusion of individuals with no prior experience in homeschooling or e-supervising online classes. The study analysed 100 valid survey responses, which may be considered a small-scale investigation to understand the perspectives of homeschooling supervisors. A pilot study approach was adopted, aligning with Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2002) who viewed pilot studies as suitable when time and resources are limited. Pilot studies can serve as a small-scale version or trial run of the significant study, and as a way of pre-testing a specific research instrument (Baker, 1994). This study used a sample size of 100 supervisors of young homeschooling students attending online classes to observe and investigate the factors influencing their online supervision.

### **Constructs**

In order to test the proposed hypotheses, the constructs were measured using items developed by previous studies (Table 1).

### **Measurements**

Following a comprehensive review of the existing literature, a survey instrument was developed based on established measurement scales. The target population for this study was parents responsible for supervising online classes for primary school students aged between 4-11 years old in the Emirates of Dubai, Sharjah, and Ajman. An online survey comprising 20 questions was distributed to participants via email and *WhatsApp*, designed to measure the five constructs identified in the proposed model. The survey's questions were adapted from previous studies (DesRoches et al., 2021; Daniela et al., 2021); Ferri et al., 2020); Bhamani et al., 2020; Erdogan et al., 2019) and presented as Likert-type scale items, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The collected data were analysed using *SPSS* software version 27. (Table 1).

Table 1: Constructs and indicators of the study

Construct	Indicator	Source
Supervisors' involvement (SI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I always prepare for online classes with my children.</li> <li>- I always attended the entire online class with my child.</li> <li>- I think my child cannot attend the online class properly without my involvement.</li> <li>- I think my involvement facilitate my child attendance of online class properly.</li> </ul>	DesRoches et al. (2021)
Supervisors' cooperation (SC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The teachers cannot control my children's attitude during the online class without my cooperation.</li> <li>- I think that without my cooperation, my young children will be unable to answer the teachers' questions during the online class.</li> <li>- Without my cooperation, I will help my children to focus better during online classes.</li> <li>- The teachers do not need my cooperation to run their online classes successfully.</li> </ul>	Ferri et al. (2020); Daniela et al. (2020)
Supervisors' interference (SIN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I must share my notes about the class running with the teachers online.</li> <li>- I think I need to share my suggestion about the questions asked by the teachers online.</li> <li>- I think I need to share my notes about the camera position and the teacher's voice toning during the online.</li> <li>- I think my interference will improve the online classes' conduction.</li> </ul>	Bhamani et al. (2020); Erdogan et al., 2019
Supervisors' guidance (SG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I must direct the teachers' attention to ask my children during online classes.</li> <li>- I need to direct the teachers' attention to the classroom setting (camera) before and during the online classes.</li> <li>- I must direct the teachers' attention to focus on my children, specifically during online classes.</li> <li>- I need to direct the teachers' attention to review her/his class planning and her/his schedule organising.</li> </ul>	Daniela et al. (2021)
Supervisors' control (SC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I need to share my opinion about the online classes running with the teachers.</li> <li>- I need to share my opinion about the teachers' homework and any academic activities given to my children at the end of the online class.</li> <li>- I need to share my opinion about her/his interaction with my children during the online classes.</li> <li>- I need to share my opinion about my children's performance assessments.</li> </ul>	Daniela et al., (2021)
Online class attendance (OCA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I think I help my children solve the technical problem</li> <li>- I think I help my children's attendance behaviour.</li> <li>- I think I help my children's class engagement easier.</li> <li>- I think I make my children's class attendance problematic.</li> </ul>	Daniela et al. (2021)

## Data analysis

### *Demographic analysis*

Table 2 provides a demographic analysis of 100 participants, including information about their gender, supervisors' relationship to the child, years in school, nationality, school type, number of children supervised, devices used by the children, supervisors' education, and type of support provided.

Table 2: Demographic analysis (N=100)

Variable		n	%
Gender	Male	18	18
	Female	82	82
Supervisor's relation to the child	Father	6	6
	Mother	57	57
	Sibling	23	23
	Maid	14	14
Years in the schools	Kindergarten	8	8
	Grade 1	12	12
	Grade 2	7	7
	Grade 3	6	6
	Grade 4	22	22
	Grade 5	14	14
Nationality	UAE	58	58
	Arabs	35	35
	Asian	1	1
	Other	6	6
School type	Private school	24	24
	Public school	76	76
Number of children supervised	One child	47	47
	Two children	38	38
	More than 2 children	15	15
Devices used by the children	Tablet	41	41
	Laptop	36	36
	Smartphone	14	14
	PC	9	9
Supervisors' education	Bachelor degree	53	53
	Diploma	26	26
	High school certificate	11	11
	Below high school	10	10
Type of supporting	Accessing to the class	70	70
	Managing the connection technical problem	20	20
	Supporting the class technical termination	10	10

Most participants were female (82%), with a small proportion being male (18%). In terms of supervisors' relationship to the child, the majority were mothers (57%), while a smaller

number were siblings (23%) or fathers (6%). The most significant number of participants were their children in grade 6 (31%), while the second largest group was students in grade 4 (22%). Most participants were from UAE (58%), followed by those with Arab ethnicity (35%). Most participants had children in schools (76%), while the rest attended private schools (24%). Most supervisors supervised only one child (47%), with a smaller number supervising two children (38%) or more than two children (15%). The most commonly used device by the children was a tablet (41%), followed by a laptop (36%). The largest group of supervisors held a bachelor's degree (53%), with the second largest group holding a diploma (26%). Most supervisors provided support by accessing the class (70%), with a smaller number supporting in managing connection technical problems (20%) or technical termination of the class (10%).

#### *Reliability analysis*

The constructs' reliability and consistency in the proposed framework were measured using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, finding values in the range .826 to .927 (Table 3), exceeding the acceptable limit of 0.7 (Joseph et al., 2010). This indicates satisfactory reliability and high levels of internal consistency for all constructs proposed in the conceptual framework.

Table 3: Reliability analysis

	Cronbach alpha	No of items
Supervisor involvement (SI)	.927	4
Supervisor cooperation (SC)	.923	4
Supervisor interference (SIN)	.919	4
Supervisor guidance (SG)	.920	4
Supervisor control (SC)	.826	4
Online class attendance (OCA)	.829	4

#### *Correlation analysis*

Table 4 indicates the strength of the relationship between each pair of variables, with values closer to 1 indicating a strong positive relationship and values closer to -1 indicating a strong negative relationship.

Table 4: Results of the Pearson correlation analysis

	Supervisor involvement (SI)	Supervisor cooperation (SC)	Supervisor interference (SIN)	Supervisor guidance (SG)	Supervisor control (SCO)	Online class attendance (OCA)
SI	1					
SC	.767	1				
SIN	.759	.813	1			
SG	.678	.733	.799	1		
SCO	.614	.611	.740	.826	1	
OCA	.537	.622	.653	.709	.823	1



For example, the value of .767 was found for the relationship between supervisors' involvement and supervisors' cooperation. This means that as supervisors become more involved, there is a corresponding increase in their level of cooperation.

### Regression

Table 5 summarises the result of the regression analysis; the beta ( $\beta$ ) values,  $t$ -values, and  $p$ -values for all of the developed hypotheses are described based on the findings, using SPSS. The table shows the results of a regression analysis in which the effect of five predictor variables (H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5). The results supported H2 and H5, supervisors' cooperation (SC) has a significant effect on the dependent variable online class attendance (OCA) with ( $\beta = .300, p < .007$ ) and H5 supervisors' control (SCO) influence (SCO) has a significant effect on the dependent variable online class attendance (OCA) with ( $\beta = .773, p < 0.000$ ). On the other hand, H1 indicates that supervisor involvement (SI) has a non-significant effect on the dependent variable and does not influence online class attendance (OCA) with ( $\beta = -.096, p > .311$ ). The result also indicates that H3, supervisor interference (SIN) has a non-significant effect on the dependent variable online class attendance (OCA) with ( $\beta = .600, p > .600$ ). also, H4 supervisor guidance (SG) has a non-significant effect on the dependent variable online class attendance (OCA) with ( $\beta = -.034, p > .778$ ). Hence, H1, H3, and H4 are not supported.

Table 5: Results of the regression analysis

	t-statistic	p-value	B-beta	r-square
H1	-1.020	.311	-.096	.706
H2	2.777	.007	.300	.706
H3	-.527	.600	-.063	.706
H4	-.283	.778	-.034	.706
H5	7.476	.000	.773	.706

### Testing hypotheses

Based on the regression analysis, hypotheses H2 and H5 are supported. However, hypotheses H1, H3 and H4 are not supported (Table 6).

Table 6: Testing hypotheses - regression analysis

	Variables		t-statistic	p-value	Result
H1	Supervisor involvement → Online class attendance.	Online	-1.020	.311	Rejected
H2	Supervisor cooperation → Online class attendance.	Online	2.777	.007	Accepted
H3	Supervisor interference → Online class attendance.	Online	-.527	.600	Rejected
H4	Supervisor guidance → Online class attendance.	Online	-.283	.778	Rejected
H5	Supervisor control → Online class attendance.	Online	7.476	.000	Accepted

## Discussion

Online homeschooling and home supervising (OHS) are solutions for young students' online learning. The online supervisors in this study are satisfied and willing to support their young children in their online classes. This finding aligned with Heba et al. (2020) and Delipiter Lase et al. (2022), who reported that parents in the UAE and Indonesia were content with remote learning but required assistance from a home supervisor to participate in online classes. However, studies conducted in the United States by Griffith (2022) and in Australia by Evans et al. (2020) suggest that homeschooling duties negatively impacted parents' ability to work. Similarly, the study by Shao et al. (2021) in China found that parental involvement in families with more children had a higher predictive effect on parent satisfaction. The study found that most online supervisors were mothers and siblings supervising young children attending online classes. The study identified five factors influencing online homeschooling and shaping supervisors' ability to support teachers: involvement, interference, cooperation, guidance, and control. The study reported that parents' interference during online classes negatively impacted teacher conduct; this finding was consistent with Open Schooling (NIOS) in India, which found that parents' interference during online classes had become a significant challenge for teachers, which affected their ability to conduct classes effectively (NIOS, 2021).

Furthermore, the National Education Association (NEA) in the USA found parental interference during online classes was a significant challenge, negatively impacting their ability to conduct classes effectively (Patterson, 2020). Consequently, Sawchuk (2020) agreed that parent interference during online classes can disrupt the flow and make it difficult for teachers to do their job. Supervisors' involvement in class conduct also impacts negatively upon teachers' conduct of online classes. This finding is consistent with a study by Lee et al. (2018) which found that supervisors' involvement in online classes led to lower levels of teachers' job satisfaction and higher levels of stress and their teaching effectiveness. Therefore, attaining supervisors' support to teachers without overbearing distraction is important for their conduct of online classes. The finding aligns with Foltz and Moller (2019) who found that excessive monitoring of online instructors can lead to decreased job satisfaction, increased stress, and, ultimately, burnout. Similarly, a study by Puzziferro (2008) indicated that too much direction from supervisors could challenge the creativity of online instructors. Furthermore, research by Johnson and Aragon (2003) suggested that online instructors need to be trusted to use their professional judgment to make decisions during online classes. In the light of these findings, it is crucial for online supervisors to strike a balance between offering guidance and enabling teachers to exercise their professional judgment to conduct online classes effectively.

However, according to the present study's findings, when supervisors control their children's attitudes effectively, and pay attention and cooperate with teachers during class, they support teachers. This result aligns with previous studies Wu et al. (2021); Alharthi's (2023) findings in Saudi Arabia, Haidi and Hamdan (2021) in Brunei, which found that teacher control and student behaviour monitoring during online learning positively

correlated with student achievement. Likewise, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) suggest that a more collaborative and supportive approach to supervision is preferable for promoting teachers' professional development and improving student outcomes. Similarly, previous studies by Daniela et al. (2021), Turnbull et al. (2015), Zhao et al. (2020) and Zhao et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of parental cooperation with teachers for effective teaching. However, it contrasts with Ma et al.'s (2020) findings that students who received more parental supervision during online learning demonstrated higher levels of engagement and achievement. Furthermore, Wajdi (2020) and Carvalho et al. (2020) state that parental involvement before and during online classes is crucial to support young students' technical problems. These different findings may be due to differences in the type of supervision provided, the context in which the supervision is given, or the outcomes being measured.

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights the novelty of online homeschooling in the UAE and the wider Gulf region. The integration of technology in education, notably through e-learning methods and online teaching, particularly strengthened during the pandemic, has yielded diverse impacts on how supervisors perceive their roles in supervising their young children's online class attendance and engagement. The conclusion elucidates how these supervisors perceive their role in actively engaging their young children in online classes and ensuring the success of the e-learning experiences. The educational shift has encouraged a more profound understanding among online supervisors worldwide and in the Gulf region to adapt and discover effective approaches to support their children's educational journeys in digital education.

## **Implications**

The study provides meaningful and practical empathy for professionals, parents, educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in the education sector who aim for a deeper understanding of OHS in the UAE and the Gulf region. Given the rising global preference for e-learning, distance learning, or online education, this study delves into the factors shaping parental supervision and its repercussions on young children's online class attendance and online class conduct in the digital environment. These findings can play a pivotal role in addressing challenges in global e-learning practices, aiding educational institutions in devising effective strategies to enhance online learning experiences for students.

## **Limitations of the study and future research**

The study provides valuable recommendations for online class developers, designers, and trainers to comprehend the factors influencing young students' engagement in e-learning and the influence of online supervisors on class attendance and conduction; there is limitations that warrant further exploration. Specifically, there is a need for additional research to understand teachers' viewpoints concerning online supervisors in the context of e-learning. Moreover, given the novelty of the online supervisory role in UAE society

and culture, investigating the cultural factors that shape online supervisors' experiences and perceptions of online learning could offer invaluable insights for future studies.

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