



# Primary School Students' Parents' Level of Involvement into their Children's Education\*

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which parents of elementary students (1st to 5th) participate in their children's education with regard to some variables. The study was designed based on descriptive survey model and comparative and correlational associative models. The sample of the research comprised 1252 parents whose children studied at 1st to 5th classes of six primary schools in Malatya province. The Parental Involvement Scale was used to collect data. As a result of the analysis, it was found out that parents' level of involvement was high for such tasks as communication with children, creating enabling home settings, supporting child's personality development, and helping with homework, but low especially for volunteering. Also mothers were found to support their children's homework significantly more than fathers ( $\eta^2 = .05$  and  $d = .48$ ). Finally, families' monthly income was found to be positively and moderately associated especially with involvement tasks of supporting child's socio-cultural development and creating enabling home settings, and negatively and moderately with volunteering task.

## Key Words

Parental Involvement, Parents, Primary School.

Parents, especially the mothers, are first and natural teachers of their children (Gürşimşek, 2003; Shearer, 2006; Ulusavaş, 1992; West, Noden, Edge, & David, 1998). When a child attends the school, parent's role as teacher does not cease. Though a curriculum is implemented by teachers in a school setting, formal education is not limited with providing students with knowledge, skills or attitudes within the boundaries of school (Taymaz, 1995). Parents must be considered a constant and principle component of curriculum. Success at school is guaranteed if school-based instruction is supported by parents' involvement at home (Şimşek & Tanaydın, 2002). The concept of parental involvement includes various parental behaviours directly or indirectly af-

fecting a child's cognitive development and school achievement (Fantuzzo, Davis, & Ginsburg, 1995). Thus a large spectrum of acts can be considered as parental involvement including getting informed about and supporting the curriculum being implemented (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Talim Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı [MEB TTKB], 2008a, 2008b); volunteering in or visiting classroom (Woolley, Benjamin, & Woolley, 2004), monitoring child's progress in cooperation with the teacher (Aslanargun, 2007; Çelenk, 2003; Erdem & Şimşek, 2009), or creating a home environment physically and psychologically facilitating learning (Aslanargun; Epstein, 1995, 2004, 2005; MEB TTKB, 2008a).

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Involving parents in education has been reported to yield positive outcomes in many aspects including increased student attendance to and satisfaction with school (Hiatt-Michael, 2008), better academic achievement (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Shearer, 2006), motivation, school attachment, responsibility and confidence (Yıldırım & Dönmez, 2008), better social adaptation and less discipline problems (Kotaman, 2008). In Turkish education system parental involvement is encouraged defining parents as shareholders who actively help creating a democratic school environment (MEB, 2003), support educational and instructional activities (MEB, 2012), and help and guide students especially in social activities (MEB, 2005). The importance of parental involvement is also highlighted in renewed constructivist curriculum launched in 2005–2006 school year (MEB Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı Eğitim Öğretim ve Program Dairesi Başkanlığı [MEB TTKB EÖPDB], 2005), where parental involvement was one of the 15 principles on which the components and content of curricula were based. “E5. Achieving Parental Involvement and Cooperation” was also one key competency categories of General Competencies for Teaching Profession defined by the ministry (MEB Öğretmen Yetiştirme ve Eğitimi Genel Müdürlüğü [MEB ÖYEGM], 2006). Furthermore, ministry has also attempted to create awareness among and inform parents about parental involvement with a parent guidebook (MEB TTKB, 2008a, 2008b).

### Purpose

The main purpose of this research was to investigate the parental involvement levels of parents of primary school students (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>). It was also aimed to comparatively analyze their level of parental involvement with regard to some variables including parents' gender (mother vs. father), parent's educational background, child's class, type of school (private vs. state) and family's average monthly income.

## Method

### Research Design

Since this study investigated the extent to which the parents of primary school students participated into their children's education considering some variables, it was designed based on a baseline descriptive survey model and both comparative and correlation associative models (Karasar, 2011).

### Sampling

The population of the research comprised the parents of 45.188 students (44.385 in state schools and 803 in private schools) studying at the 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grades of 159 state and four private primary schools in the central district of Malatya province during 2009-2010 school year according to official statistics (Malatya Millî Eğitim Müdürlüğü, 2010). The sample for this study was selected randomly using cluster sampling method. Accordingly, five state primary schools (Ahmet Parlak, Hidayet, Gazi, Kemal Özalper, and Türkiyem Primary Schools) and one private primary school (Private Battalgazi Bilim Primary School) were selected as the sample clusters. After official permissions were granted all 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade students at these schools were asked to take the instrument to their parents to be completed at home and to return them to their schools. As a result, 1321 forms returned from the parents. After eliminating cases with excessive missing data and outliers, 1252 (669 mothers and 583 fathers) remaining forms were taken into consideration for the analysis. Considering the designated possibility of type I error (.05), power (.80), and effect size (medium), the adequacy of the sample size was tested and minimum number of participants for each cell was determined to be 56. Thus, it was concluded that, since each cell except for two had minimum sample size of 100, the sample (n=1252) was adequate for the present study (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1998).

### Instrument

The data were collected using Turkish Parental Involvement Scale-TPIS originally developed by Gürbüzürk and Şad (2010a, 2010b). This five-point (Always-Never) Likert type scale measures the extent to which parents perform parental involvement tasks represented by 39 items under eight distinct factors. It was reported that initial form of the instrument was constructed through literature review and interviews with ten primary class teachers, three principals, and fifteen parents from different socio-educational backgrounds about the importance of and best practices regarding effective parental involvement. The validity of the content was tested based on the views of an expert panel including twelve scholars with PhDs in educational sciences (Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Administration, and Guidance and Counseling) and an expert in Turkish Language Teaching department for language (Gürbüzürk & Şad, 2010b). A follow-up pilot study on 618 parents yielded an eight factor structure with 39 items. The factor loadings of the items ranged between .442 and .807,

altogether explaining 60.86% of the total variance (Gürbüzürk & Şad, 2010a). Internal consistency analysis revealed Cronbach Alpha coefficients of  $\alpha=.914$  for *Communication with teacher/school factor*,  $\alpha=.825$  for *Helping with homework factor*,  $\alpha=.817$  for *Personal development factor*,  $\alpha=.810$  for *Volunteering factor*,  $\alpha=.828$  for *Communication with child factor*,  $\alpha=.807$  for *Enabling home setting factor*,  $\alpha=.685$  for *Supporting personality development factor*, and  $\alpha=.617$  for *Supporting socio-cultural development factor* (Gürbüzürk & Şad, 2010b). For the present study Alphas were estimated .898, .790, .811, .789, .798, .744, .670, and .617, respectively. The confirmatory factor analysis revealed goodness of fit indices suggesting adequate model-data fit (Gürbüzürk & Şad, 2010b):  $\chi^2=1334.85$ ,  $df=636$  ( $\chi^2/df=2.09$ ),  $GFI=.90$ ,  $AGFI=.88$ ,  $NNFI=.92$ ,  $CFI=.93$ ,  $RMSEA=.042$ ,  $RMR=.057$ ,  $SRMR=.043$ .

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using mean scores, standard deviation, t test, One Way ANOVA (Brown-Forsythe where equality of variances not assumed), Scheffe post hoc test (Dunnett C where equality of variances not assumed) and Pearson correlation coefficient. To interpret the effect sizes in inferential analysis  $\eta^2$ , Cohen d, and determination coefficients ( $r^2$ ) were used. Significance was considered  $p < 0.05$ . To interpret the parents' level of involvement the five-point Likert intervals were used as *never*=1.00–1.80, *seldom*=1.81–2.60, *sometimes*=2.61–3.40, *mostly*=3.41–4.20, and *always*=4.21–5.00.

### Results

It was found that participating parents *always* perform such tasks as *communication with child* ( $\bar{x} = 4.57$ ), *enabling home settings* ( $\bar{x} = 4.43$ ), *supporting personality development* ( $\bar{x} = 4.35$ ), and *helping with homework* ( $\bar{x} = 4.32$ ). The parental involvement tasks they performed *mostly* were *communication with teacher/school* ( $\bar{x} = 3.73$ ), and *parents' self-development* in order to be better involved ( $\bar{x} = 3.55$ ). Parents were found to *support their children's socio-cultural development* ( $\bar{x} = 3.12$ ) *sometimes*. Lastly, parents' frequency of *volunteering* in curricular and extracurricular activities was *seldom* ( $\bar{x} = 2.23$ ). These findings suggested that parents perform home-based parental involvement tasks more frequently compared to those tasks taking place at school or different settings.

The t test analysis comparing the involvement levels of mothers and fathers revealed statistically significant

differences in favor of mothers in all factors. But the estimated effect sizes (Eta-square and Cohen d) for all differences were small ( $\eta^2 \leq .03$ ; Cohen  $d \leq .38$ ) except for *Helping with homework* factor whose effect size was almost "medium" ( $\eta^2=.05$ , Cohen  $d = .48$ ).

One Way ANOVA analysis comparing involvement levels according to parents' educational background revealed that parents' level of education does not cause any statistically significant differences in terms of *communication with teacher/school* [ $F(6, 177.49) = 1.13, p > .05$ ], *communication with child* [ $F(6, 1215) = 1.79, p > .05$ ], and *supporting child's personality development* [ $F(6, 86.63) = 11.85, p > .05$ ]. On the other hand, parents' educational background was found to be a statistically significant factor in terms of *helping with homework* [ $F(6, 55.91) = 3.85, p < .05$ ], *personal development* [ $F(6, 105.05) = 5.47, p < .05$ ], *volunteering* [ $F(6, 162.72) = 2.82, p < .05$ ], *creating enabling home setting* [ $F(6, 44.18) = 4.22, p < .05$ ], and *supporting socio-cultural development* [ $F(6, 1215) = 7.01, p < .05$ ]. However, estimated small effect sizes ( $\eta^2 \leq .03$ ) proved that all these statistically significant differences were questionable in terms of practical significance.

One Way ANOVA analysis comparing involvement levels according to students' class level revealed that parents' level of involvement does not differ statistically significantly across different grades except for two tasks: *helping with homework* [ $F(6, 1003.12) = 3.82, p < .05$ ] and *supporting socio-cultural development* [ $F(6, 1244) = 6.57, p < .05$ ]. However, estimated small effect sizes ( $\eta^2 \leq .02$ ) again proved that these statistically significant differences were questionable in terms of practical significance.

Comparisons based on child's gender revealed no statistically significant differences in terms of frequency of performing any parental involvement tasks ( $p > .05$ ). This suggests that parents do not favor either their daughters or sons while getting involved into their education.

The t test analysis comparing parental involvement levels in terms of type of school (state versus private) the students attend revealed no statistically significant differences except for two factors, *communication with teacher/school* [ $t(258.342) = 2.278, p < .05$ ] and *supporting socio-cultural development* [ $t(1250) = 2.851, p < .05$ ] in favor of parents of private school students. But the estimated effect sizes (Eta-square and Cohen d) for these differences were small ( $\eta^2 \leq .01$ ; Cohen  $d \leq .23$ ), thus their practical significance was questionable.

The correlation analysis between frequency of performing parental involvement tasks and family's average monthly income yielded statistically significant moderate-to-low levels of positive correlations between family income and *supporting child's socio-cultural development* ( $r=.540, p<.05$ ), *creating enabling home setting* ( $r=.468, p<.05$ ), *helping with homework* ( $r=.303, p<.05$ ), *personal development* ( $r=.286, p<.05$ ), *communication with child* ( $r=.240, p<.05$ ), and *Supporting personality development factor* ( $r=.214, p<.05$ ), but not for *communication with teacher/school* ( $p > .05$ ). However, a statistically significant moderate level of negative correlation was found between family income and frequency of *volunteering* in curricular and extracurricular activities ( $r=-.331, p<.05$ ). Considering the determination coefficients, the average monthly income can be said to explain 29% of the variance in *supporting child's socio-cultural development* and 22% of the variance in *creating enabling home setting* in the positive direction, whereas it explains about 11% of the variance in frequency of *volunteering* in a negative direction, that is as the family's average monthly income decreases their frequency of *volunteering* increases or vice versa.

### Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

It was concluded that participating parents performed such home-based parental involvement tasks as communicating with children, creating a favorable learning environment at home, supporting child's personality development and helping their homework relatively more often. However they perform school- or community-based tasks less frequently, volunteering being the least performed task. That implies a need to train parents to perform more school- and community-based parental involvement tasks. Meeting the education needs of parents about various aspects of parental involvement (Gür & Kurt, 2011) seems half way to solution, but schools' roles in encouraging parental involvement cannot be underestimated especially in terms of volunteering. Indeed, school's parental involvement policy is very decisive in encouraging parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Şimşek & Tanaydın, 2002; West et al., 1998). Although, ministry adopts a policy to encourage parents to volunteer in school activities, e.g. in social activities (MEB, 2005), this may not be the case in practice. For example, principals may disregard parents while organizing social and educational activities (Erdem & Şimşek, 2009). Some teachers may not welcome parents as they are concerned about being criticized (Shearer, 2006). Or poor school-based involvement may be because parents are generally expected

to school for financial reasons (Yıldırım & Dönmez, 2008). Thus, it should be ensured that school policy and what principals or teachers do in practice comply with the parental involvement policies specified in relevant legislations (MEB, 2003, 2005, 2012; MEB ÖYEGM, 2006).

Like in previous works (Aslanargun, 2007; Çelenk, 2003; Kazura, 2000; Pala-Günkan, 2007; Prins & Toso, 2008), in this study it was also found that mothers are the dominant parents over fathers especially when it comes to helping children's homework. On the other hand, the lack of any significant differences in terms of child's gender can indicate democratic attitudes by parents not discriminating against their daughters or sons while performing various parental involvement tasks unlike the findings of other researches (Muller, 1998; Sohn, 2007; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996).

It is also reported that parental involvement decreases in time (across successive grades), as the subjects become more difficult or students become more independent learners (Chen, 2008; Mau, 1997; Muller, 1998). However, this study, like the one by Kotaman (2008), proved that no matter which class (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>) their children attend, frequency of parents to perform different parental involvement tasks was similar in practice.

Although some researches (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Pala-Günkan, 2007) suggest that parents' educational background is decisive in terms of parental involvement, this study - like some other (see Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1998) - found that parents' educational background does not cause significant differences in practice. Thus, participating parents can be said to spend similar time and effort in practice to involve in their children's education regardless of their educational background. Yet, when it comes to financial variables, it was concluded that family's average monthly income does matter especially in supporting children's socio-cultural development by i.e. taking them to concerts, theatre, exhibitions etc., and creating an enabling home setting. This finding is consistent with previous researches which suggest that parents from higher SES involve more (Driessen, Smit, & Slegers, 2005; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Slaughter & Epps, 1987; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). However, finding regarding the lack of any correlation between income level and frequency of communication with teacher/school supports that of Bevill (2007) who found no correlation between income level and parental involvement. Moreover, as reported by Domina (2005) volunteering was found in this study to be performed more frequently as the family's income

level decreases. These inconsistent findings suggest that when investigating the association between parental involvement and income level, the specific parental involvement task becomes an issue.

In brief, the results imply that parents need to be informed and encouraged about parental involvement tasks, especially about the school based ones. Also they must be convinced that no matter what educational or socio-economical background they come from they can perform favorable parental involvement tasks.

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