

# Parental involvement in secondary education: Perceptions and potential barriers

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, we aimed to discover the meanings of parental involvement and the factors influencing parental involvement in high school, in Turkey. We conducted the study with 12 participants and applied phenomenological research design. After collecting the data with a semi-structured interview form, we applied descriptive analysis to it. The results of the study show that parental involvement carries multiple meanings that can be classified as home-based and school-based involvement. Several parent-family, child, school, teacher, and social factors influence parental involvement in high school. The practitioners should be aware of the plural meanings of parental involvement and run practices beyond the one-size-fits-all approach and enact policies to handle the possible barriers.

**Keywords:** Parental involvement, high school, barriers, phenomenology.

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## INTRODUCTION

As a result of various research, it was understood long ago that parents play a central role in children's education (Barge and Loges, 2003). This role was conceptualized as parental involvement in education and it was observed that it had the strongest positive effect on children's school achievement among many other familial variables (Harris and Goodall, 2008). Several studies showed the positive influence of parental involvement on various educational outcomes. Parental involvement had positive relations with homework completion (Cancio et al., 2004), higher grades (Chen and Gregory, 2009), higher standardized test scores (Hayes, 2011), better reading and mathematics performances (Van Voorhis, 2011), decrease in retention (Miedel and Reynolds, 1999), increase in school attendance (Sheldon, 2007), higher graduation rates (Hiatt-Michael, 2001), fewer in-class behavior problems (Davalos et al., 2005). In addition to the relations with educational outcomes, parental involvement had significant relations with the development of self-regulation skills (Brody et al., 1999) and increase in social skills (McWayne et al., 2004).

Yet, parental involvement didn't have the same meaning for everyone, that was why different definitional

and classification approaches were found in the literature. According to Jeynes (2007) parental involvement in education entailed parents' participation in their children's educational processes and experiences. This involvement was a mutual, regular and meaningful communication between children and parents, and encompassed students' learning and other school activities. Johansson and Wahlberg (1993) believed that parental involvement was a liability to students and was a combination of the active participation from both parents and school staff (Cited in Chukwu, 2018). Christenson and Sheridan (2001) defined parental involvement as all the parenting roles for children's education at home and at school. Epstein (2009) asserted that parental involvement or parent-school cooperation was a concept that remarked the shared responsibility of parents, educators and the other citizens in students' education and development. As clearly seen, there wasn't a singular understanding about what parental involvement was; parental involvement was multidimensional and definitions could not be compared (Keith et al., 1993). If different perceptions about parental involvement were ignored, there might be communication failures leading

teachers to feel accused by parents and parents to feel their efforts were undervalued (Lawson, 2003). In Lawson's study (2003) it was found that teachers and parents defined parental involvement in different ways. While parents had a more "community oriented" perspective, such as keeping children safe or driving them to school, teachers defined involvement primarily as parents' presence at school. Baker (1997a, b) found out that teachers and parents agreed effective parental involvement required communication between school and home. They observed that teachers had a narrower view of parental involvement and they defined it primarily through home-school communication, while parents had a broader view about the types and functions of parental involvement and they explained it as participating parenting programs, school events and school councils and being agents of their children. Refusing to define parental involvement from a singular perspective, Epstein (2010) classified parental involvement into six types, ranging from basic parenting practices to social collaboration. She gave leads about how to develop these forms of involvement as such:

*Type 1- Parenting:* developing practices that help parents set home conditions which supports children's learning.

*Type 2- Communicating:* designing effective ways of home-to-school and school-to-home communications about school programs and children's progress at school.

*Type 3- Volunteering:* parents' volunteering at school and participating in school events as an audience.

*Type 4- Learning at home:* parents' assisting their children with their homework and other curricular activities.

*Type 5- Decision making:* developing parent leadership by encouraging their active participation in school decisions, councils and committees.

*Type 6- Collaborating with the community:* integrating community resources and agents into school programs with a sense of shared responsibility for children.

Different from Epstein (2010), Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) classified parental involvement in three types as behavioral, personal and cognitive-intellectual participation. Behavioral participation included school based activities, such as participating in parent-teacher meetings and school events and home based activities, such as helping with homework and chatting about school. Personal participation was caring about children's school life and knowing what was going on there. The third type, cognitive and intellectual participation was about exposing children to cognitively and intellectually stimulating activities such as going to the library, having talks about contemporary events. Pomerantz et al. (2007), using a binary approach, classified parental involvement into home based involvement and school based involvement. School based participation covered the practices which required parents build a relationship

with school. Participating in parent-teacher meetings and school events, meeting with teachers and volunteering at school were practices of school based involvement. Home based involvement was school related activities at home, such as assisting children with school related tasks or subject choice, responding to their academic interests and having talks on academic subjects.

In many countries which are aware of the positive effects of parental involvement in education, there are policies aiming to increase parental participation (e.g. UK Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007; USA- The America 2000 Act, 1994 and No Child Left Behind Section 1118, 2001; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2005). In Turkey, it is a legislative obligation to have a school-family association in every school (Turkey Ministry of National Education, 2012). By this regulation, parents were granted with authority and responsibility to participate in the improvement of education and learning. In accordance with the policies and regulations of their countries, schools try to apply strategies to involve the parents in education. However, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) argued that there were huge discrepancies between the parental involvement discourse and school practices. That is, although the research remarked the importance of parental involvement, and education policies encouraged to improve it, parents did not involve in education as much as they were expected to do. Because as Hornby and Lafaele (2011) claimed, parental involvement was limited by various factors. In their model, Grolnick et al. (1997) claimed that variables in three categories as "individual", "contextual" and "institutional" had effects on parental involvement. Individual variables were parent and children factors that could be influential on parental involvement. Family conditions were called contextual variables. The third category was institutional variables and they interacted with family variables. In another model about the barriers to parental involvement Hornby and Lafaele (2011) defined the barriers in four categories as "individual parent and family factors", "child factors", "parent-teacher factors" and "societal factors". Parents' beliefs about themselves, as self-efficacy beliefs (Grolnick et al., 1997; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011) and about their parental roles (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011) acted as an important factor. In both models it was argued that parental involvement strategies adopted by teachers and parents' perceptions about the involvement invitations influenced their participation (Grolnick et al., 1997; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Similarly, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) claimed that parents thinking that teacher and school valued parental involvement tended to be more eager to involve. Besides parents' beliefs or teacher-school factors, parents' life context e.g. parents' educational level, single parenting, social support, employment status and psychological status (Grolnick et al., 1997; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011) were influential on involvement decisions.

In the models, it was pointed out that child variables were influential on their parents' involvement. According to Grolnick et al. (1997) "difficult" children's parents were less willing to involve actively in their education. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) marked child variables in parental involvement as child's age, learning difficulties and disabilities, gifts and talents and behavioral problems. Among child factors, child's age plays a crucial role as a barrier, as many researches showed that the older the child got the lower the involvement in education became (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In her study with 8, 9 and 10 grade students, Deslandes (2003) observed that as children moved to the upper grade, there was a constant decrease in parental involvement and a constant increase in adolescents' autonomy. The decrease in parental involvement through adolescence could be explained by the unwelcoming atmosphere towards parental involvement in high schools, parents' loss of confidence as subject matters got more complicated and adolescents' aspirations to be more autonomous (Chen, 2008). Eccles and Harold (1993) claimed that the reason why parental involvement decreased was that high schools were perceived as unwelcoming, huge bureaucratic organizations by families. However, Deslandes and Cloutier (2002) observed that when parents involved in their education, high school students were more successful academically, set higher goals and had fewer discipline problems. Moreover, the majority of the adolescents were willing to show their parents how well they performed at school, to ask their parents' ideas for school projects, to listen to their parents' memories of adolescence. But, it was also found that two third of those adolescents did not want their parents visit their school or participate in school trips. It might be said that although adolescents wanted their parents involve in their educational life, they did not prefer school based involvement. As the child grows, the type of parental involvement changes and instead of building direct relations with the school, parents apply home based methods like helping with homework or giving suggestions about course selection (Hill and Taylor, 2004). It must clearly be understood that parental involvement, appropriate to child's developmental stage and needs, results in positive outcomes at school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Although there is a plethora of research on parental involvement, most of them are on pre-school and elementary school children (Addi-Racah and Ainhoren, 2009; Alaçam and Olgan, 2019; Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; Erdener and Knoepfel, 2018; Koç, 2018). As research shows (Deslandes and Cloutier, 2008) parental involvement is important not only for pre-school or elementary school children but high school students, as well. Taking the argument that parental involvement does not have a single meaning and there are various barriers to parental involvement, in this study it was aimed to discover a) the meanings of parental involvement and b)

the factors that influence parental involvement in high school.

## METHOD

We conducted this research with qualitative research approach and phenomenological design. Phenomenology examines conscious experience structures together with related experiences from the perspectives of those who have first-hand experiences (Smith, 2018). Phenomenology tries to give a description of direct experiences by in-depth examinations. This design focuses on answering two basic questions as "What is experienced" and "How it is experienced (Creswell and Poth, 2016). In this study, the meanings ascribed to parental involvement and the factors which influence parental involvement were examined from the perspectives of teachers, administrators and parents as partners in parental involvement experience.

## Participants

The participants of the study included 12 participants selected according to maximum variation sampling method. Before we selected the participants for the study, we had defined the criteria of variation. We decided to apply school type as one of the criteria because perceptions and experiences might differ according to school type. The researchers defined four high school types in which student and parent profiles changed. Student and parent profile change in those schools because in Turkey students take a national high school entrance exam, and according to their scores they can apply to different school types. That is, the students who get the highest points can go to "project high schools", the students who cannot attend the project schools can apply to "local Anatolian high schools" and those whose exam points are not high enough to attend either of these schools attend the "vocational and technical high schools". There are private high schools in all types. Accordingly, we interviewed one teacher, administrator and parent from project high schools, one teacher, administrator and parent from local high schools, one teacher, administrator and parent from vocational and technical high schools and one teacher, administrator and parent from private high schools. Apart from the school type criterion, we were tried to interview from different subjects and male and female teachers. The characteristics of the study group created according to these criteria can be seen in Table 1. We used pseudonyms for the participants' names.

As shown in Table 1, the study group, seven of whom were male and five of whom were female, included four administrators, four teachers and four parents. In order to attain maximum variation, in each category of

**Table 1.** Study group.

	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>School type</b>
<b>Administrators</b>	Deniz	Assistant Principal	Male	12	492	Public Project Science High School
	Özgür	Assistant Principal	Male	17	963	Public Anatolian High School
	Ümit	Assistant Principal	Female	30	208	Private Anatolian and Science High School
	Güner	Assistant Principal	Male	21	509	Public Vocational and Technical School
	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Branch</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>School type</b>
<b>Teachers</b>	Ömür	Turkish Language and Literature	Female	19	82	Public Project Science High School
	Derya	School Counselor	Male	21	315	Public Anatolian High School
	Seyhan	School Counselor	Female	10	130	Private Anatolian High School
	Bilge	Chemistry Technologies	Male	24	117	Public Vocational and Technical School
	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Parents' occupation</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Parent's age</b>	<b>Number of children</b>	<b>School type</b>
<b>Parents</b>	Evren	Tradesperson	Male	46	3	Public Project Science High School
	Tuna	Financial Consultant	Female	38	2	Public Anatolian High School
	Ferhan	Housewife	Female	40	2	Private Anatolian High School
	Cihan	Factory Worker	Male	45	2	Public Anatolian Imam-Hatip High School

administrators, teachers and parents one representative for each school type -project high school, local Anatolian high school, private Anatolian high school, and vocational and technical high school- was included. Professional experience of administrators and teachers ranged from 12 years to 30 years and parents' age ranged from 38 to 46. In the administrators group the number of students was used to show the size of the school, in the teachers group the number of students was used to show the total number of students that the teacher was teaching or counseling to.

### Data collection

In order to collect data of the study, we used a semi-structured interview form. This form covered

questions of personal information and four open ended questions such as "What does 'parental involvement in education' mean to you?" (Question 1), "How would you define it?" (Probe Question 1), "In your school what kind of parental involvement strategies are implemented?" (Question 3). We developed interview questions in accordance with the research questions, after literature review two field experts revised them and after their revisions the language in the parent interview questions were simplified and new probe questions were added. We had two pilot interviews with a teacher and a parent. In the pilots, the researchers discussed with the interviewees if there were any ambiguous points and they had any suggestions to improve them according to research aims. With the forms enhanced with pilot interviews, we started the interviews of the study. One of the researchers

conducted the interviews face-to-face at a place and time the participants preferred. Voice records of all the interviews were taken with participant confirmations.

### Data analysis

In the data analysis, we transcribed the interviews verbatim and analyzed the transcriptions with descriptive analysis method. Following Yıldırım and Şimşek's (2011) steps of descriptive analysis, as a first step we summarized the data and interpreted according to the themes defined according to the literature. Later stages of the analyses were creating a framework, processing the data according to the framework, defining findings and interpreting them. In defining themes and categories for the current study, we took both

the themes remarked in parental involvement literature and new themes arose in the interviews into consideration.

### Credibility and trustworthiness

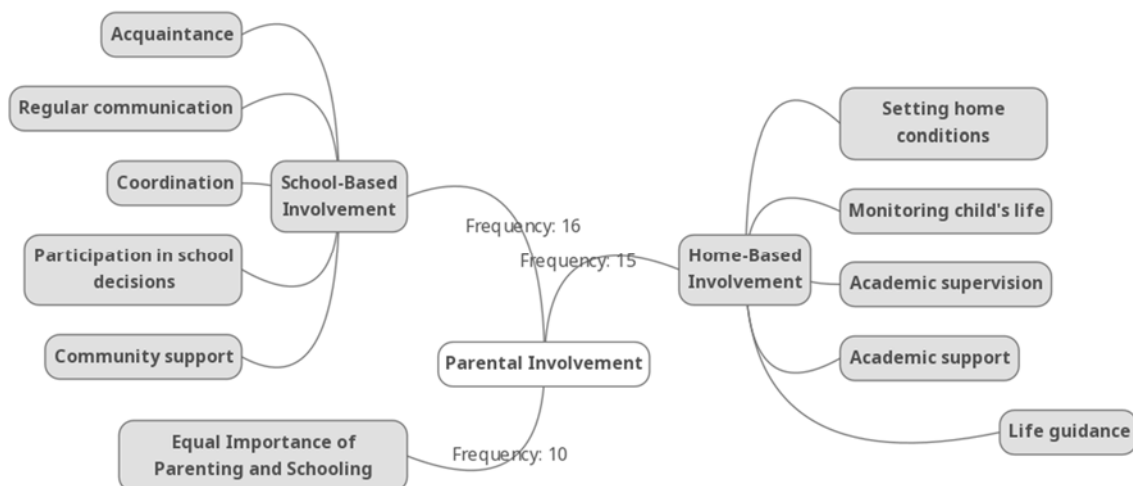
In order to ensure credibility and trustworthiness in this study, the researchers followed some of the guidelines suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). In accordance with these guidelines, the study group and the procedures in the research were explained in detail so that the whole procedure could be understood in depth and compared with other groups and studies. The aims of the study were expressed clearly and the research stages were consistent with the questions. Data were collected in detail and as necessitated by the research questions. The researcher explained the method and stages clearly. We carefully observed the alternative ideas/themes in the interviews and reported them. The raw data of the study were kept for further examinations.

## RESULTS

In consequence of descriptive analysis of the interviews, 133 codes under 19 themes were identified. In accordance with the aims of the study the findings were presented below under two main titles as “The Meanings of Parental Involvement” and “The Factors Influencing Parental Involvement in High School”.

### The meanings of parental involvement

We classified the participant responses to the interview questions about what parental involvement in education meant to them under three main themes with 10 sub-themes which had 41 codes. Explaining what meanings parental involvement had, some of the participants commented on what parental involvement did not mean. That is, they explained some misperceptions about parental involvement and we classified them as ineffective ways of parenting. Themes about the meanings of parental involvement can be seen in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The meanings of parental involvement.

As seen in Figure 1, we classified the meanings of parental involvement under three themes as “Home Based Involvement”, “School Based Involvement” and “Equal Importance”. Home based parental involvement had 5 sub-themes, one of which was “setting home conditions”. For the current study, setting home conditions meant providing children with an educationally supportive environment at home. According to Assistant Principal (AP) Ümit, “parental involvement includes preparing breakfast or watching children get on the school bus”. Similarly, Teacher (T) Seyhan argued that parental involvement covered “setting proper lighting in child’s room”, “planning weekends according to child’s educational life”. Participants who pointed at the

distractors as “social media”, “surfing on the internet” or “substance abuse” (Parent (P) Cihan) argued that parental involvement included monitoring child’s life outside school. Because in T. Bilge’s opinion, “children grow up in uncontrolled environments, that is internet and the social media” and “it is parents’ responsibility to monitor these uncontrolled environments”. Participants expressed that home based involvement covered supervising child’s academic progress and providing academic support when needed. A.P. Deniz claimed that “Parents should supervise/monitor the teachings and learning at school and their children’s performance in the school program”, because as T. Seyhan asserted “Learning at school are never enough for exams, in order

to be successful in the national exams in Turkish Educational System, children should complete their learning at home and add more on them". A.P. Deniz claimed that parents who were not competent to provide academic supervision or support could provide life guidance by transferring their life experiences to their children and he claimed that this was a type of parental involvement, too.

School based involvement had five sub-themes one of which was "mutual acquaintance between parents and school". Mutual acquaintance differed from "regular communication" sub-theme in that mutual acquaintance referred to teachers' and families' getting to know each other. That is, teachers got to know the family conditions such as single parents or working mum etc. and families got to know the teachers, the school staff and the educational system. P. Tuna explained this type of parental involvement as such.

Parental involvement is about families getting to know the school and schools getting know the families so that everything gets easy for each partner: For example, children can have personal problems, they can be in a difficult period in their lives or might have physical illnesses and when schools know/meet the family they can reach out to them and solve the problems in cooperation, or parents can reach the teachers to get some helpful advice. In order to create such an atmosphere, parents should introduce themselves and schools should know the family circumstances.

Defining parental involvement as a regular communication, P. Evren explained that "there are three main partners in education, child, teacher and parent. Parental involvement builds the communication among these there". A.P. Güner thought parents were one of the medium for student-teacher communication and he defined this position as such:

In my opinion, school compares to our family structure; there is a big, patriarchal family structure in our culture with grandparents, parents and children. School has the grandparents' role, and students are like our grandchildren. When we want to convey a message to them, we use parents as medium of the message.

The comments about the coordination as a type of parental involvement came along with the definitions of regular communication as parental involvement, because coordination between school and family could only attained by the communication between family and school. T. Seyhan explained the incoordination as a possible result of lack of communication between parents and schools;

In fact, the main responsibility and burden are on parents not teachers. As a teacher, I fulfill my professional responsibilities. However, when parents do not give me information about their children, keep me informed about the progress at home I cannot provide professional support. If there were not parental involvement in education, the system would collapse,

teachers could not do their work properly.

Another sub-theme in school based involvement was participation in school decisions. P. Erhan remarked that "in order to attain goals and improve education at school, parents' opinions should be taken into consideration". A.P. Deniz pointed to the fact that as a legal liability of schools, parents were included in various councils and commissions at school. In addition to being a liability, parents' participation in school decisions made these decisions easier to execute, and he explained "For example if we give decisions about school discipline with parents' support, it becomes a lot easier to apply the decision". Community support sub-theme as a parental involvement style covered the codes about wealthy parents giving financial support to the parents in need. P. Evren said that parental involvement could be used as a medium of social support network among parents. He thought that school administrators could identify the parents in need and create the network of support. Participants – P. Cihan and A.P. Ümit- argued that parents could participate in school based campaigns and help the people in need in the community.

Equal importance theme covered the expressions which remarked that parental involvement was as important as school education. Although we could not classify this theme under any parental involvement type, the participants pointed to the importance so many times that we thought that it was necessary to create a different theme in order to reflect participants' point of view. When participants expressed that parental involvement was as important as school (or teachers) and students, participants used metaphors as "trivet" (T. Derya, T. Bilge) or "tripod" (T. Ömür). When he explained his thoughts that parental involvement was as important as school or teacher quality, T. Ömür argued that "At school the eventual goal is success- student success. But we cannot attain this goal with only one party's efforts; that is, teachers', students' and parents' effort should act together to reach the goals in education". T. Seyhan claimed that sometimes family (structure, attitudes etc.) was more important than student aptitudes, she stated that parent profiles sometimes outweigh student profiles. Especially for the 12 graders in high school, when students study for the university entrance exams, it is very important to involve parents in the process because the exam preparation process requires not only academic support but also psychological support at home.

### ***Ineffective types of parental involvement***

When participants explained their ideas about parental involvement, they pointed out that there were misperceptions about parental involvement. These ideas formed ineffective types of parental involvement theme which had five codes. A.P. Özgür argued that parental involvement was misunderstood as "parents'

interferences in education”, because parents asked for the things beyond schools or teachers resources to meet and sometimes against education regulations. He argued that “Parents ask for this and that, but they don’t know whether their demands are within legislation or school resources. We try to tell them why it is impossible to meet their demands, but sometimes it is just difficult to explain everything”. P. Tuna, who argued that parents could over-involve easily by monitoring teachers or intervening in school system all the time, explained her ideas as:

It is not parents’ job to monitor school or teachers all the time or criticize everything school does. Parents should know that they are not school administrators. We, as parents, are not experts of education or school system. We do not know what it means to educate and keep safe all the children together in one space. I think that parents’ over involvement and interventions almost in everything have negative effects on education and their children.

In addition, P. Tuna expressed that “parents’ babysitting their children at school” or “overprotection of children” were ineffective forms of parental involvement in these sentences:

School is children’s space, it belongs to them because it is the place where they start to be an individual and by being an individual they construct their personality. It is a very important experience for children to go to school because they start being responsible for themselves, they have a social environment different from their family. But some parents cannot see the importance of this experience, for example they come to school to feed their kids, they even have fights with the other kids who have trouble with their kids, they can debate with other families

or teachers over their child ...etc. these kind of parental behaviors have serious negative effects on the psychological development of their own children.

Similarly, M.P. Ümit asserted that some parents defended-advocated for their children no matter what children did and it had negative effects on education.

Besides these wrong perceptions about parental involvement, P. Evren criticized the way school-family associations worked in Turkey. He thought that school-parent associations limited their work to physical improvements of the school; they did not do anything to improve education quality.

To sum up, participants voiced that parents’ unreasonable demands, their over-interventions in schools’ and teachers’ work, babysitting their children at school and overprotecting them, school-parent councils’ focusing their work on physical needs of the school were remarked as ineffective types of parental involvement.

**The factors that influence parental involvement in high school**

In this study according to the participant responses, we grouped the factors influencing parental involvement in high school in five categories as “Child Factors”, “Parent-Family Factors”, “Teacher Factors”, “School Factors” and “Social Factors”. All these factors are shown in Figure 2.

As it can be seen in Figure 2 there were 18 themes and 85 codes under the five categories of factors influencing parental involvement in high school. We analyzed and discussed all these categories with themes and sub-themes separately and presented below.

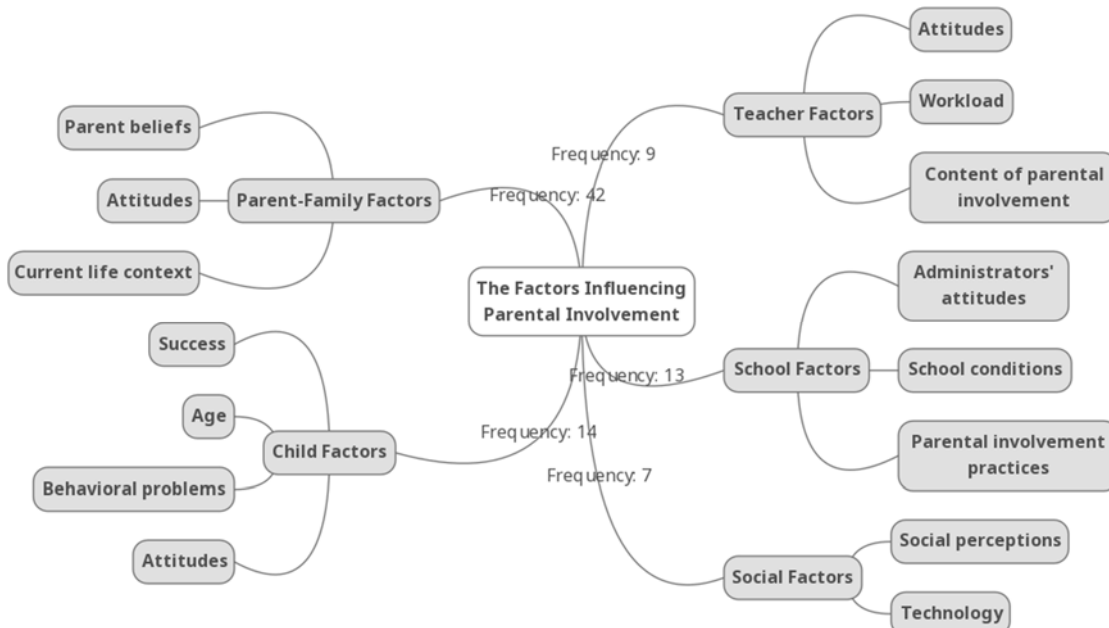


Figure 2. The factors influencing parental involvement.

### Parent-family factors

In the parent-family factors category, there were 42

codes classified under three themes. As seen in Figure 3 these three main themes were “Parents’ Beliefs”, “Parents’ Attitudes” and “Current Life Context”.

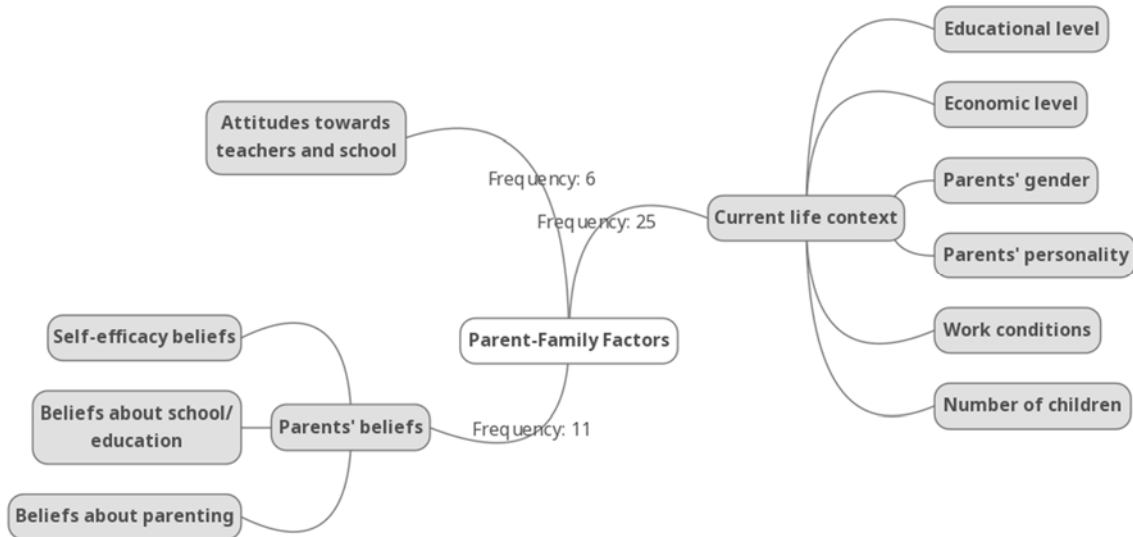


Figure 3. Parent-family factors influencing parental involvement.

It is seen in Figure 3 that the theme of parents’ beliefs had three sub themes as “Self-efficacy beliefs”, “Beliefs about education/school” and “Beliefs about parenting”. Pointing the effect of parents’ self-efficacy beliefs on parental involvement, T. Ömür claimed that “Some parents think that they are incapable in participating in education because when they come to school they do not feel confident. Teachers sometimes speak so professionally that some parents cannot follow them and they can even forget the questions they want to ask”. Similarly, T. Seyhan agreed that some parents did not want to participate by saying that “We do not understand education or anything related to it, you are the experts”.

A.P. Deniz claimed that some parents did not see parental involvement as a parenting responsibility and they put the burden on school and A.P. Ümit thought that some parents assumed that parenting was only about meeting children’s physical needs and they could solve every problem by putting money in their children pockets.

P. Ferhan said that as a parent she believed there were some situations that parents should have stayed behind and let their children solve the problems on their own. That is, P. Ferhan’s beliefs about what parents should have done and what they should not influenced her decision to be involved or not. She explained her point in these sentences:

I want my children solve their own their problems if the problems are small. If there is no need for parents’ interference, I prefer them to solve their school issues

themselves. (...) So that, they can learn how to handle situations in life. If we as parents solve everything at school, we interrupt or harm children’s social and psychological development.

Participants said that parents’ beliefs about education/school could be effective on involvement. Parents’ beliefs particularly about the value of education or the roles or responsibilities of schools and education system could be effective on participation. According to A.P. Ümit “parents who think their most important investment in life is their children’s education are more open to cooperation”. T. Seyhan explained how beliefs about the roles or responsibilities of school could be effective on involvement decisions in these sentences: “Some parents, especially those of private schools, think that when they send their children to school they get rid of all the responsibilities about their school life (...) they think that teachers and schools are responsible for solving any kinds of problems.”

The theme of current life context had the highest frequency and the subthemes as “Parents’ Education”, “Parents’ Economic Status”, “Parents’ Work Conditions”, “Number of Children”, “Parents’ Gender” and “Parents’ Personality Traits”. Participants expressed that “the more educated parents become, the more they get involved (P. Evren); “the parents with better income involve more” (A.P. Güner); “parents with heavy workload participate less” (T. Seyhan) and “when both parents work, it becomes difficult for them to participate” (A.P. Güner); “the number of children decreased in modern Turkey and



this makes participation easier” (P. Tuna); “parents who are generally good at human relations are better in involvement and mothers involve dramatically more than fathers” (T. Ömür).

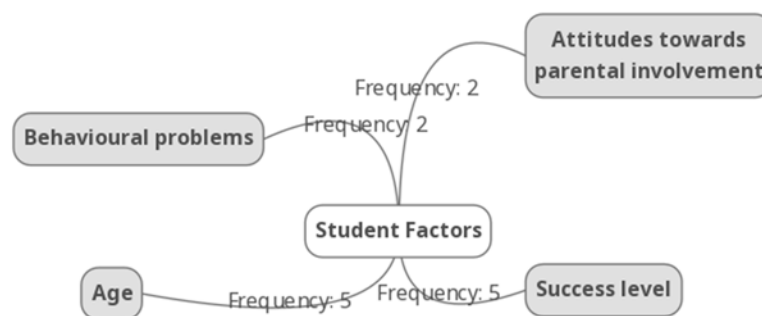
Parents’ attitudes theme included “parents’ attitudes towards teachers and school” only and didn’t have other subthemes. P. Tuna, who argued that parents’ attitudes towards teachers and school could affect parent involvement, explained her point in these sentences:

Some parents have some attitudes that belittle teachers in front of students. As a result of these belittling

attitudes, teachers who work hard and put extra effort for parental involvement can give up trying to do their best. They don’t want to do extra work which is not appreciated.

### **Student factors**

14 codes categorized under student factors were classified under four themes as “age”, “success level”, “behavioral problems” and “attitudes towards parental involvement”. Themes and code frequencies under student factors category can be seen in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Student factors influencing parental involvement.

As seen in Figure 4, the most frequently referred factor in this category was students’ age. Participants agreed mostly upon that as students got older and moved to a higher grade, parental involvement got lower. T. Derya argued that “in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (the first year of high school in Turkey) parents are more willing to participate, but as the grade gets higher, the participation gets less and less”. P. Tuna explained this with the dynamics of adolescence “Our children really do not like it (parental involvement) in adolescence; they do not want to see their mothers or fathers at school”.

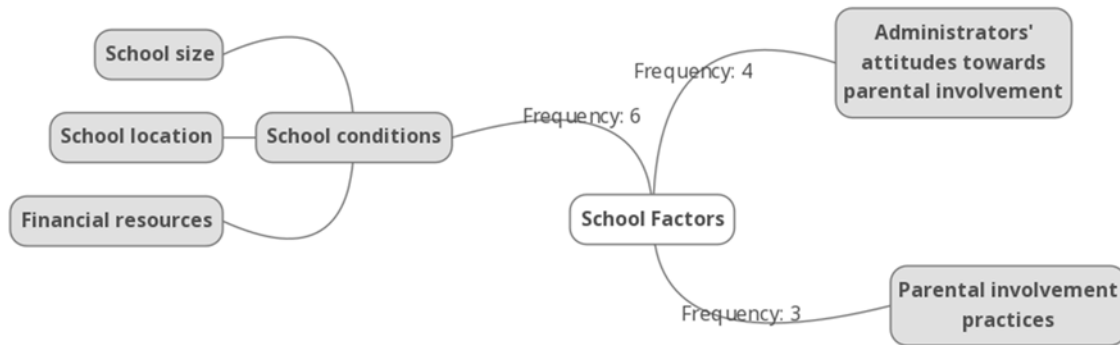
Another student factor pointed was students’ academic success. There were not consistent opinions about how student high level of success influences parental involvement. That is, while A.P. Deniz argued successful students’ parents involve more than the low achievers saying that “as our students in this school are successful, their parents are eager to involve”, T. Seyhan claimed that successful students’ parents didn’t show involvement much, she said that “There are such kids -you know- who do their best for everything. The parents these students thrust their kids so much that they don’t need to involve”. Agreeing with A.P. Deniz, T. Derya said that “the more successful students are, the higher parents’ expectations become and this makes them involve more in their educational processes”. Besides success factor, A.P. Deniz claimed that when students had a lot of discipline or behavioral problems at school; parents were less

willing to participate. Lastly, A.P. Güner claimed that student attitudes could play a role and explained that when students directly demanded their parents’ involvement, parents did not refuse to involve, they became more eager.

### **School factors**

School factors that might influence parental involvement included 13 codes under three themes as “School Administrators’ Attitudes towards Parental Involvement”, “Parental Involvement Practices of School” and “School Conditions”. The frequencies and themes of school factors can be seen in Figure 5.

As it can be seen in Figure 5, school factors had three themes and school conditions theme had three subthemes as “school size”, “school location” and “school’s financial resources”. T. Ömür argued that school size effected school-family meetings, in crowded schools meetings could not run efficiently, and this influenced parents’ involvement decisions. Besides inefficient school-family meetings, A.P. Güner argued that school size influenced counselling services in a negative way, it increased the workload of school counselors; they had to deal with so many student problems that they could never spare enough time for parental activities. School location was mentioned as another factor, when



**Figure 5.** School factors influencing parental involvement.

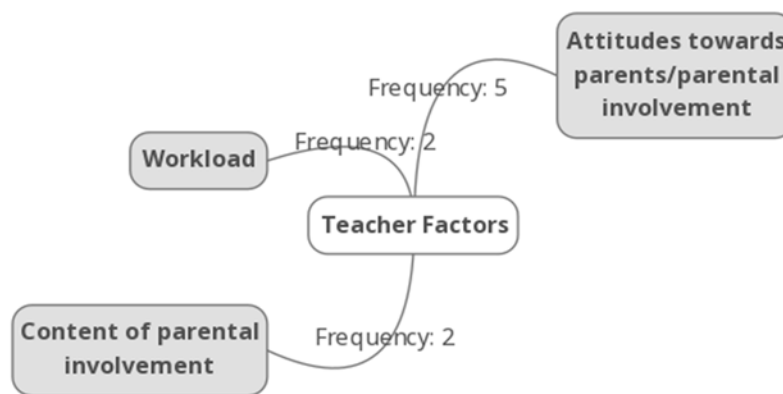
the schools were far from the city center, involvement became difficult (A.P. Ümit). Apart from size and location, lack of enough financial resources could have a negative impact on involvement because when school did not have enough financial resources, they asked the families to contribute in the school budget which deterred low-income parents from involvement; when they visited school, they were asked for donations (T. Bilge).

Arguing that school administrators' attitudes towards parental involvement influenced parental involvement, P. Evren said that "I think, the school (administrators) does not want our involvement, they do not want to see parents at school. Unlike teachers, who want to see parents, school administration does not want involvement". Likewise, T. Seyhan argued that school administrators' relationships with parents influenced parental involvement substantially; school administrators' close and effective communication with parents enhanced parental involvement.

Participants, referring to parental involvement practices applied by schools as an influential factor, argued that widely used involvement practices as parent-teacher meetings (P. Tuna) and bulk message systems (P. Evren) were not efficient and those practices did not attract parents to school. P. Tuna explained her point of view as "I do not think parent-teacher meetings, held once in a term, are effective. In those meetings teachers say standardized sentences. I will not participate the meetings again".

### **Teacher factors**

We categorized teacher factors under three themes as "teacher workload", "teacher attitudes towards parental involvement" and "content of parental involvement". Teacher factors with themes can be seen in Figure 6.



**Figure 6.** Teacher factors influencing parental involvement.

As seen in Figure 6, teacher factors influencing parental involvement were expressed seven times. P. Cihan stated that when teachers showed their interest and gave importance to parental involvement, parents got involved in educational processes more. A.P. Güner explained

how teachers' negative attitudes influenced parental involvement in these sentences:

Principals, assistant principals, teachers or counselors, in short we as educators blame parents for the problems

about their children. (...) We criticize their parenting styles. But as adults, parents do not want to be criticized or reprimanded like children. They take a defensive position; they do not listen to us. They do not want to take any advice. To sum, this kind of teacher attitude move parents away from school.

Apart from negative attitudes, it was argued that teacher workload could be a factor by T. Seyhan. Moreover, the content of parental involvement, that is, the information teachers delivered to the parents about student progress were important in parental involvement. T. Seyhan explained that "When parents come to school, I give them such detailed reports that they could understand the

process their children go through. (...) Parents become satisfied with the meeting and feel themselves behind the wheel and included".

### Social factors

Social factors influencing parental involvement in high school were classified under "social perceptions" and "technology" themes. Codes in social perceptions theme were divided into three subthemes as "perceptions about teachers", "perceptions about the value of education" and "perceptions about parental involvement". The distribution of seven codes under this theme can be seen in Figure 7.

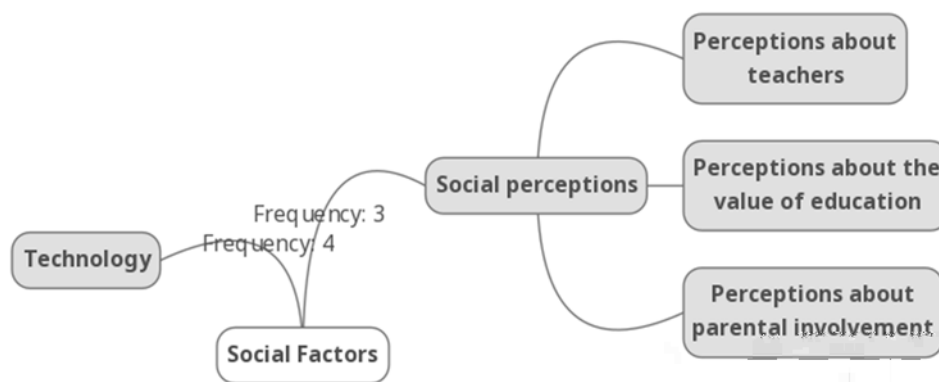


Figure 7. Social factors influencing parental involvement.

As can be seen in Figure 7, technology was referred as a factor that could influence parental involvement. Participants argued that technology had both negative and positive effects on parental involvement. For instance, P. Evren stated that bulk message systems used at school had negative effect on parent-school relationship and explained his point "They have a message system, a WhatsApp group for parents. They send messages on the system. But I do not know them personally, they do not know me, either. We – school and parents- do not actually know each other. It is a virtual relationship, not real". On the contrary, T. Derya argued that technology had a positive effect on parental involvement because it decreased teacher workload and made easier to reach out the parents.

It was stated that negative perceptions about parental involvement, teachers and education reduced the degree of involvement. P. Tuna explained that,

Socially it is thought that parents are called for a meeting only when there is a problem about their children. This negative perception can prevent involvement. Our educational system is problem based. We are never called to the school for the good deeds of our children. (...) some perceptions about teachers and negative

attitudes as a result of these perceptions can harm their motivation. In Turkey there are some negative perceptions about teaching profession, some parents look down on the profession and report every minor mistakes teachers do. As a result of this social perception, teachers do not want to sacrifice their time.

To sum she explained that parental involvement, especially if it was face-to-face private meeting at school, was interpreted as "for the students with behavior problems only", and parents' attitudes towards teachers could be deterrent. T. Bilge added that the high rate of college-graduate-unemployment rate in Turkey damaged the value of education and as a result of this; parents did not want to invest their time in involvement. They thought their children would not find a job, even if they got quality education.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that parental involvement can take various forms and meanings which can be classified in two categories as home-based and school based parental involvement. When we compare home-based and school-based parental involvement types in

the current study to Epstein's (1995) famous parental involvement typology, we think that four types of parental involvement in her typology match with the subthemes in the research. In particular, Type 1-parenting matches with "setting home conditions", "monitoring child's life outside school"; Type 2-communication matches with "acquaintance between parents and school", "regular communication" and "coordination"; Type 4-learning at home matches with "academic monitoring" and "academic support"; Type 5-decision making matches with "participation in school decisions". In the interviews, Type 3-volunteering and Type 6- collaborating with the community didn't come up in participants' interpretations of parental involvement. According to Epstein (1995) parental involvement as volunteering is parents' volunteer work at school and participation in events as audience. In the present study participants think that taking part in volunteering activities in social projects is a kind of involvement, however these projects are not for school. That is, these volunteering events are organized at and by school but not for the school but the others in need in the country or community, school is just a medium for the event. That is why, for this study these activities are classified under community support theme. Both in Epstein's typology and the findings in this study volunteering is interpreted as a type of parental involvement, yet the target of volunteer work in Epstein's typology and in this study are quite different. Although the social support subtheme of this study resembles to Epstein's community collaboration type of involvement, she defines this type of involvement as improving education via collaborating the community resources. In other words, in Epstein's typology community collaboration aims to improve the education at school while in the present study community support means helping the people in need at school and outside the school. The reason why these two types –volunteering and community collaboration- are not interpreted as parental involvement types might have various reasons. One of these reasons is that in Turkey, it is not common for parents to do voluntary work for school. At the primary school level there are some parents who can help teacher with the title of "class mum" (Class mum is a parent mother helping teacher with some extracurricular activities and organizing events etc.). However, in the middle or high school levels, volunteering work for class or school is not a common phenomenon. Another reason is in Turkey education system is centralized, that is almost all decisions about curriculum, textbooks, teacher appointments are taken by the Ministry of Education, schools have almost no authority on subject and textbooks choice or teacher recruitments. As almost everything is decided by the ministry, the decisions are so firm, neither school administration nor parent associations have much power to influence them. Epstein's community collaboration type of involvement might not be observed in the countries with centralized

education administrations.

The results of this study call attention to ineffective parental involvement practices such as parents' inappropriate interferences in education, overprotection of children at school and the limited influence of school-family associations. The ineffective ways of parental involvement like overprotection are conceptualized as helicopter parenting in the literature. And it might have destructive influences on children's development (LeMoyné and Buchanan, 2011). Parallel with the results of the current study, Barge and Loges (2003) found that building negative relations with school, particularly criticizing school and school staff were inefficient ways of involvement and harmed the relationships among parents, students and schools.

In this study the factors influencing parental involvement are parent-family factors, student factors, school factors, teacher factors and social factors. Parent-family factors, just as in Alaçam and Olgan's (2019), Hornby and Blackwell's (2018) studies, have the highest frequency among the others. However, as all these studies were conducted with teachers and/or administrators, the higher frequency of parent-family factors might be a partially biased result. In the current study, parent factors are parent beliefs, parent attitudes and current life context. Parents' self-efficacy beliefs and parenting beliefs as barriers to parental involvement are parallel with Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) model in which parents' beliefs about their influence on education and their roles in children's education are potential barriers to involvement. In their study, Anderson and Minke (2007) show that while parents' role interpretations and self-efficacy beliefs don't have a direct influence on participation decisions, when they are accompanied by limited resources and perceived invitations; they influence not only school based but also home based involvement. Parents' beliefs about school and education are not discussed as a barrier in theoretical models (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011) or observed in studies (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; William and Sanchez, 2011). However, similar to the findings of the current study, Erdener (2016) observed that parents' beliefs or perspectives about roles of school and value of education in Turkey were influential on their involvement decisions.

In this study, current life context factors include parents' educational level, economic level, work conditions, gender, personality traits and number of children in the family. In various studies these factors were identified as barriers to parental involvement. For example, Hornby and Blackwell (2018) found that parents with low educational levels were unwilling to involve in their children's educational processes. Moreover, they discovered that parents with negative school experiences of their own, were scared of the experiences they would have in their children's school. Murray et al. (2015) argue that parents with high school or college degree are more knowledgeable about the educational system, which

results in more positive attitudes towards involvement. Family economic status is pointed as a barrier in a number of studies on parental involvement (Erdener, 2014; Erdener and Knoeppel, 2017; Lee and Bowen, 2006; Park and Holloway, 2013), yet in others (Murray et al., 2015) it is not verified as a consistent factor in all types of involvement. In accordance with the current study, parents' work conditions are pointed as a factor in parental involvement in the literature (Erdener, 2016; Ho and Kwong, 2013).

In the extant literature, student gender is argued to be an important variable effecting parental involvement, but the current study shows that not the student gender but the parent gender might play a role. According to Reay (1998), parental involvement is a mother based process (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011), confirming this argument, Deslandes and Cloutier (2000) observed that mothers exhibited higher levels of involvement in homework than fathers. Reay (1998) argues that this gendered nature of parental involvement must be examined together with the language used, power inequalities and controversies (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Number of children in the family is pointed as a significant barrier since it can limit the time reserved for each child and school based involvement (Ramirez, 2001). Eccles and Harold (1993) observed that families with fewer children helped with homework more than those with more children. Contrary to these findings Anderson and Minke (2007) found that resources of family, which included number of children, influenced neither home-based nor school based involvement decisions.

The results of the current study show that students' age, success level, behavioral problems and attitudes towards parental involvement might influence parental involvement. Parental involvement studies (Deslandes, 2003; Green et al., 2007) show that involvement, particularly the school based, decreases as children moved from primary school to middle and high school. One of the reasons why parental involvement decreases by middle and high school is that by middle and high school curriculums get complicated and parents do not feel comfortable with this complexity (Hill and Tyson, 2009). Another child factor pointed in the current study is students' success level which was found to be a factor in parental involvement in different studies (Eccles and Harold, 1993; Erdener, 2016). However, different from the extant literature, in which the higher success rate was observed to bring about higher parental involvement levels, in the current study it was remarked by the participants that in some cases high success levels resulted in lower parental involvement levels. Parents of successful students might not need to involve the educational processes, as these students may be highly autonomous. Parallel to the current study, in the previous studies it was observed that student attitudes towards parental involvement played a key role. For example, Green et al. (2007) found that students' demand for

parental involvement was a direct predictor of school-based involvement. Another finding in the current study is that parents of children with behavior/discipline problems exhibit lower levels of parental involvement. In the previous studies (Amato and Rivera, 1999; Domina, 2005) a direct link was observed between parent involvement and lower levels of behavior problems, however there are no studies showing the relationship vice versa. That is although there are clear results about the effect of parental involvement on the decrease of behavior problems; there are no showing the effect of children behavior problems on the level of parent involvement.

School factors that might be influential on parental involvement are schools' parental involvement practices, school administrators' attitudes towards parental involvement and school conditions. School conditions are school size, school location and school financial resources. School parental involvement practices are very important in parental involvement because as Okeke (2014) points out most parents do not know how to involve in their children's education and when they visit school, parents have to handle with negative emotions as fear and worthlessness. School administrators' attitudes towards parental involvement, that is communicating the message to parents that school administrators give importance to parental involvement is another school factor in the current study. Eccles and Harold (1993) remarks that particularly after primary level, schools that welcome parents can involve them more efficiently. In his revision of studies, Seginer (2006) found that school factors as school size and school culture influenced the amount and quality of parent-teacher interaction. In parental involvement literature, it is generally argued that an inviting environment for parental involvement is school administrators' responsibility (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In Turkey one of the main differences between preschool, primary school and middle school, high school is that in preschool and primary school students have one main teacher teaching different subjects while in middle and high school there are different teachers for each subject. So, when the students move to middle and high school, they have many teachers. In preschool and primary school parental involvement is related to teachers' attitudes more than school administrators' attitudes. However, in middle and high school, the rise in the number of teachers makes parental involvement process more complicated. Building a consensus on the importance of parental involvement and consistent practices among teachers, creating a collaborative atmosphere for parental involvement are school principals' responsibilities (Blazer, 2005). Although it is not discussed as a potential barrier in the studies conducted in developed countries, schools' financial resources is a factor in the current study. School financial resources are a big concern in developing countries because the states can allocate a comparatively limited

budget for education and for schools. In Turkey, most of the public primary and middle schools and many high schools have very limited financial support from the state. So, schools have to create their own local resources (Altunay, 2017). This, in turn put a pressure on families, who are asked to make donations to school. This kind of mandatory donation practice acts as a barrier to involvement for poor families. In his study in Turkey, Erdener (2016) reached the same finding that expecting financial support was a barrier for the parents who were already in need themselves. School location is another barrier. In Turkey after middle school students are placed in high schools according to the score they get in a national exam, this means that a big number of students do not study in a high school in their neighborhood. Especially for the families who do not have a car and when the school is far, involvement may get a difficult and time consuming issue.

Teacher factors in the current study are the content of parent-teacher meetings, teacher workload and attitudes. In Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) model, it is argued that teacher invitation is a key factor for parental involvement and in the empirical test of the model it was verified. Similarly, Anderson and Minke (2007) observed that among the variables they tested the strongest relationship is between teacher invitations and both home based and school based involvement. Although not debated widely in the extant literature, in the current study teachers' heavy workload is specified as a barrier to parental involvement. In various studies (Higton et al., 2017), it is remarked that teacher workload is increasing day by day and it is a serious problem for teachers. And as Anastasiou and Papagianni (2020) points parental involvement practices increase teachers' workload. Another factor which is not identified in the previous studies is the content of interaction during parent meetings. In accordance with teacher workload, providing a satisfying content about student progress requires preparation. When teacher is heavily loaded with teaching various classes and having a number of students, it might get very difficult to get ready for parent meetings and this can lower the quality of interaction between the two.

Social factors as the last category include technology, social perceptions about teachers, education and parental involvement. Although it is very difficult to test the effect of social factors on parental involvement, Fan et al. (2018) argues that social factors influence parent, child and teacher factors, the relationship between these parties. All the factors that influence parental involvement emerge in a wider social context. For example, family economic status, educational level, psychological sources and family structures are all influenced by political and financial conditions.

It is a striking fact that although there is a big refugee population, most of whom are Syrian, in Turkey, we cannot detect any comments about ethnicity and language differences, which can act as barriers. In

various studies (Smit et al., 2007; Turney and Kao, 2009) it was observed that ethnic minority parents had lower level of parental involvement. The reason why ethnicity is not a finding in the current study and in others conducted in Turkey (Erdener, 2016) might be that although there are 680,000 Syrian refugee students in Turkey in 2019 (www.unicefturk.org), the population of Syrian students in high school is very low because they general have to work and they have the option of getting a high school degree in open high school. So, ethnicity is not perceived as a barrier in high school, at least for now.

### Limitations and future research

This study discussing the meanings of parental involvement from the perspectives of different parties and reflecting the possible barriers to parental involvement in high school is one of few studies on parental involvement focusing on high school level in Turkey. It is believed that high school level is neglected in parental involvement studies and this study provides some insight in this neglected subject. Yet it has some methodological limitations such as using one data collection method. Since it is one of the preliminary studies in Turkish context, more researches are needed to build a comprehensive understanding. So we recommend researchers to conduct qualitative studies in which parents, teachers, administrators and student behaviors can be observed in parent meetings so that potential communication barriers can be analyzed in depth. Besides observations, school documents as school council meeting reports, council decisions reports can be used to understand the perspective towards parental involvement.

The results of the current study shows that in high school level in Turkey, although parental involvement has various meanings, parents might tend to show typical participation styles. School administrators and teachers should design different participation opportunities to include all families. In addition, it is quite clear that in order to increase involvement, financial burden on the parents' shoulders, created by mandatory donations, ought to be removed. In general, to decrease barriers schools or other educational bodies can start parent training programs and teacher and administrators can attend in service training about parental involvement.

### Declaration of interest

The authors of this manuscript acknowledge that there is no financial interest or benefit that has arisen from the direct applications of this research.

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