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## **THE FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE OR LIMIT PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLING**

### **ABSTRACT**

Parent involvement is a significant factor in schooling process. Epstein et al. (2009) stated that home, and school partnership directly and indirectly affect child growth and development. There are many factors which support or restrict parent involvement in schooling. This study explored positive and negative factors about parent involvement via a qualitative research method in three regions of rural area, the city of Konya. A total number of 578 parents responded open-ended questions in this study. Low income level was the highest problem that limited parent involvement for families. Additionally, parent education level, teachers' and principals' attitudes, education policies, school activities, PTOs, etc. were effective factors about parent involvement in schooling.

**Keywords:** Parent Involvement, Parents' Perceptions about Schooling, Family Income, Parent Education Level, Teacher Behavior

## **AİLENİN EĞİTİME KATILIMINI ENGELLEYEN VE DESTEKLEYEN FAKTÖRLER**

### **ÖZET**

Ailenin eğitime katılımı eğitim-öğretim sürecini etkileyen en önemli faktörlerden biridir. Epstein ve diğerleri (2009) aile ve okul işbirliğinin çocuğun gelişimi ve büyümesi üzerinde direk ve dolaylı olarak etkilere sahip olduğunu belirtmektedir. Ailenin eğitim-öğretim sürecine katılımını engelleyen ve destekleyen birçok faktör bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışma Konya ilinin üç farklı kırsal bölgesinde yaşayan ailelerin eğitime katılımlarını pozitif ve negatif olarak etkileyen etkenleri nitel araştırma deseni kullanarak incelemiştir. Toplamda 578 veli açık uçlu soruları cevaplandırmıştır. Düşük gelir düzeyi ailelerin eğitime katılımını etkileyen en önemli faktör olarak önümüze çıkmaktadır. Bundan başka ailelerin eğitim seviyeleri, öğretmen ve yönetici davranışları, eğitim politikaları, okul aktiviteleri, okul-aile birliği vs ailelerin bu süreçte katılımını engelleyen ve destekleyen diğer faktörlerdir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ailenin Eğitime Katılımı, Ailenin Eğitime Katılıma Bakış Açısı, Aile Gelir Düzeyi, Ailenin Eğitim Seviyesi, Öğretmen Davranışları



## 1. INTRODUCTION (GİRİŞ)

Parents support children's learning and growth from cradle to career, and they influence on children's cognitive, social and emotional development (Rosenberg and Lopez, 2010). In the previous study, the authors explained that parents also influence children's educational engagement, and occupational aspirations, so parents' interactions and activities help shape children's readiness for school. In addition, Rosenberg and Lopez (2010) clarified that parent's help shape language and literacy development before children enter formal schooling. Parent involvement in early education is an important factor for children's academic achievement, and parents need to stay involved throughout the school years (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern and Duchane, 2007; Englund, Luckner, Whaley and Egeland, 2004). Also, families stimulate children's learning and interests by creating literacy-rich home environments, taking children to visit libraries and other places. Families are the first and most important teachers of children, so they ought to work collaboratively with schools (DePlanty et al., 2007; Erdoğan and Demirkasımoğlu, 2010).

Lee and Bowen (2006) described parent involvement as attending parent-teacher conferences, attending programs featuring students, and engaging in volunteer activities at school and includes providing help with homework, discussing the child's schoolwork and experiences at school, and structuring home activities at home. All in all, Lee and Bowen (2006) clarified that socio-economic status is associated with parents' expectations about children's academic performance as well as their achievements.

Furthermore, Henderson and Mapp (2002) synthesized many studies about home and school collaboration. The authors found that students whose parents were involved in education regardless their income or background earned higher grades and test scores, and was enrolled in higher level programs. In addition, these students are encouraged to complete their classes, to attend school regularly, and to have good social skills and behavior (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). The authors said that these students also adapted well to school, graduate on time, and go on to postsecondary education. The authors thought schools might close the achievement gap by improving parent and school communication. Henderson and Mapp (2002:7) further explained how high performing schools engaged families and communities. Example of engagement in these schools included: a) focus on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members; b) recognize, respect, and address families' needs, as well as class and cultural differences; c) embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared.

Moreover, many studies pay attention to the role of the school in improving home, school and community partnerships and collaboration. For instance, Machen, Wilson and Notarn (2005) explained that the more proactive communication of schools with parents influences parent involvement and provides parents the opportunity to volunteer for school activities. Also, school leaders need to use policies to improve communication with families, and encourage teachers and families for an optimal level of collaboration (Machen et al., 2005).



### **1.1. The Purpose of Education (Eğitimin Amacı)**

The purpose of education is to improve democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility (Cranston, Mulford, Keating, and Reid, 2010). Democratic equality is defined as a society preparing young people to be active and competent citizens by encouraging individuals to be good citizens who promote equity and social justice (Cranston, Mulford, Keating, and Reid, 2010). In addition, Holtzhausen and Meyer (2006) explained that the purpose of education contributed to the personal development of the learner while preparing for the learner to become an economically active citizen. According to Cranston, Mulford, Keating, and Reid (2010), social efficiency is defined as preparing young people to be productive workers, so that the individual can be financially independent and contribute to the economic development of others. Lastly, social mobility is defined as providing individuals with a desirable social position through competition in the community (Cranston, Mulford, Keating, and Reid, 2010).

### **1.2. History of Education and Education Accountability in Turkey (Türkiyede Eğitimin Geçmişi ve Eğitimde Sorumluluk)**

Turkey was established in 1923 and is considered a developing country. During the first years of the Republic of Turkey, the population was around 12,000,000; the literacy rate was 10 percent, and female literacy rate was just 3 percent. According to Demirtaş (2008), the new country would educate the new generations as more national and secular individuals. The Turkish alphabet was changed from the Arabic alphabet to the Latin alphabet in 1928. The new alphabet simplified the transition to a modern education system that promotes the dissemination of information. The new education system also provided equal education to students regardless of gender.

Aksit (2007) noted that there were around 13 million students at the formal primary and secondary education levels with more than 500,000 teachers. Compulsory education was expanded to 8 years (5-year elementary and 3-year middle school) in 1997. In 2011, the primary (elementary + middle school) education graduation rate was 98.41%, that is 98.59% for males and 98.22% for females. The statistics showed that graduation and literacy rate had increased. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the high school graduation rate was 26% in Turkey in 2011.

Wong and Nicotera (2007) explained that an education system should have high expectations, be challenging, and establish specific demands for student outcomes. Wong and Nicotera (2007) categorized accountability policies as one of the following: (a) bureaucratic, (b) legal, (c) professional, (d) political, (e) moral, and (f) market accountability. The authors explained that bureaucratic accountability included the roles of hierarchy, control, rules and regulations, and legal accountability operated school accountability with legislations. Professional accountability includes the responsibility of educators about teaching and learning with professional standards. Moral accountability stated that educators improve schools based on their sense of duty. Market accountability was about customer choice based on school performance (Wong and Nicotera, 2007). One example cited by Wong and Nicotera (2007) was low performing schools. These schools were identified and contracted with universities, non-profit, and for-profit organizations to increase student performance and community based organizations. Parents used the



information from this program to express their preferences for school selection (Wong and Nicotera, 2007).

Teachers are responsible to teach all students not just a few, to understand ideas deeply, and to teach in ways that help different kinds of learners to find pathways and improve knowledge. Teachers might motivate students to be more engaged in learning, help students to develop positive attitudes about the subjects, and to give students feedback about what they need to focus on to improve their understanding of learning (Wong and Nicotera, 2007). In addition, the authors explained that teachers might encourage students to become competent at self-evaluation. Teachers need to communicate with students about their expectations and goals, and absolutely communicate with parents about working collaboratively with the school.

Wong and Nicotera (2007:26) said that "education accountability requires that all attention and support within the education system be directed at improving instructional practices by influencing roles and responsibilities, academic standards, assessments, and accountability mechanism". The first assumption of educational accountability is that educators might know their role and be aware to make necessary changes in instructional practices (Wong and Nicotera, 2007). The authors explained that the second assumption is to increase academic achievement and performance, so the goal was to arrange the curriculum, instruction and student assessment for high standards that increases student learning and performances.

School leaders must understand and implement local, national, and international policies to improve student learning. Turkey has a centralized education system. Ozdemir, Bulbul and Acar (2009) explained that in administrative accountability, supervisors mainly conduct supervision, assessment, examination and investigation in schools. There are 400 Ministry-level Inspectors for 8,280 high schools and 191,041 high school teachers and approximately 3,300 primary school inspectors who are responsible for supervising 37,693 pre-schools and primary education schools and 456,271 teachers (Ozdemir, Bulbul and Acar, 2009). According to Ozdemir, Bulbul and Acar (2009), the investigation report of National Ministry of Education in 2008 showed that around 5% of all high schools and around 2% of all high school teachers were investigated. The authors claimed that investigation that is a part of educational accountability is not sufficient in Turkey.

The Education for All (EFA) movement is a global commitment to provide a quality basic education for all children. This protocol was drafted in Thailand and signed by Turkey in 1990. Turkey has engaged the EFA's six goals that required: (a) improving early childhood education and child care for the most disadvantaged students; (b) ensuring that by 2015 all children, especially girls and children in difficult circumstance have access to compulsory primary education in good quality; (c) ensuring that all youths and adults have access equitable learning and life skills programs; (d) improving adult literacy rate; (e) achieving gender equality, and ensuring girls have equal access to education of good quality; and (f) improving all aspects of quality education and provide all people have access literacy, numeracy and essential life skill (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2012).

Aydagul (2009) claimed that Turkey did not realize EFA's six goals, so compulsory education was increased from five years to eight years.



1,100,000 students are enrolled in grades one through eight, 104,000 new classrooms were built, and more than 70,000 new teachers were assigned; however, Turkey still had not achieved the goal for equal education according to gender, region, and socio-economic status until 2005 (Aydagul, 2009). After 2005, the government began Haydi Kızlar Okula (*Let's go to school, Girls*) campaign, and financially supported 856,000 families for the education of 1, 56 million students (Aydagul, 2009). Aydagul (2009) claimed that the policies are lack of assessment on the impact of equal and quality education.

Haydi Kızlar Okula, the girls' education campaigns which provided for children's attendance in school and closed the gender gap in education, was started in Turkey by collaboratively working with the Ministry of National Education and Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF) (The Ministry of National Education, 2011). The protocol was signed by the Ministry of National Education and UNICEF on June 17, 2003. The Ministry of Education determined that 273,447 children did not go to school. In this case, the Ministry of Education and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF) started a campaign for girls who did not go to school and had high rates of absenteeism. Although, the campaign seemed to include only girls, it was interested in all children who did not go to school and had chronic absenteeism.

The Ministry of National Education established teams to work for the campaign. These teams advertised the campaign in rural areas by collaborating with mayors, religious leaders and principals. They not only identified children who were not going to school, but also they identified students who might drop out school. In addition, they visited door to door, and persuaded families to send their children to school. Also, they followed these students' attendance and communicated with the parents. The committee followed the implementation, and reported development to administrators of the Haydi Kızlar Okula campaign. According to the Minister of National Education (2011), Haydi Kızlar Okula campaign included 222,800 girls in school from 2003 to 2006.

### **1.3. International Policies (Uluslararası Eğitim Politikaları)**

Turkey signed the protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2012). UNICEF explained the mission of convention is the protection of children's rights and to help meet their basic needs while expanding their opportunities to reach their full potential (UNICEF, 2012). Turkey also signed the protocol of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2012). "The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international treaty that identifies the rights of persons with disabilities as well as the obligations on States parties to the Convention to promote, protect and ensure those rights" (United Nations, 2012:4). Also, the convention is to protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights of all people with disabilities.

### **1.4. Culture and Education (Kültür ve Eğitim)**

Turkey has different cultures, education and schooling systems, majority religions, and customs. The city of Konya in Turkey contains farms and is classified as rural. Despite the cultural differences, rural areas face challenges in the provision of education. For example, Ilkcaracan (1998:67) noted "when rural women actively working in agriculture migrate to urban areas, the fact that they are less educated



than men virtually prevents them from finding paid employment in the official labor force". Many reasons such as the high cost of schooling, parent education level, geographical location, lack of interest in school, unavailability of a proper school, household chores, need to care for younger siblings, need to help family in economic activity, customs, religion were asserted to ban children' schooling. Also, Ilkkaracan (1998) described what she termed irrational beliefs, for example, people want a high number of children although they are not interested in children's education, and girl children are less valued than boy children. As a matter of fact, when asked about the total number of children to men, they only count boys. Many women also believe when they are divorced, they cannot afford life's expenses by themselves (Ilkkaracan, 1998). So, they accept the pressure from their husbands.

In addition, according to a report of the United Nations Development Program, "girls and young women still do not have the same educational rights as their male peers in Turkey" (Zengin, 2008). She explained that uneducated young women get married at a young age, and that young motherhood also exacerbates health problems, stunted growth, disability, chronic illness, and the recursive problem of lower educational performance in their children.

The Equality of Educational Opportunity, also known as the Coleman Report of 1966, explored the characteristics of teachers, students, and family with school body structure and school facilities from 4,000 public schools with more than 645,000 pupils enrolled in 1965. The findings of the Coleman Report were considered controversial because it stated that the most important influence on student achievement was families, and to a lesser degree peers. This was misinterpreted by many to mean that schools did not matter in student achievement and that barriers to achievement could not be overcome. The research detailed in this literature review reveals that regardless of different cultures, schools do indeed matter and parent involvement is a key to increasing student achievement and closing achievement gaps.

## **2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE (ÇALIŞMANIN ÖNEMİ)**

In this study, the researcher investigated what factors affect the parent involvement in schooling at elementary grades in rural areas of the city of Konya. Also, this study explored accountability system, national, and international policies that promote parent involvement. The research question is that guided this study was:

- What major factors contributed to the success of your school's family and community involvement efforts?
- What major factors limited to the success of your school's family and community involvement efforts?

This study is droved by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. Bronfenbrenner (1977) stated that the interactions between human and the environment shape the growth and development of a person, and he described Ecological Theory into the five key systems: (a) Microsystems, (b) Mesosystem, (c) Exosystem, (d) Macrosystem, and (e) Chronosystem. According to the systems, home, school, neighborhood, peers, religious affiliations, culture, the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems, and policies are directly or indirectly effective for human.



### **3. METHOD (YÖNTEM)**

This study was a qualitative study. The qualitative research promotes observation, interview, and analysis of the document in the research area with participants (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). In addition, qualitative method provided the researcher to explore the problem from parents' perspectives with their own words.

#### **3.1. Instrument (Enstrüman)**

The data were collected via survey that was adapted from the work of Epstein et al. (2009:329). In this study, the reflection part of Epstein's survey was used. The reflection part included open-ended questions.

#### **3.2. Selection of Participants (Katılımcıların Seçilmesi)**

The sample for this study consisted of elementary school parents who lived in rural Turkey. Although the school sample was not random, they were among rural areas of the city of Konya, Turkey. The cities' profiles help to understand the differences between these cities. First, the city of Akşehir has a population of 94,886 with 64.9% of the population living in the city center and 35.1% of population living in villages around the city. The illiteracy rate is 4.69% in Akşehir (female illiteracy rate is 4% and male illiteracy rate is .69%). 60.5% of the population has less than a high school degree, 19.4% of the population has graduate degree, 8% of the population has some college and bachelor's degree, and .6% of the population has graduate degree in Akşehir.

Second, the city of Cihanbeyli has a population of 59,342; 26.4% of the population live in the city center and 73.6% of population live in villages around the city. The illiteracy rate is 6.3% in Cihanbeyli (female illiteracy rate is 5.6% and male illiteracy rate is .7%). 72.2% of the population has less than high school degree, 12.3% of the population has graduate degree, 3.5% of the population has some college and bachelor's degree, and .16% of the population has graduate degree in Cihanbeyli.

Finally, the city of Çumra has a population of 64,597; 46.4% of the population live in the city center and 53.5% of population live in villages around the city of Çumra. The illiteracy rate is 4.6% in Çumra (female illiteracy rate is 3.9% and male illiteracy rate is .7%). 73.4% of the population has less than high school degree, 14.3% of the population has graduate degree, 4.5% of the population has some college and bachelor's degree, and .22% of the population has graduate degree in Çumra.

A majority of the population in the cities of Çumra and Cihanbeyli work in farming and breeding livestock. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, Akşehir has a more educated population than the other two cities; compared to the other two cities, a smaller percentage of the population in Akşehir works in farming and breeding livestock. In addition, the majority of the population lives in small villages in city of Çumra and the city of Cihanbeyli. The primary job in those areas are farming and breeding livestock. The city of Akşehir's population is almost twice as large as the other two other cities; residents there have diverse jobs in business and industry.



### **3.3. Data Collection (Veri Toplama)**

Study participants were solicited in multiple ways. First, the researcher contacted school principals to see if the principal is willing to send a letter to the school community inviting them to participate in this study. After parents agreed, the hard copies of survey were sent to them. Each survey was placed in an envelope and after parents filled it out, they returned the envelope to the school. Survey was available both electronically and as paper copies. Every attempt was made to obtain a representative sample that includes diversity of age, marital status, socio-economic status, and region.

### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (SONUÇLAR VE TARTIŞMA)**

In this study, the data were collected from elementary school students' parents in three different rural areas of the city of Konya, Turkey. A total of 1100 hard copies of survey were distributed to parents, and 578 surveys were received. The return rate was 52%. 112 participants only explained their reflection with long sentences; nevertheless, many participants respond the question as a few words. Epstein's survey was used in many studies, and the researcher also used the participants' words for validity of the study. In spite of the fact that many parents briefly commented the common factors, other provided specific comments regarding their personal experience.

More than 80% of the responds stressed low family income as an important factor which limited their involvement in schooling process. This study was drove in three different regions of a rural area in the city of Konya, so farming and livestock breeding were a common job for high number of participants. Many families only earned minimum wage salaries to afford all of their expenses. The low income causes some problems and argues among family members. So, these kinds of problems were also negative effects on children, and influenced their schooling process. Students have to take some exams for post-secondary education in Turkish education system. Some families explained that they do not think public schools do not give enough document and materials to pass these exams, thus they send their children to private learning centers. However, low income parents cannot afford the expenses of the private learning centers. They believed that their children cannot pass the exam regardless going to a private learning center. A parent explained the positive and negative factors about parent involvement:

The parent and teacher organization works well. The teachers' willingness and smiling faces during meetings with parents support parent involvement. On the other hand, the following factors limited parent involvement: parents' indifference, low income, teachers' unwillingness, teachers' perceptions of education, the education policies of the Ministry of National Education (MEB), not supported equal education for all students and all schools.

In addition, parents are worried about the often changes which are provided by the National Ministry of Education (MEB). Parents stated that they cannot follow these changes and they claimed that even if the educators have same problem about these changes. Students usually have to use technology for homework, and low income families cannot also afford these expenses. Also, school administrators' and teachers' behaviors are significant factors to affect parent involvement. Low income parents who have less than high school degree might be shy, so



they might not have communicate with teachers. Therefore, families are expected teachers promote parent involvement and provide more information about schooling process to families. For example, one parent commented:

The growth and development of a child begins in the family. Each family member composes the community. Each person must be educated to support parent involvement in schooling and pay attention to their children's education. We are not following innovation as a society. Recently, students were provided how to use internet and computer for their class project. Nevertheless, they are not taught to carry out research, they get used to copy and print the prepared documents in the internet. The textbooks and materials were based on logic instead of real information. However, the students take the exams that asked knowledge base questions. The schools teach students not only how to reach information but also teach them how to think, to be wondering, to carry out a research, and to solve problems. Love, respect, responsibility, and discipline might be taught by educators.

Another parent explained that:

The school and other education organizations should teach student-centered. So, they can raise conscious individuals, and they can promote the importance of education in the families. The negative effects of schools caused parents perceptions to be involved in schooling. In addition, uneducated parents, not paying attention of education, and teachers who think that they are only responsible to educate students at the school are the barriers for parent involvement.

A third parent observed these suggestions:

The education organizations should promote the seminars, conferences, notes, activities, and home visiting for families. The effective teaching materials, models, and technology must be used by the teachers to raise responsible individuals. The changes on students might be realized by families. On the other hand, teachers are not qualified to use technology and new teaching materials, and models. So, professional development must be provided for teachers. I think that teachers' salaries and conditions might be rearranged by the government. The most important thing is to evaluate teachers' and students' performance by using appropriate test materials.

Moreover, parent education level is another key factor for parent involvement in schooling. Some parents said that educated parent have good communication with teachers and school principals. Educated parents also attend many activities in school or out of school as volunteer, and they might take responsibilities for Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). If school has an effective PTO, it promotes families to be involved in decision-making process for school programs and plans. A parent stressed the collaboration among home, school and the community:

The school, the community, the parents and the students work collaboratively to increase parent involvement. They all make decision, plan and program together for well community. The



school should provide information to all community members and parents in the seminars and meetings, so families need to feel that they are a part of the education system. The education systems must be supported regular policies, so a new government might not randomly change the system.

Many participants made their remarks and observations about the factors that support or restrict their involvement in schooling. As a general pattern, the parents agreed that parent involvement has a positive impact on student academic achievement and support the education process. Parents also highlighted what factors were support parent involvements and what factors limited parent involvement in schooling in Turkey. In conclusion, the factor which limited parent involvement were low income, parent education level, school administrators' and teachers' negative attitudes, the changed education system, student absenteeism, transportation problem. In the rural areas of the city of Konya, half of the parents had less than higher education degree, and more than half of the parents earned minimum wage salary. Low income families explained that they do not enough time for school activities, and help children's homework. Also, they stated even if they cannot attend parent-teacher meetings and seminars at the school. Furthermore, low educated parents do not attend the decision-making process for school programs, and also they are not aware of their children's career plans. If they attend the parent-teacher meetings, they might have more information about process of college and university education. Many students from low-income families drop-out school, and at early ages, they begin to work in industry. Moreover, school administrators' and teachers' bad attitudes make parents to not involve schooling. Some parents stated that classroom teacher do not give information about their child, and do not welcome parents at school.

On the other hand, the factors which support parent involvement were good attitudes of school administrators and teachers, well-educated parents and community, an effective PTO, the seminars, conferences and meeting which are provided by school, surveys and portfolios which are supported by school about families, activities, trips, student achievement. Teachers' and administrators' good attitudes promote parents to be involved in schooling. Principals provide alternative meeting times to increase parents' attending rates. Also, teachers might contact parents via alternative ways such as phone calls, e-mails, home-visits, and etc. High income families might offer private learning centers, private schools and tutors to support their children's education. Some participants clarified that well educated parents can attend decision-making process about school programs and activities.

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