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Exploring Types of Parental Involvement at Secondary Public Schools in Baku

Abstract

The primary objective of this study is to explore the perceptions of parental involvement among schoolteachers, parents, and school principals and to define the types of parental involvement that are fostered by teachers and school principals at Azerbaijani secondary public schools. The types of parental involvement were investigated using a qualitative research approach based on Epstein's (2009) theoretical framework of six types of parental involvement. The study was conducted in two public secondary schools of Baku, which were selected through convenience sampling. Consequently, the data were gathered through qualitative research methodologies, employing semi-structured individual interviews with teachers, parents, and school principals. The findings of the study indicate that not all forms of parental involvement as defined by the Epstein framework are evident in the sampled schools. Some forms of parental involvement, such as volunteering, decision-making or collaborating with local communities, are either misunderstood or entirely absent.

Ortaöğretimde Ebeveyn Katılımı Türlerinin Araştırılması Bakü'deki Devlet Okulları

Öz

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, öğretmenler, ebeveynler ve okul müdürleri arasındaki ebeveyn katılımı algılarını araştırmak; ve Azerbaycan'daki orta dereceli devlet okullarında öğretmenler ve okul müdürleri tarafından teşvik edilen ebeveyn katılımı türlerini tanımlamaktır. Ebeveyn katılımı türleri, Epstein'ın (2009) altı tür ebeveyn katılımı teorik çerçevesine dayanan nitel bir araştırma yaklaşımı kullanılarak araştırılmıştır. Çalışma, kolayda örnekleme yoluyla seçilen Bakü'deki iki devlet ortaokulunda yürütülmüştür. Sonuç olarak veriler, öğretmenler, veliler ve okul müdürleri ile yarı yapılandırılmış bireysel görüşmeler kullanılarak nitel araştırma metodolojileri aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları, Epstein çerçevesi tarafından tanımlanan tüm ebeveyn katılımı biçimlerinin örneklenen okullarda belirgin olmadığını göstermektedir. Gönüllülük, karar verme veya yerel topluluklarla işbirliği gibi bazı ebeveyn katılımı biçimleri ya yanlış anlaşılmakta ya da hiç bulunmamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ebeveyn katılımı türleri, Epstein çerçevesi, Evde öğrenme, Ebeveynlik, Ebeveyn katılımı

Introduction

A defining feature of contemporary educational development is the aspiration of educational institutions to be accessible, which encompasses the involvement of society in the operations of educational enterprises. Parents occupy a pivotal role in the process of making schools open, as they are the primary agents of influence in their children's education. In the context of societal democratization, education is afforded the opportunity to evolve in a variable manner, adopting the characteristics of an open system. Many societal issues, including those pertaining to education and upbringing, lack definitive solutions. The solution to socially significant problems in education should be implemented through a joint project and social-organizational activities. These activities should orient members of the educational community to the maximum possible inclusion in the life of the school. In contemporary society, the formation of a teenager's personality is of particular importance, given that the younger generation is the least protected segment of society from the negative influences. The school, as a social institution, is confronted with significant challenges, and the attitude of schoolchildren towards learning is of particular importance. In this context, the conditions for effective collaboration between all participants in the educational process have become a significant concern in everyday life.

The traditional model of interaction between family and school assigned parents the role of passive helpers. This entailed monitoring progress and responding to grades and inappropriate behavior on the part of the child. In numerous countries, the educational establishment remains a closed system that does not permit genuine participation or evaluation of its activities by the family. Nevertheless, the advent of recent decades has witnessed a profound transformation in the field of education, as a consequence of the technological revolution and the emergence of global threats in the domains of health, the environment, social relations, and economic affairs. In the current educational landscape, parents have the opportunity to closely monitor the process and outcomes of their children's education. Family participation in education is considered as a mechanism for improving a child's academic performance at school. A learning-friendly home environment, encouragement and support, high expectations and parental participation in school life have a beneficial effect on children's educational outcomes, regardless of their social, national, cultural and economic differences (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

There is a paucity of empirical studies in the field of parental involvement in the Azerbaijani context. Consequently, this study aims to illuminate the pivotal role of parental involvement. In the light of limited number of empirical studies, the primary objective of this study is to explore the perceptions of parental involvement among schoolteachers, parents, and school principals and to define the types of parental involvement that are fostered by teachers and school principals at Azerbaijani secondary public schools. The types of parental involvement were investigated using a qualitative research approach based on Epstein's (2009) theoretical framework of six types of parental involvement. The study was conducted in two public secondary schools of Baku, which were selected through convenience sampling. Consequently, the data were gathered through qualitative research methodologies, employing semi-structured individual interviews with teachers, parents, and school principals. A total of 34 participants were selected through simple random sampling. The study employed two cycles of coding to analyze the data. In the initial phase of the analysis, open coding was employed, and in the subsequent phase, axial coding was utilized.

1. Literature Review

Parental involvement in children's education has been evidenced to foster a variety of positive outcomes for students, including academic achievement and increased attendance (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2013; Dom, 2006; Epstein, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Harris &

Goodall, 2007; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2007; Patall et al., 2008; Smit et al., 2006; Yan & Lin, 2005).

There are several models and frameworks about parental involvement, and Epstein's (2009) "six types of involvement framework" is one of them. Epstein (2009) has developed a theoretical framework regarding parental involvement in children's education with the components including parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the whole community. Parenting offers families opportunities to learn how to support students at home (Bailey, 2006; Kaya & Lundeen, 2010; La Cour et al., 2013; Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 2005; Marshall & Swan, 2010). A number of studies have demonstrated that communication with students' families, conducted in various ways, can lead to positive outcomes in academic achievement (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Seitsinger et al., 2008; Sirvani, 2007; Thompson et al., 2015). Gonzales and Jackson (2013) found out that when the schools made an attempt to encourage families to volunteer, students performed better in reading (Gonzales & Jackson, 2013). A substantial body of research indicates that the use of interactive homework is associated with enhanced academic performance among students (Epstein, 1996; Van Voorhis, 2003; Gulcan & Duran, 2018), in a cross-national study, showed that the importance of involving parents in the school-level decision-making process reveals certain variations based on either the education systems or cultural differences (Sheldon, 2004) in a quantitative study, investigated whether partnership programs increase student achievement in the schools that were a part of the National Network of Partnership Schools.

The existing literature in the Azerbaijani context on this topic examines the association between parental involvement and students' reading performance or school characteristics (OECD, 2019). However, there is a lack of empirical studies focusing on how parental involvement and its importance on students' academic achievement is perceived, leading to the significance of this study.

2.Data Collection and Analysis Process

The framework of " six types of involvement framework " developed by Epstein (2009) was utilized to analyze the data in order to identify the various forms of parental involvement observed in public schools of the capital city of Azerbaijan, Baku. Six types of parental involvement were specifically incorporated into the design of the interview questions, which aimed to ascertain the ways in which parental involvement was perceived and to document the types of parental involvement that were observed in the sample schools.

The data collection process was initiated in October 2021, coinciding with the commencement of secondary school classes, which were delayed due to the pandemic. Two school principals (School Hope and School Sun) consented to participate in the study. Upon receipt of the requisite authorization, we initiated our visits to the educational institutions. In order to select teachers, the lists of teachers from each respective school (School Hope and School Sun) were obtained by the school principals. Six teachers (Math, English, Azerbaijani and Literature, Chemistry, History, and Physics) were randomly chosen from each list. After the teachers' selection, the lists of parents whose children were in 5-9 grades were provided by the participating teachers. Ten parents from each school were chosen from the lists. This sampling method facilitated the identification of parents who were engaged in their children's academic pursuits. The study involved 20 parents, 12 teachers, and 2 principals. Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with teachers, parents, and school principals for approximately 45-60 minutes to explore participants' thoughts and beliefs about the parental involvement.

Prior consent was obtained from all interviewees before the interviews were conducted, and detailed notes were taken during the interviews. To analyze the data, two cycles of coding were considered: open and axial coding. The interviews were initially carefully read, and the main statements, expressions, and quotes were highlighted. The codes were developed using the techniques of open coding. The application of open coding facilitated the generation of a condensed overview of the principal points and common meanings that recur throughout the data set (Harding, 2013). In the subsequent phase, axial coding techniques were employed to synthesize and organize the data into more coherent categories (Saldana, 2013). Member checking is used as a way of validation, verification, or assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative results (Birt et al., 2016).

3.Findings

Considering the pivotal role of parental involvement in students' achievement, this study aimed to respond to the following research questions: "*How is parental involvement defined in Baku secondary public school?*" and *"What types of parental involvement are fostered in Baku secondary public school?"*

4.The Definition of Parental Involvement

The most prevalent definition of parental involvement, as articulated by the three primary stakeholders in the educational arena—parents, educators, and administrators—is a collaborative

effort between parents and teachers aimed at enhancing students' academic performance (Driessen, 2005; Antipkina, 2017).

5.Types of Parental Involvement

The study also aimed to find out the types of parental involvement that exist in Baku public schools.

Initially, participants were requested to describe the forms of parental involvement that are encouraged in these institutions (*Could you please provide examples of the ways in which parents are involved? Could you please describe the specific types of parental involvement observed in your class?).* The study identified a range of parental involvement practices in these two Baku secondary public schools. The types of parental involvement are introduced according to the Epstein framework, which outlines six distinct categories.

Figure 1. Epstein's Parent Involvement Model

5.1.Parenting

The data indicate that the majority of interviewed teachers employ a variety of strategies to facilitate parental involvement in their children's education and school life. Nearly all teachers reported that they initially strive to establish trust with parents in order to encourage them to become more engaged. Both school principals and teachers concur that teacher-parent meetings are instrumental in furnishing parents with insights into their children's academic performance, conduct, and social development. Nevertheless, some educators and guardians acknowledged that teacher-parent conferences are primarily convened to address students' concerns with their peers or instructors, or when the class's examination outcomes are suboptimal. A small number of

teachers indicated that they arrange home visits or meet with parents outside of the school setting. According to the teachers, these visits and meetings allow them to gain a deeper understanding of their students' family backgrounds, social and economic circumstances, and the challenges they face.

5.2. Communicating

The data from the interviews indicate that the most prevalent forms of communication between teachers and parents are telephone calls and messages. The majority of parents stated that they had established a "parents' group" on social media platforms where they could engage in discussions about school-related matters with their children's homeroom teachers. In the meantime, the majority of teachers indicated that the messages on the groups were a source of distraction and consumed their time. Some educators posited that the use of notes as a means of maintaining communication with the parents of primary school students could be an effective strategy. However, this approach is less effective for secondary school students. It is not uncommon for students to neglect to deliver notes or to intentionally conceal them from their parents, particularly when there is a problematic issue. Both teachers and parents have asserted that virtual meetings with teachers are highly beneficial and helpful.

5.3. Volunteering

The data revealed that the parents and teachers of both schools (School Hope and School Sun) initially exhibited confusion when they were informed of the concept of "volunteering." The majority of teachers and parents indicated that the practice of engaging in volunteer work at the secondary school level is not widely utilized. Nevertheless, parents reported that they engage in volunteer activities at school in a number of ways. These include providing essential teaching materials such as maps, globes, and other educational resources; assisting teachers in the preparation of classroom displays and bulletin boards; and supporting teachers in the organization of school events.

5.4. Learning at Home

The analysis indicates that parents provide their children with various forms of support to facilitate academic achievement. Some educators contend that assisting students outside of the classroom is not an effective strategy, as students cannot be expected to become autonomous learners. Instead, they recommend that parents encourage their children to seek assistance from their teachers when faced with difficulties. Only one of the interviewed teachers planned to

implement interactive homework or tasks that would encourage parental involvement in their students' learning. Most parents perceive assisting their children with homework as the primary form of parental involvement. Both school principals believe that parents should support student learning by helping them to learn at home.

5.5.Decision-Making

The study findings indicate that parents are involved in various aspects of their children's education, including the organization of educational events and holidays. School principals perceive that parents assist their children in decision-making regarding their education at home. However, they are not permitted to participate in the school's decision-making process regarding students' education. This is due to the existence of certain policies, programs, and rules established by the Ministry of Education, which cannot be altered.

5.6.Collaborating with Community

The educational institutions in question do not engage in close collaboration with the local community. In particular, there is little evidence of interest on the part of the schools in community-related collaboration. However, the principal of the school Sun has indicated that the school is considering community collaboration, which could be beneficial for students' development. Teachers indicated that they disseminate information about community resources when they receive it from the school or elsewhere.

6.Discussion

In her 2009 publication, Epstein (2009) defines parenting as "assisting all families in establishing a home environment that supports children as students" (Epstein, 2009, p. 339). The teachers from the sampled school believe that meeting and communicating with parents are the most effective ways for demonstrating their support to parents. The parents also believe that teacher-parent conferences and meetings are the essential means of communication with teachers about their children's school life. Nevertheless, the other leading practices, as indicated by scholars (such as organizing workshops, sessions, or training for parents to support parenting activities at home), were not identified in the sampled schools (Bailey, 2006).

The consensus among researchers is that communicating with students' families through various channels is essential for enhancing students' academic performance through parental involvement (Thompson et al., 2015). The study revealed that the most prevalent communication practices are in-person meetings, teacher-parent conferences, telephone calls, written messages, and virtual meetings within the context of communication. Another noteworthy finding from this

research is that schoolteachers were encouraging parents to become involved in volunteering by fundraising and attending school trips, excursions, or school events, which aligns with the findings of Christianakis's study (Christianakis, 2011). The absence of a legal or policy framework that explicitly delineates the roles and responsibilities of the governing or self-governing bodies in school governance results in parents being excluded from the formulation of crucial decisions pertaining to school reforms and improvements in Baku secondary schools (Profile commissioned by NEPC for the Global Education Monitoring Report 2021- Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia - Inclusion and education: All means all). A significant proportion of participants in the sampled Baku public schools demonstrated a lack of awareness regarding the concept of collaboration with the community and the extent to which the school disseminates information about community resources. The school administration exhibits a limited interest in leveraging community resources to support students, largely due to a lack of recognition of the value of such support in fostering student development.

Conclusion

The study revealed that the prevailing definition of parental involvement is to actively collaborate with educators, engaging in activities such as monitoring children's academic progress, supporting their behavior, and providing guidance at home. However, the research indicates that the significance of parental involvement is not adequately conveyed to parents, and schools do not systematically implement initiatives to enhance parental engagement. The initial type of involvement (parenting) proposes that the school administration provide parents with workshops, parent education, or training sessions that facilitate student learning. The two sampled schools (School Hope and School Sun) do not employ such practices to support parenting practices. Although communication is the most commonly used form of involvement, in the Azerbaijani context, schoolteachers and principals do not inform parents of all school programs, reforms, and policies; parents are not encouraged to participate in the school's decision-making activities either. The Epstein's framework offers to recruit parents to assist with school goals and provide training for parents engaged in volunteer work. However, this practice was not observed in the sampled schools. Furthermore, certain practices of learning at home, as outlined in Epstein's framework, were not identified in the findings of this study. The study indicates that the sampled schools do not provide family training programs or summer learning activities that could assist students in developing their skills, informing parents about the skills required for students, or providing

guidance on how to monitor their children's tasks at home. The study did not observe the identification and integration of community resources and services that could help to strengthen student learning. This study is subject to two main limitations. The first is the size of the sample population, which was limited to two public schools. The second limitation could be considered gender-biased, as only female participants (i.e., parents) were involved in the study. However, it is hoped that the outcomes of this study will inform the stakeholders of various forms of parental involvement that they may consider while developing the partnership with parents. Conversely, the study may encourage the conduct of similar studies to yield further insights into the topic of parental involvement.

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