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Keywords

parental involvement, cultural minorities, school success, school performance, cultural differences, intercultural education, intercultural awareness

Cover Page Footnote

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN A MULTICULTURAL EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

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Abstract

This work focuses on parental involvement, which is considered a crucial element of school performance, especially in the case of students belonging to cultural minorities. It presents findings of modern notable research studies that examined the cultural dimensions of parental involvement in middle childhood. It also focuses on the issue that the mutual acceptance of the dominant and minority culture is a prerequisite for cooperation between family and school, to achieve the improvement of school performance. The work is structured in three sections, in the first, the term "parental involvement" is clarified and mainly cultural differences in parental involvement are recorded. In the second section, it is shown that the acceptance of the cultural difference is a prerequisite for the school's cooperation with families, whose achievement improves school performance. In the third section, the most common barriers to parental involvement of foreigners are discussed. Finally, the conclusion highlights the need to implement relevant effective interventions in schools, such as educating teachers on relevant topics, since their role is crucial.

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Introduction

The term “parental involvement” (Chatzidaki, 2007, p. 133) describes the ways in which mainly the teaching staff finds and creates opportunities for parents to participate in their children’s education, but also more broadly in their support at school (Bonia et al., 2008). It emphasizes personal parental responsibility for their children (Golby, 1993). This term is often associated with the term “parental participation”. The last term refers to the general operating framework of schools and follows the systemic approach. This is a dynamic and multidimensional concept, since parents are not a homogeneous group, and do not participate in the same way in the educational process (Larocque et al., 2011).

The factors that affect the ways in which families participate are varied. They are mainly related to cultural characteristics and to their personal perceptions of education. Significant differences are observed in the involvement of parents with different cultural and linguistic characteristics, depending on their nationality, the culture of their country of origin, and their religion, as these determine their behavior and communication with the school. In every culture, the distance that is judged to be tolerable during communication is different, as well as other less obvious examples, such as meanings, smiles, whining, walking, shaking hands, gestures, and the distance from the person we communicate with (Spinthouraki et al., 1997). In this context, the example of Asian parents is indicative, that, when they are touched on the head, it is treated as an insult, while in Western culture, this is a sign of intimacy. The movement of the head from top to bottom, which means agreement in Western cultures, in Eastern cultures is interpreted otherwise. Finally, some distance between a parent and a teacher who communicate with each other is preferable to Americans and Northern Europeans, while Latin-Americans and residents of Central and Southern Europe accept a shorter distance during human communication (Spinthouraki et al., 1997).

Differences in parental involvement are also confirmed due to notable individual socioeconomic features including socioeconomic status, previous parental experience in schools, and school attendance. Foreign parents with high social status adopt a positive attitude and are willing to play an active role in the education of their children, as opposed to parents who have low socioeconomic status and a limited level of education. The latter, usually because of

ignorance or fear, do not feel comfortable with teachers of a higher education and find it difficult to understand the importance of the school process (Baker & Stevenson, 1986).

Due to the heterogeneity that characterizes foreign parents, the parental involvement is manifested in different ways. Sometimes it involves simply communicating with school about the curriculum and the performance of pupils, conducted through the physical presence of parents at school. Sometimes, it is manifested by providing support to enhance and assist the pupils' learning and development at home (Larocque et al., 2011). At the same time, it is also related to the parental supervision of the daily school activities of the children, and to the help parents offer in homework. Another form of parental involvement is the active participation in the parents' associations, involvement in leadership roles in school, and participation in the decision-making process, primarily in extracurricular activities and educational visits. Finally, parental involvement means providing voluntary assistance in the classroom, in the library, and in other activities beyond the curriculum, such as celebrations, charities, and similar cultural events (Gouvias & Foulidi, 2019).

The issue of parental involvement in a multicultural educational context has become crucial in the last seven years, specifically in Greece, due to the massive migration flows from countries of Asia and Africa. Families of different cultural characteristics have been accommodated in hosting premises for more than a year. During this time, refugee parents had been encouraged to let their children attend local schools, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, although neither the local educational communities nor the relevant infrastructures were initially prepared for such a challenge. Therefore, the training and awareness especially of teachers on issues of multicultural education is considered particularly important (Foulidi & Papakitsos, 2022).

The mutual multicultural acceptance in educational context

Modern international literature has shown that the mutual acceptance between the dominant local culture of hosting countries and the minority cultures of the refugees helps to achieve parental participation, which improves the school performance of children that belong to cultural or linguistic minorities. In this correlation, the low degree of parental involvement in families belonging to linguistic and cultural minorities is aptly pointed out, but also, they are

blamed for each school that problem arisen, by the other members of the school community (Karafoti, 2014). Finally, the need for substantial cooperation between the school and family that the intercultural education model proposes is emphasized, inclusive of the recognition of the pupils' cultural capital, as it cultivates the sense of security and tranquility that pupils absolutely need, especially if they live in refugee conditions.

The mutual acceptance of the dominant and minority cultures, and respect for the particularity of others, are a precondition for intercultural understanding and intercultural communication (Papadopoulou, 2008). The culture of refugees is accepted as merely different, and at the same time the deconstruction of racial stereotypes which arbitrarily evaluate, reject, and degrade people is achieved. Intercultural competence and ability are promoted (Chen & Starosta, 2000), as well as intercultural readiness (Papachristos, 2010). This is how the "intercultural course" takes place, which leads to the cooperation of families with different cultural and linguistic characteristics, both at the micro-level of the classroom and at the middle level of the school (Nikolaou, 2006, p. 81).

In addition, research shows that the parental involvement in children's education is beneficial to both pupils and parents, as well as to teachers (Sohn & Wang, 2006). Particularly in the case of immigrants and refugees, this contribution is proven to:

- facilitate the processes of socialization and acquisition of children's social skills
- improve communication among all children
- cultivate self-confidence
- increase motivation and achievements in education
- foster the participation of parents, which has been shown to have positive benefits, especially in the case of refugee children with learning disabilities.

Initially, parents oppose the apathy that may arise due to the multiple problems faced by their children. This may significantly reduce the stress levels of education. Their participation plays an important role in the changes that are taking place in the lives of their children, namely, in their inclusion in the school system of the host country. They develop the attitudes and skills needed to help their children make this change. Their self-confidence is improved, self-awareness is increased, and they acquire a more positive image of their abilities. As a result, they

understand that they can influence the education of their children. Thus, they develop all the required skills to substantially support their children.

From the children's point of view, the parental involvement has a positive effect on them in various ways, in improving school performance and achieving school success (Boethel, 2003; Tan & Goldberg, 2009). Indicatively, the research of Hill & Craft (2003) identifies positive results in the language development and socialization of children. Their parents' emotional support helps them to complete their activities and deal effectively with their daily difficulties. The related activation of parents also activates their children, even reducing school dropout.

Parental involvement is also important for preschool pupils. The research of Kontogianni & Oikonomidis (2014), in a sample of kindergarten teachers (in Greece), finds that kindergarten teachers have realized the benefits of parental involvement and, therefore, encourage parents to participate in group activities, such as the parents' association, and in other events.

The parental involvement has positive effects on teachers because it helps to facilitate their work. Parents gather the necessary information for teachers to understand the behavior of their pupils and, therefore, they understand student needs more effectively, to achieve teaching goals (Mylonakou-Keke, 2009).

Obstacles to parental involvement

The main obstacles to parental involvement come from the parents themselves. These obstacles are related to the multiple obligations of the parents and to their cultural characteristics. Their tiring, manual, long and low-paid work in extremely difficult conditions, the rolling schedule, the serious living problems, the many family obligations, and the lack of free time are considered obstacles to parental involvement as they make it extremely difficult for parents to participate in school activities (Nova-Kaltsouni, 2004). These obstacles are increased due to the ignorance of the language of the host country (Moles, 1993), the ignorance of its educational system (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990), the lack of parents' education (Damanakis, 2005), and negative personal experiences with education (Lopez, 2001).

These affects are confirmed by the research of Turney & Kao (2009), which is focused on a representative sample of children attending kindergarten from 1998 to 1999. They have found that most of the obstacles they faced were related to language ignorance within the local culture,

and to the lack of intercultural awareness in school. They have also found a variety of barriers related to cultural differences. Typically, this research has pointed out that parents from Asia face more obstacles than other groups, because teachers are highly valued, respected and considered less accessible. The same research emphasizes that parental involvement is more common when children are young. This research concludes that in order for children to greatly benefit, it is necessary to take appropriate measures, so that minority parents feel welcome in school and cope with the problem of language (Turney & Kao, 2009).

The research of Bonia et al. (2008) identifies obstacles on the part of teachers, in a sample of 1,121 teachers from many cities in Greece, having the research topic of the parents' perceptions of parental involvement and their attitude towards it. This research concludes that the attitude of teachers towards parental involvement was quite positive. Obstacles are related to the lack of training of teachers in matters of cooperation with parents and the lack of time on behalf of teachers. It emphatically argues for the informal, non-institutionalized form of cooperation, which exists in parallel with the institutionally guaranteed parent-teacher communication and correlates it with the cultural capital of the participants. Finally, the role of teachers is highlighted in the research of Mylonakou-Keke (2017). Its innovation is that it correlates the obstacles of parental involvement with the years of service of teachers. This is because, due to many years of service, these teachers have reduced endurance and are not willing to be involved in either a crisis management or a difficult negative situation. After many years of service, they do not tolerate being challenged; they have not been trained in family-school cooperation to deal with such negative situations, when working with a foreign family.

Conclusions

Concluding the critical assessment herein, it is realized that whenever parents are involved in their children's education, there are usually positive results in school performance, especially when the pupils belong to linguistic or cultural minorities. The parents contribute to the positive adaptation of their children to the school environment, and to the continuous cultivation of their skills. From the above, the need arises to address the obstacles that are related to both parents and teachers. An effective way is the relevant training of teachers (Brouzos, 2002), whose role is crucial to gain the required intercultural readiness for collaborating well

with the parents of their pupils (Papachristos, 2010).

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