

## **The Impact of Socio-Economic Status on Parental Involvement in Turkish Primary Schools: Perspective of Teachers**

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### **Abstract**

This exploratory qualitative study investigates the effects of socio-economic status on parental involvement in public primary schools in Turkey. The study aims to examine how teachers in these schools present the scope of current parental involvement, to what factors teachers ascribe the barriers to parental involvement, and whether teachers' responses are differentiated according to the socio-economic status of the surrounding community. The data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews with ten teachers working in two primary schools in Istanbul. One school is located in an affluent and relatively homogenous community, while the other one is in an area that includes a predominantly poor and culturally diverse population. The results of the study indicate that although teachers in the affluent school are more satisfied with the quality and quantity of parents' involvement, teachers in both schools believe that parents who do not collaborate with schools do not value education. Moreover, even though all teachers agreed that socio-economic status is a significant determinant of involvement, teachers in the community with high poverty stated that cultural differences also play an important role in explaining lack of parental involvement.

**Keywords:** Parental Involvement, Socio-economic status, Turkish primary schools

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## Introduction

It is a well-established argument in educational research that children's educational success is strongly linked to the characteristics of their parents, such as their level of educational attainment and socio-economic background. The time and attention that parents devote to their children's education are also known to be among the most important parental attributes that may influence children's educational performance. Parents' involvement in schooling of their children has been found to be strongly associated with a variety of educational outcomes, including children's cognitive skills, attendance rates, and positive behaviors (Desimone, 1999; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Feinstein & Symons, 1999; İpek, 2011; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Loucks, 1992; Resnick, et al., 1997; Sheldon, 2003). In addition, parental involvement can contribute positively to the teacher's performance, school climate, and schools' effectiveness, all of which may eventually result in greater student achievement (Christenson & Cleary, 1990; Epstein, 1995).

A substantial number of researchers find consistent evidence that the more parents involve in their children's education, the better their children perform in school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Furthermore, extant research suggests that parental involvement can be even more important for the betterment of schools and enhancement of student achievement in environments filled with low-income, immigrant, and minority parents, and this can play a significant role in closing the achievement gap between different social groups (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Barnard, 2004; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). Therefore, the factors that may prevent effective parental involvement in terms of school and home activities have been paid significant attention by many researchers. In her seminal article, Lareau (1987) argues that the socio-economic status of parents is one of the most important determinants of parental involvement in education. Following her study, many other studies have shown that patterns of parental involvement, in both quality and quantity, significantly vary in different communities that differ in their socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic characteristics (Bandlow, 2009; Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Desimone, 1999).

Turkey has a greatly diverse population and has been facing intense waves of internal migration over the recent decades. Many parents in the rural or underdeveloped regions of Turkey have moved to western regions or bigger cities in their close vicinity. The most important factors behind this mass domestic migration have been the social problems people face in the rural and/or their hopes for a better future (for higher living standards or for better jobs) in the urban. This large number of immigrants with differing socio-economic and cultural background thereby has created a diverse group in western Turkey (Cinoglu, 2006; Doh, 1984). With this in mind, we argue that this diversity in the population and varying socio-economic background of parents should be taken into account for any strategy aiming at reaching the entirety of all parents on the part of public schools. Given the vital role of schools in encouraging effective parental involvement, investigating the teachers' understanding of parental involvement along with their methods to promote it in different socio-economic communities is particularly important.

Although a number of studies have been conducted on different aspects of the parent-school relationship in Turkey (e.g. Aslanargun, 2007; Erdogan & Demirkasimoglu, 2010; Genç, 2005; Gökçe, 2000; İpek, 2011; Keçeli-Kaysılı, 2008; Kılıç, 2009; Özbaş & Badavan, 2009; Şeker, 2009; Şimşek & Tanaydin, 2002), only a few studies have taken the socio-economic differences into account (e.g. Ahioglu, 2006; Balkar, 2009; Gürşimşek, 2003). This paper therefore constitutes an attempt to explore how teachers in public primary schools present the scope of current parental involvement, to what factors they ascribe the barriers to parental involvement, and whether teachers' responses are differentiated according to the

socio-economic status of the community in which they work. This paper develops a particular focus on teachers and intends to reveal their perceptions of major barriers to parental involvement across differing socio-economic groups, since teachers often have a direct connection with parents, and play a significant role in promoting parental involvement. Based on teachers' perception of parental involvement at their schools, the current study attempts to answer three specific questions.

1. How do teachers working at two socio-economically distinct schools describe the scope of parental involvement in their schools?
2. Do both socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged schools have barriers to parental involvement; if yes, to what extent do these barriers resemble or differ in two types of schools?
3. What do teachers in both schools think of possible solutions to overcome the existing barriers to effective parental involvement?

This paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, we review seminal research to clarify the relationship between socio-economic status and parental involvement. The second section describes the process of data collection and analyses, and the third section presents the findings. Finally, the last section provides recommendations for schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas to enhance parental involvement and discusses how findings of this study could be situated in the broader literature.

### **Socio-Economic Status and Parental Involvement**

Extant research has indicated that parents' involvement in a child's educational life may vary across different social groups (Bandlow, 2009; Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Lee & Bowen, 2006). It has been found that students from middle-class families are more likely to achieve higher grades than those from low-income families, primarily due to the fact that middle-class families are usually more educated and involved deliberately in the schooling and childrearing processes of their children. By contrast, low-income families are less likely to participate in the schooling and childrearing processes of their children as a consequence of problems that have been articulated by researchers (Lareau, 2002; Lareau, 2003; Rothstein, 2004).

One strong argument that has emerged from the existing literature is that it cannot necessarily be assumed that low-income parents do not appreciate the importance of education as much as middle-class parents do (Lareau, 1987; Lee & Bowen, 2006). In fact, research shows that there is not any significant difference between low-income and middle-class parents in the value they attach to the education of their children. Based on this outstanding finding, different factors have been analyzed with the purpose of clarifying reasons that undermine adequate parental involvement. According to Lareau (1987), low-income parents' lesser involvement in their children's education can be explained in two ways: First, since these parents mostly possess less educational attainment, they do not have sufficient skills to assist their children in educational matters. Second, they do not have adequate information about schooling, such as curriculum, subject areas, and instruction, and they often do not have enough resources (money, time, etc.) to invest in their children's schooling.

Rothstein (2004) suggested that the unequal consequences of socio-economic status among parents, such as inequality in housing, are clearly associated with inequality in the educational outcomes of students. Students who do not have adequate housing are more likely to achieve lower grades than others because, first, they usually do not have a room

appropriate for studying, and second, they are less likely to have a stable household since their parents change neighborhoods more frequently than wealthy parents do. Considering the issue from this perspective, it becomes obvious that parents who do not possess a stable house are less likely to participate in the schooling process because it will presumably take more time for these parents to get used to a new environment and to acclimate to a new school.

Consistent with the international literature, Ahioglu (2006) also found that the socio-economic status of parents significantly influenced parental involvement in children's education in Turkey. According to results of this study, parents' interest in their children's educational improvement and their help with children's homework at home increase extensively with increases in socio-economic status. She also argued that there is relatively weak interaction, in regard to both quality and quantity, between teachers and parents from low socio-economic groups compared to interactions between teachers and parents from middle and upper-middle socio-economic groups. Likewise, Turkish primary school teachers stated that parents from low socio-economic status are less involved in their children's education compared to their counterparts (Balkar, 2009). In addition, it was found that both teachers and administrators believe that parents' low level of education was one of the most considerable obstacles for effective parental involvement in Turkish elementary schools (Erdogan & Demirkasimoglu, 2010).

### Method

The data for this research were collected through semi-structured in person interviews with 10 classroom teachers (teachers of Grades 1–5) working in two different schools in Istanbul, the most populated and the most diverse city in Turkey. In order to develop an understanding of the teachers' views about socio-economic status in explaining the issue of parental involvement, schools were purposefully selected in communities that significantly differ in the socio-economic status of their inhabitants. The first school was selected from the community which was mostly filled by low-income and working-class families, most of whom migrated from the countryside of different regions. However, the second community generally included professional, middle-class families. The below table includes the basic characteristics of two selected schools as provided by the school principals.

*Table 1.* Demographic characteristics of two selected schools

Characteristics	High SES School	Low SES School
Lunch provided with payment	Yes	No
Daily Schedule	Full day	Half day
Elementary Level Population (1-5 graders)	450	980
Average Teacher Student Ratio	34	37

At the time when the data was collected, Turkish primary schools<sup>1</sup> used to consist of both elementary (1-5 graders) and middle levels (6-8 graders). Our objective was to focus on parental involvement at the elementary level specifically, since it is claimed that parental involvement in early years of education is more likely to be higher than those at higher levels of schooling (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Singh, Bickley, Trivette & Keith, 1995). Teachers in both schools were selected from those with at least five years of teaching experiences and with at least three years spent in the current schools. However, in average, teachers at high SES school had more teaching experiences than those at lower SES school, mostly because of the assignment policy. In Turkey, teachers are assigned to schools by the Ministry of National Education based on their years of experiences. Hence, teachers with more teaching experiences are more likely to be appointed to schools in well-developed areas where generally more affluent families live.

<sup>1</sup>With a recent educational reform in May 2012, elementary and middle schools were separated in Turkey. Each of these levels now consists of four years of education.

The primary investigator made two side visits to each school prior to the interviews. During the first visit (one day for each school), he talked to school administrators and obtained permission to conduct interviews with teachers in that particular school. Information about the basic characteristics of schools and teachers who work at the first level (Grades 1–5) of the schools was also obtained from the principals during the first visit. During the second visit (one day for each school), teachers who met the above mentioned criteria were asked to participate in the study. Then, five volunteer teachers from each school were selected for the interviews. Each school was visited one more time on a scheduled date to conduct the interviews. Interviews with all teachers in the same school were scheduled to the same day, yet different time. Time spend for each interview ranged from 40 minutes to one hour.

The interview protocol consisted of six open-ended questions, developed by the authors in collaboration with experts in the field, about the problems of parental involvement in Turkey and whether the problems are associated with socio-economic status. Through those questions, teachers were encouraged to think deeply about social facts such as the demographics and socio-economic statuses of their students and to express their ideas about whether these factors influence school-parent relationships and what the most important factors are in explaining the matter of insufficient parent collaboration with schools. Interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of teachers, and all records were transcribed and analyzed as Turkish. Transcriptions of interviews were e-mailed to teachers and confirmed by them. Consequently, only statements that were planned to be quoted in the paper were translated into English and used in the study.

Data from two schools were analyzed separately by using content analysis method in order to explore specific patterns associated with the current state of parental involvement at each school. Data consisting of responses from two teachers at each school were analyzed by two coders to ensure inter-coder reliability and hence to reduce the impact of individual bias (Remler & Ryzin, 2011). By comparing results from this initial sample data analysis, coders came up with a qualitative coding scheme which includes different categories. The rest of data were, then, analyzed by the primary author based on the developed scheme. Using this scheme for analyses made easier to compare two schools with regard to parental involvement from various perspectives. At the end of content analysis process, it was seen that a variety of common themes for both cases emerged. The common themes were ultimately presented in a form of comparison of two schools.

## **Findings**

### **The Scope of Parental Involvement**

Teachers' responses to the interview questions indicated that regardless of the socio-economic situation of the community in which they work, teachers believed that the socio-economic status [SES] of parents was strongly correlated with the extent of parents' involvement in the educational processes and experiences of their children. Almost all teachers who participated in this study pointed out that middle-class parents showed more concern about and made more contacts with the schooling processes of their children. Teachers also believed that as a consequence of their effective involvement, students with middle-class parents were achieving higher grades than those whose parents are of a lower SES and whose parents do not have connections with the school

There is close connection between parents' status and their participation. In my class, parents who are graduated from a university have very close relationship with us..... They know our expectations and we know theirs.

In my class, most of the parents really have good jobs and SES. They are very concerned with their kids. Some of them are not able to come to school but they usually do not neglect to give me a call and ask about their kids and our needs.

Parents' participation is a very important part of education... Without support from them, it is really hard for us to make students successful.

We have parents who suffer from unemployment or some domestic issues... I try to make contact with them, but sometimes it is impossible... The same is the case for those who are working the entire week.

The above comments include statements from teachers from both schools and they show that there is an agreement among teachers that SES is a significant determinant of parental involvement and consequently student achievement. This fact was further stressed when teachers estimated the involvement ratio for their classes. While teachers in the higher SES school reported an 80–95% involvement rate, which is a satisfactory rate according to them, teachers in the lower SES school reported a 30–40% parental involvement rate. This shows an apparent difference in the quantity of parents who have some sort of connection with teachers. Our finding in this regard is substantially consistent with the international and Turkish literature both of which have stressed less involvement of parents from lower SES communities (Lareau, 1987; Ahioglu, 2006). In addition to quantitative differences, the distinction of activities that parents in two schools get involved in is evidence that it is also important to analyze the quality of involvement.

#### *Quality of Involvement*

Just as the quantity of involvement was different, the quality of parental involvement in these two schools was also very distinct from one another according to the teachers' responses to the question about the ways in which parents collaborate with the school. Teachers in the high SES school agreed that parents made contact with the school administrators and teachers in various ways. By contrast, involvement in the lower SES school took place mostly through official parent-teacher meetings held twice a year and in case of any personal problems that a student experiences.

Some responses from teachers working in the high SES school to the question of how parents get involved in education, as indicated below, showed the willingness of parents to work voluntarily to help students acquire not only academic abilities but also non-academic skills:

Compared with the school where I was working before, I am very satisfied with parents in this school because, I think, there is a sufficient involvement rate here. We have different activities and events for students, and parents are ready to help us... This year, some of our parents came to school and wanted to form a dance group. They did pretty much everything... One of the parents said she could teach how to dance. She is coming once a week and teaching dancing to first graders.

Some parents wanted us to teach drama, but there is no teacher in the school who can teach... Then, parents collected some money and hired a teacher... we do not even know how much money the teacher is receiving from parents.

We have online books, materials for test preparation. Now students have a chance to work with computers. They were all bought by parents. We did not even ask them to buy. One of the parents realized that I do not have a computer in the classroom and he bought one for my classroom....Look at this, parents said that they do not want

their kids to carry heavy bags, so they decided to buy lockers so that students can leave their books at school. One parent is a carpenter... He produced these lockers without any profit...

It is important to point out that, as indicated by the teachers, not all parents who made regular contact with the school did volunteer jobs for students. According to one teacher, 20% of parents visited the school regularly and participated in weekly activities, such as students' clubs. Due to their tough job schedules, most of the parents came to regular meetings, or, if not, they made contact with teachers to learn what was discussed in parental meetings. However, teachers in this school agreed that 5–20% of parents had never had any contact with teachers or administrators through either coming to school or making a phone call.

On the other hand, responses from teachers in the school with lower SES to the question about the content of parental involvement implied that the only activities involving parents were collective meetings held each semester regarding issues of the school and other individual parental meetings resulting from any problems of individual students:

If you are a teacher in this school, you should be able to overcome everything by yourself...It is hard to find a parent who can help you... This year, I want to teach folk dance to my students, but for this, we need traditional clothes and shoes. Who is going to buy these materials? As a teacher you have to figure out what to do in such cases.

The school has meeting days for parents. These are not weekly or monthly meetings, but only once for each semester. Still a lot of them do not come.

I think the problem is that these parents do not value education... There are parents willing to come to all of our meetings, but most of them are not.

Some of them (parents) come to school only if there is a problem with their kids.

These comments imply the existence of significant differences between these two schools in the quality of parents' involvement. On the one hand, parents in the high SES community got actively engaged in the schooling processes of their children by collaborating voluntarily with the school to lead various extra-curricular activities, and showed their concern with students' academic skills by purchasing online materials such as software programs conducive to improving students' testing skills. On the other hand, the school in the lower SES community exerted effort to reach parents by holding meetings. Teachers in this school did not mention any significant parental support that helped the school overcome problems or satisfy its needs. In fact, parents in this community also failed to gather around shared goals and common understandings, as indicated by one of teachers:

Parents who participate in meetings do not usually care about needs of the school. They all care about their own kids. We try to help them focus on the entire school's issues, but at the end they only ask questions about their individual kids...I do not think that we have a community (collaboration for shared issues) in this school.

### **Factors Teachers Ascribe to the Problems of Parent Involvement**

Our analysis concerning teachers' perceptions of parental involvement indicates that, both in the quantity and the quality of parents' engagement in the schooling process, there are significant differences between the school in the high SES community and the school located in the lower SES community. However, it is important to mention that even though it is apparent that the high SES school had higher rate of parental involvement, this school also

included parents who had never made contact with teachers. In this section, therefore, we wanted to analyze factors impeding parental involvement not only in the lower SES school but also in the school where the majority of parents had a connection with the school staff. In order to clarify the extent of the impact of SES on parental involvement, we asked teachers to expound on impediments that they thought preclude some parents from engaging in the educational processes of their children, either by coming to school or assisting their children at home.

Regardless of the school that teachers worked in, there was one common response to the questions such as, “Who are the parents who do not have any contact with you?” “Why do they not have contact?”, and “What are some problems behind their paucity of involvement?” Most teachers expressed the opinion that parents who were not making contact with them or who did not assist their children at home regarding school work did not value education. Here some comments from teachers in both schools:

There is a huge difference between parents who value education and those who do not. Some parents are coming from distant places to send their children to this school because they know this school is successful.

I think the success of students depends closely on parents attaching value to education. When parents get involved in school, their children also show more concern about their lessons.

I believe parents who join school activities are those who value education....

Even if parents are well educated, they might still not get involved... Valuing education is not about educational attainment...

Almost all teachers who mentioned parents that have less contact with schools indicated that such parents attach less importance to education, although previous research shows that there is not any significant difference between parents, regardless of their socio-economic background or identity, in comprehending the value of education for their children (Lareau, 1987; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Then why do teachers believe in this misleading notion? Our assumption is that teachers possess such viewpoints presumably due to the fact that they do not distinguish the difference between parents' thoughts or values about education and their actions regarding making contact with the school. Therefore, teachers evaluate how much parents' value education based on the extent to which parents have collaboration with teachers. If a parent has some sort of connection with teachers at the school or with the child at home in relation to educational issues, this parent is assumed by teachers to be among those who value education.

In order to investigate the way that teachers conceptualize the idea of valuing education, we asked them to explain the reasons why some parents valued education but others did not. Teachers' responses grouped into two clusters: On one hand, most teachers (eight out of ten) referred to socioeconomic factors to explain why some parents do not value education. On the other hand, although they still believed in the existence of parents who do not value education, two teachers argued that there is no connection between socio-economic status of parents and how they value education, and mentioned low-income parents who actively engaged as a basis to their argument. Both situations confirmed our assumption that teachers do not distinguish between parents' perceptions about the importance of education and their involvement because teachers mostly linked parents' not valuing education to socioeconomic factors and therefore evaluated how parents value education based on their actions in relation to schooling.

## **Barriers to Parental Involvement**

### *The School in the High SES Community*

It was indicated by teachers in the high SES school that parental involvement was at a satisfactory level: Approximately 20–30% of parents were very actively engaged in school activities, supported teachers, and provided the school's and teachers' needs. Around half of the parents had some connection with teachers or school administrators by making phone calls and partaking in parental meetings. However, depending on the numbers given by individual teachers, 5–20% of parents neither made contact with the school nor participated in any meetings. Beyond the teachers' perspectives concerning parents' not valuing education, we asked them to explain the reasons preventing these parents from getting involved.

The most challenging problem I have faced so far is about parents' working conditions... although they have good economic conditions, they are working too much... But at least they give me calls to ask about their children...

Unlike most schools in this city, I think the only problem is families' tough job schedules...they start working in the early morning and up until night because I know many of them bring their work home with them ...They even work on Saturdays.

Last time the discussion in the class was about "robots" and students said the best examples for robots are their fathers and mothers... They work like robots... these students are despaired because their parents do not spend enough time with them...

According to teachers in this school, the most serious problem preventing parents from getting involved in education was their inflexible working conditions. All the teachers who responded to the interview questions pointed out the same impediment. Due to their tough working schedules, parents did not have time to spend with their children at home to assist with their homework or to participate in school activities arranged for parents. This was particularly problematic for parents who are divorced. Two teachers indicated that in each grade level there were at least two students whose parents got divorced; the students were living with their mothers. They stressed that in order to satisfy the needs of their children, these mothers spent even more time working. Interestingly, these parents were thought by the teachers to be those who did not value education, which, according to teachers, was the main problem for lack of involvement. However, it has been obvious that when teachers focused more on the question of why these parents are not involved in the education of their children, they recognized actual problems impeding some parents' involvement. For instance, in this school, the major impediment to involvement was the inexorable working schedules of parents.

### *The School in the Lower SES Community*

Teachers in the lower SES school were more pessimistic regarding parental involvement. According to these teachers, just like in the high SES school, parents spending most of their time working was also an impediment to effective involvement in this school. However, as with other impediments, the issue becomes more serious. Some of the comments teachers made can be seen below.

In this community, mostly both parents work in the week and sometimes at the weekend because they have some economic problems...If they do not come to school, let's say that's fine but they do not even help their kids at home...

Parents are working in tough jobs and spending a lot of time at working... For them education is not important because they know its benefit is distant... They need to make money for their basic needs... They do not expect their kids to go on to higher level of education, instead they want their kids help them earn money as soon as kids accomplish the mandatory education.

The first aim of parents is to earn money and to satisfy their basic needs...Education is not a priority. They send their kids to school because it is illegal not to send... Kids are expected to contribute to family's budget...

Sometimes it is about the student, when parents see the child's achievement. This motivates them and so they want their kids to continue, but for other students who are struggling, it is not the case... Schooling is a waste of time...

As can be interpreted from teachers' comments above, in addition to parents' lack of involvement in the educational experiences of their children, parents in this school did not allow children to spend more time on schooling or go on to a higher level of education mostly due to economic struggles. Instead, children were expected to start working to contribute to the income of their families even during their mandatory primary education. The teachers added that it was very hard to work with these parents due not only to parents being unwilling to collaborate with teachers but also because of communication problems.

There are high school graduate mothers, we do not have problem to talk with them, but parents here are mostly graduated from elementary school (five years). Even some parents have not got any schooling experience... It is really hard for me to communicate with them... I see that they respect teachers, but are not able to assist their child.

The educational level of parents is a critical factor... When I tell them to take their child to a psychologist, they do not accept this... They misunderstand me.

This is a very diverse community and most of them, especially those from eastern Anatolia region, are not educated... they do not have educational experience to know what schooling looks like...

Parents think we are experts and the most responsible person for their kids' education...They even say "if we help our kids' lessons, then what teachers do at school. It is their job..." Some of them believe if they help their kids at home, this is something bad because kids should be able to do their homework on their own...

In addition to the economic problems that parents face, the teachers indicated that the insufficient educational attainment of parents is one of the most important impediments to accomplishing fruitful involvement. It is acknowledged that effective parental involvement should go beyond teacher-parent meetings and should trigger parents to take actions in contributing to school activities and students' independent work at home. However, according to the teachers' responses, the educational levels of most parents were not adequate to assist their children. In addition to this, the inadequate educational level of some parents did not make it possible for teachers to communicate with them effectively. As pointed out by one of teachers, they could even be misunderstood. Consequently, as part of the problem of ineffective communication, parents were not able to respond to the demands of the school and teachers concerning the needs of students.

Teachers' responses to the inquiry into the impediments to effective parental involvement in this school revealed that problems were not limited to socio-economic factors:

Parents in our school are not able to come together for the same purpose. They act individually...They focus on individual problems. It seems like everybody cares only for their own kids...

The community in this school is very diverse... There are a lot of families migrated from eastern provinces...some parents do not want to communicate with others or they do not want their kids to talk with others (students with a different socio-cultural background)...It is all about trust.

As indicated earlier, unlike parents in the high SES school, where parents showed a positive sense of school community through coming together for the same goals, parents in this school did not accomplish that unity. Part of this problem is the fact that this school included parents from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. As pointed out in the comments above, some parents were hesitant to communicate with other parents who had different cultural identities. However, we do not have sufficient information about what specific cultural differences might hinder parents from making contact with the school. From the teachers' viewpoint, it is apparent that the parents who migrated from the eastern provinces were less likely to get involved in the educational process. It is known that a large number of these parents possessed different identities and cultural values. Although some teachers had a sense that the problem was about adaptation to new environment and about language barriers (some parents had difficulties of speaking fluent Turkish), we think that another study that makes direct contact with these parents is needed to discover how specific cultural differences between schools and parents might affect their involvement.

### **Solutions to the Articulated Barriers**

Teachers' responses to questions about possible solutions to the problems of parental involvement in their schools reflected different aspects of the problems. Interestingly, teachers focused mostly on the socio-economic status of parents as the predominant factor determining the extent of involvement; however, when they were asked to elaborate strategies that might alleviate the deleterious impact of such factors, it became apparent that one part of the problem is with the schools themselves, and hence schools were presented as the major source of solutions:

School administration and teachers should act collaboratively... (all school staff) should be together. There is isolation among teachers and administrative staffs... parents are respectful, so, no matter what situation you are in, you can make connection with them...they (Parents) trust us...If the school administration takes action and gathers all teachers together, around the same slogan, I believe we can draw the attention of parents...

When you talk about increasing parental involvement in any school, you should have an objective or a vision statement...But, look at our school...No objective or vision about how to gather parents....

Unfortunately, we do not have any plan or program for parental involvement. It is up to teachers to decide what to do....they (teachers) are not taught how to make contact with parents...

There is no collaboration between teachers and administrators...everybody is independent here... no shared vision about parental involvement... if you do (activities for parents), you just do. If you don't, it is okay too...it is not a requirement...

According to these comments from teachers in the lower SES school, the school had failed to gather teachers to develop shared understandings, visions, and plans in relation to involving parents in the educational process. Involvement activities taking place depended mostly upon the individual efforts of teachers who did not possess formal education or professional training concerning how to communicate with parents and help them get involved. These findings suggest that the school as a whole does not exert a collective effort to reach parents; instead, efforts are either restricted to individual teachers or to the parents themselves who are already willing to engage in the educational experiences of their children. This argument is further confirmed by comments from teachers in the high SES school. They also indicated that the school they were working in did not have a collective vision regarding parental involvement; again, parental involvement activities were mostly shaped by individual teachers' efforts and parents who were voluntarily engaged.

According to teachers, the school administration should play a significant role in building effective parent-teacher collaboration because the extent of teachers' activities with regard to parents is mostly limited to group and individual meetings. Since teachers lacked knowledge in relation to specific steps for increasing the number of parents having regular contact with the school and getting involved more productively, they considered administrative staff as the primary responsible figures for creating effective parental involvement strategies. Administrators were expected to develop a shared vision and understanding among teachers about parental involvement, set directions for specific steps, develop agendas for school-wide meetings, support and guide teachers in communicating with parents, and provide teachers with sufficient resources such as space, communication devices, etc.

### **Conclusion & Discussion**

The main aim of this study was to explore how teachers in Turkish public primary schools present the scope of current parental involvement, the factors they ascribe the barriers to parental involvement, and how their responses differ according to the socio-economic status of the community in which they work. We achieved this goal by inquiring into the school-parent collaboration in two primary schools, which were on the different ends of socio-economic spectrum in Istanbul. Throughout the analysis of teachers' responses to interview questions, it has been obvious that the differences between the high SES and the lower SES schools in the quality and quantity of parental involvement in Turkish context is consistent with conventional wisdom, such that teachers in the high SES school reported more satisfaction with the number of parents involved and the way that they participate in their children's education. For instance, Lareau compared parental involvement in a high SES school with one that involved large number of lower SES parents in the U.S., and she came to the conclusion that "difference in two schools was apparent not only in the quantity of interaction but in the quality of interaction" (Lareau 1987, p.77). Similarly, we revealed that the high SES school included parents who had close connections with teachers, were sensitive about the schools' needs, and participated voluntarily in extra-curricular activities. However, parental involvement in the lower SES school failed to go beyond regular meetings.

The idea that parents who do not get involved do not value education, which was held by most of the teachers, lost its prominence when teachers mentioned socio-economic factors as impediments to parental involvement, such as parents' job schedules, educational levels and so forth. Hence, it can be argued that parents do not get involved mainly because of their life conditions, not necessarily because they disvalue education. These findings also confirm the study of Louis *et al.* (2010) who suggested that less involvement of lower SES parents should not be construed as they do not value the school or comprehend the importance of education. Moreover, our results suggest that problems of parental involvement in these schools do not only stem from issues related to parents but schools themselves lack individual and/or collective accountability to enhance parental involvement.

There is an agreement among researchers suggesting that schools located in more diverse and lower SES communities need to exert more effort to reach the community instead of expecting parents to make contact with them (Khalifa, 2012). However, teachers' responses in both schools indicate that both teachers and administrators have failed to develop a school-wide understanding of and vision about parental involvement in order to reach all parents. Most teachers work in isolation in their effort to collaborate with parents. Furthermore, since schools do not possess strong requirements or policies for teachers that encourage and support them to work with parents, the quality of parental involvement in these schools depends solely on the willingness of teachers and parents.

Based on our findings, we suggest that administrators in schools with substantial concentrations of low-income and migrant students should direct specific attention to developing strategies that have the potential to enhance school-parent collaboration. The process of strategy development should be carried out in collaboration with teachers, which would enable the school not only to establish a shared understanding of parental involvement among teachers but also a cohesive attitude toward it. School administrators should also be aware of and satisfy the needs of teachers regarding the resources required for parental involvement activities. In addition, depending on teachers' concerns about the fact that they do not have sufficient training on effective ways to reach out to parents, we advise schools add training sessions regarding parental involvement to their professional development schedules. Furthermore, other researchers studying parental involvement recommend that teachers not simply wait for parents to make contact with them; rather, they should devote a certain amount of time to leaving the stark boundary of school and reaching those parents who are isolated from the school (Khalifa, 2012), and listen to and show respect for the needs and concerns of these parents (Lopez, Scribner & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). Extant research also shows that there may (still) be existing dissatisfactions among low-income parents regarding their voice being valued, even when there are significant efforts to bring parents directly to school on the part of the school administration (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002). It could be inferred that schools should make contact with parents by going to them and paying assiduous attention to their values, concerns and needs instead of trying to bring parents with lower SES directly into school.

Although our study has provided critical implications concerning the issue of parental involvement in socio-economically different schools, we are also aware of the existing limitations of our study. First of all, the data utilized in the study were based solely on teachers' self-report and involved only one interview with each participant. Second, the measure of parental involvement was quantified by the numbers taken from teachers without any other observation. Third, the data that we used is relatively small, and consists of two schools and ten teachers in total, which may limit our findings in terms of their generalizability to a broader scope of schools across Turkey. Forth, teachers working at the affluent school had more years of teaching experiences than those who were working at the school with students predominantly coming from lower socio-economic background. This existing situation may positively impact the level of parental involvement in more affluent school.

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