Educational partnership in Kosovo
Organisational efforts, teacher beliefs and perceived experiences with parental involvement in schools of varying levels of socioeconomic status and cultural student compositions

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Abstract

The present study compared the organisational efforts, teacher experience and beliefs on parental involvement among (pre)schools comprising a student population of different levels of socioeconomic background and ethnicity of. Further, it examined the effect of organisational efforts on teacher experience and beliefs. For this purpose, 123 directors and teachers working in 32 schools of Kosovo answered a questionnaire. Overall, (pre)schools reported moderate organisational efforts for parental involvement and positive experience. Only 35.8% of them agreed that child education is a shared responsibility among families and parents. Teachers working in preschool consisting of high socioeconomic student background and teachers working in schools of high cultural minority student background scored significantly higher on teacher experience than those working in low SES preschools and low cultural diversity, respectively. Moreover, the organisational efforts in preschools and ethnicity in schools predict teacher experience. Further research is recommended to understand the contextual factors behind these findings.
Keywords: Parental involvement, diversity, schools, teacher experience, Kosovo

Family engagement is considered a possible strategy to reduce student achievement gaps related to socioeconomic status and ethnicity (e.g. Catsambis & Beveridge, 2001, Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes 2005, 2007; Schofield, 2006) and an opportunity for educationally and socially disadvantaged parents to acquire valuable information and support (Coleman, 1988, 1992; Yan & Lin, 2005). Through parental involvement families and professionals differing in cultural and social capital may share and understand each other's backgrounds (Hill & Taylor, 2004), so that a child does not have to navigate alone in two differing contexts. Definitions of family engagement emphasise a strength-based and reciprocal relationship between teachers and parents (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark & Moodie, 2009). According to Epstein (2001) in the process of parental involvement, teachers and parents should be active actors with equal status. Acceptance and mutual respect from the base for a balance in power during collaborations (Wehman, 1998).

However, the relationships between teachers and minority parents may be more hierarchical (Adams & Christenson, 2000), and teachers' beliefs about their involvement, may be biased (Kim, 2009). In general minority parents are often seen from a deficit lens (Hyland & Heuschkel, 2010; Lightfoot, 2004; Lott, 2001), and their fund of knowledge is argued to be devalued (Kroeger & Lash, 2011; Auerbach, 2007). Recommended practices for family engagement put the focus on the school organisational context, such as outreach efforts, a welcoming school environment and a two-way street conversation (Douglass, 2011; Halguenseth & Peterson, 2009; Handerson & Mapp, 2002). Teacher beliefs about family engagement could be shaped partly by a school's paradigm for parental involvement and partly by the experiences teachers encounter with parents (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have yet explored the influence of school policies on teacher-parent relationship and teacher beliefs about sharing responsibility with parents. In Kosovo, a country in the South-East of Europe, parental involvement has only recently gained attention and schools might have increased their parental involvement policies recently. The current study, based on the theory of overlapping spheres (Epstein, 2001), will study three school factors of parental involvement in schools of varying in socioeconomic status and ethnic student compositions, That is, the school's organisational efforts to support five types of parental involvement, teachers' perceived experience with parents and teacher beliefs about sharing responsibility on child education with parents. Next, it will look into the relations between school efforts, teacher experience and teacher beliefs in Kosovo.

The literature on parental involvement shows variations in the conceptualisation and value given to parental involvement among and within cultures, as well as, variations in the forms of engaging with the children's education. In the U.S. and Western Europe, parental involvement has clearly been a focal point of research and practices over the past decades. Consequently, many researchers have given definitions of parental involvement, trying to grasp what it entails (Intxausti, Etxeberria, & Joaristi, 2013; Radu, 2013). A general conceptualisation of parental involvement is based on the context where it happens: parental involvement in home and parental involvement in school (Anderson & Minke, 2007). In line with this categorisation, some research seems to indicate that minority parents are more involved with their child's education in the home environment, whereas majority parents seem to participate in the school (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Eccles & Harold, 1996). Some other studies show parental involvement to vary, independent of the socio-economic characteristics of families (e.g. Stoep, Bakker & Verhoeven, 2002). Epstein's (2001) defines parental involvement as a school-home partnership of shared responsibility on child education and socialisation. In addition, she distinguishes six types of parental involvement, namely: *parenting*, *communicating*, *volunteering*, *learning at home*, *decision making*, and *collaborating with the community*. The theory of Epstein (2001) outlines the *external structure* and *internal structure*. The external structure consists of three spheres which depict the contexts where children learn and grow: home, school and community. In the internal structures, relations between and within each context take place. The family sphere concerns the personal lives and the relationships within the family. The school sphere involves principals, teachers and other staff members developing school policies and implementing school activities. Each of these spheres has its own experiences, philosophies and practices of engaging with the child. Similarities or differences in child development between the spheres can pull or push one another, resulting in an increase or decrease in communication and collaboration (Epstein, 2001).

According to Lareau (1987), the concept of parental involvement retains among professionals an "ideal parent type", linked to class, race, ethnicity and gender. This is argued to mostly fit the white middle-class women, and parents who fail to meet the held expectation of parental involvement are viewed as deficient parents. Similarly, Auerbach (2007) argues that parental involvement is a social construct which, in terms of having the recourses and the cultural capital to participate in the school, is mostly a privilege of middle-class parents. Family factors such as work schedules, money, level of education, lack of access to child care, prior educational experience, are listed as some possible factors to hinder the

participation of minority parents (Carlisle, Stanley & Kemple, 2005; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). However, many researchers have shifted focus from family factors that may hinder participation, to the school environment and its efforts to outreach and collaborate with parents (e.g. Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lewis, Kim & Bey, 2011). In this line of discourse, there seems to be a consensus that the responsibility for parental involvement lays within the school, thus accounting for the inclusion of parents from the non-dominant group.

Scholars illustrate the importance of outreaching parents and demonstrating receptive attitudes for the variations in parental involvement. It might be the case that the involvement of minority parents differs in nature from the involvement of middle or higher SES parents, and the expectations of the school. For instance, Reay (1998) shows from her interviews with 33 women, that contrary to the middle-class women, initiating teacher contact for working-class women did not come naturally to them and when they needed to, it constituted to an enormous psychological effort. However, independent of the school, they monitored their child's educational process by asking their children about it. They evaluated their learning by drawing on their own educational experiences or using older siblings as a standard for comparison. Souto-Manning & Swick (2006) share that some parents believe they should not interfere with the role of the school, thus only visit it upon invitation. Many studies show the engagement of minority parents in their children's education in the home context (e.g. Chang, Park, Singh, & Sung, 2009; Daniel-White, 2002; Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Patel & Stevens, 2010; Stoep, Bakker & Verhoeven 2002). However, the home involvement might often be ignored (Zellman & Waterman, 1998) and the lack of involvement with the school may be perceived by professionals as a lack of interest (Kim, 2009; Jackson & Remillard, 2005). The results of a study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics in the U.S. show discrepancies between school and parent reports of the efforts made by the schools to engage parents in their school involvement (Nord & West, 2001). Hence, acknowledging different types of involvement, outreaching parents through multiple mediums and supporting their participation in various forms is considered necessary, especially for an inclusive family engagement (Lewis et al., 2011).

According to the theory of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 2001) the collaboration between parents and teachers happens in two levels: *institutional* level (e.g., when a school invites all families to an event or communicates the same message) and at an *individual* level (e.g., when a parent meets a teacher individually). Metaphorically, this interplay is called the overlapping spheres of influence. Many studies have shown that there

is a higher parental response if the school works actively to invite, welcome and support parents, and they perceive the school to treat them as "member of a family", (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). According to Bastiani (1993), a school-home partnership should consist of shared purpose, negotiation and mutual respect (Hornby, 2011). An open and caring environment may pave the way for parents and teachers to express their concerns, ideas and experiences on child development, as well as share responsibility and decisions (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). As such, the institutions not only provide information to the families, but pay attention and address the parental perspective (Rous, Hallam, Grove, Robinson & Machara, 2003). The organisational efforts of the school and a good relation between teachers and parents may foster and maintain the collaboration between school and home (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Based on the theory of overlapping spheres and research on parental involvement, a framework was developed consisting of the six aforementioned types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995). The parenting type of involvement concerns assisting parents in supporting their children's development and learning. Whereas, communicating suggests designing effective and two-way communication, so both, teachers and parents may participate equally in discussions regarding school child experiences, learning, school policies and programmes. Additionally, it involves communication through various mediums. Next, the volunteering type involves engaging families in helping and supporting schools' activities. Similar to parenting, the learning category means providing information to families on how to help their children with academic learning activities. Further, involving parents in decision-making concerns offering them opportunities to undertake leadership roles and participate in school decisions. Lastly, the collaboration type consists of providing collaboration and access to community resources as well as serving as a resource to the community. Besides the efforts in the institutional level, as teachers are key agents collaborating in the individual level with parents (Epstein, 2001), their positive beliefs and attitudes are essential for maintaining the partnership with parents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

However, teachers' beliefs and interactions with minority parents might be biased and more hierarchical in nature. According to Hornby (2011), there is a tendency for teachers to view parents in general as "less able", "problems" or "vulnerable", and when the encounters with them are challenging, they may be inclined to maintain "a professional distance" with them. Parents coming from a lower socio-economic background and/or different ethnicity are often viewed through a deficit lens and identified as the primary source of the problem (Hyland & Heuschkel, 2010; Lightfoot, 2004; Lea, 2004). Partnerships have a vertical

dimension of power and responsibility (Wazir & van Oudenhoven, 1998). In relationships between professionals and minority parents, a power imbalance seems to emerge. As relationships are constituted in communication, the latter is a critical factor for the parent-teacher collaboration (Swick, 2003). However, in the interactions between professionals and minority parents, communication is sometimes a barrier, especially for parents with less knowledge of the host country tongue (Intxausti et al., 2013; Kim, 2009; Lewis, Kim, Bey 2011). Teacher beliefs about the lack of efficacy of minority parents are considered another barrier to their active participation (Kim, 2009). Further, although one-way street communication is not limited only to minority parents, it seems that minority parents are more often put in a subordinate position in these power relations (McLaren, 2009). Lott (2001) gives examples of different studies with minority parents reporting that the contact they received from the school was mainly formal and written, and their opinions and insights about their children were not listened to, hence disregarded. He points out that parents coming from low socioeconomic status are often perceived as they do not have much to offer, thus are disempowered and excluded from decision-making processes. Kroeger & Lash (2011) argue that parents differing from the majority culture are put in a position to "listen to the authority" and their family fund of knowledge is disregarded. Thus, in the collaboration between teachers and parents from minority, it might sometimes be the case that teachers are more in a position of power and decision-making.

Teacher beliefs about the involvement of the parents might be shaped by the organisational structures and processes of the school, and teachers' own experience with the parents. A case study by Lareau & Horvath (1999) illustrates how a black couple who expressed opposing views with the school, was considered by the school as "the most upsetting", leading to moments of their exclusion. The couple called out for racial injustice in this school and, among other issues, one example describes that the couple drew attention to the excess focus that is given to Halloween celebration while neglecting the celebration of Martin Luther King's birthday. The school staff, teachers and the principal considered that the couple were undermining the teacher's authority and their behaviour was reported as "unacceptable", "destructive", "unhelpful" and better to be avoided (Lareau & Horvath, 1999). In general, the beliefs professionals hold may bias their pedagogical practices (Maggioni & Parkinson, 2008). The beliefs professionals hold may function as a filter for new information that confirms the already held beliefs (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000). Consequently, this may result in a self-fulfilling prophecy; for instance, teachers may be less than enthusiastic about their interactions with minority parents which could, in turn, evoke

their belief to come true (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Seeing minority parents from a deficit lens might influence the beliefs about their involvement (Lightfoot, 2004). Douglass (2011) argues that the organisational structures and the processes among the staff of the school, reflect on their relationship with parents. The results of her research indicate that early childhood education that are caring, flexible, responsive, reflective of the culture of the families and share power and knowledge associate with higher quality partnerships (Douglass, 2011).

Altogether, this study aims to further gain an understanding of organisational parental involvement efforts, teacher beliefs and teacher experiences of parental involvement in Kosovo in diverse school contexts. The first research question of this research will focus on what efforts the schools make on five types of parental involvement as distinguished by Epstein (2001), and what teacher experiences and beliefs are in schools of different SES and culture compositions in Kosovo. The second question addresses whether these beliefs, experiences and efforts differ between the different school compositions in Kosovo. The third research question asks what the relations are between school efforts, teacher beliefs and teacher experiences.

Methodology

Research Design

The current study is partly a parallel study of the ISOTIS research project with professionals. It investigates aspects of parental involvement on the school's organisational and teachers' individual level in Kosovar formal education, specifically in primary schools, preschools. Since age is one factor that accounts for differences in parental involvement (Epstein, 2001), all the data is analysed and presented separately for preschool and primary school.

Participants

14 preschool and 18 primary school located in more urban and deprived areas, ranging in their level of socioeconomic and ethnical diversity of student population participated in this research. As such, participants of this study (N = 123, N_{male} = 38) are 19 directors and 62 teachers within primary schools, and 14 directors and 28 teachers in preschool. The average sample age is 39. Half of the participants have a master degree, and overall, they have 11 years of experience on average (SD = 8.7). All participants are of Albanian ethnicity.

Procedure

This study followed a purposive sampling, selecting and approaching schools based on their diversity in student population. The sample size of participants was decided approximate to the country samples of professionals in the ISOTIS research. Diverse preschools and schools within three cities were identified. Afterwards, the institutions were approached and informed about the aim and process of the study. Of 51 schools contacted, 62% agreed to participate in the study. The survey was administered online, by LimeSurvey server. An online link of the survey was sent to directors to fill out, and pass on to five teachers within the school. Information consent was part of the survey, and only if agreed, participants could fill out the questions. Their participation was voluntary, and they were able to withdraw from the study at any point.

Measures

For the purpose of this study, the previously developed ISOTIS online survey for professionals was used. The questionnaire included three different measures, along with the demographic questions about the school and professionals (such as age, gender, years of working in education, level of education, diversity composition of the school). The construction of these three measures was based on Epstein's model (2001) and the literature on parental involvement in general (Slot, Romijn, Cadima, Nata, & Wyslowska, 2018). The questionnaire was translated to Albanian by the author and back to English by a certified translator. There were generally good agreements for most of the items, with a few changes address in order to enhance the conceptual equivalence. Along with the survey, four semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions similar to the questionnaire.

Parent communication policy questionnaire

The efforts of the schools to increase parental involvement were measured by the communication policy scale. This scale was answered by school directors, and it consists of 17 general questions about organisational policies regarding parent communication and involvement. The answers were scored on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Five scales, comprising 2 to 8 items were constructed based on the Epstein's model (2001), representing the types of parental involvement: *parenting* (e.g. Parents receive advice concerning childrearing or home learning activities) *communicating* (e.g. We organize a short individual meeting with parents to discuss how their child is doing), *volunteering* (e.g. We use volunteer parents as mediators in activities), *decision making* (We organize meetings for all parents to share our organizational policy and vision with them) and *collaborating with the community* (e.g. We organize special events for children and parents). Since the parenting and learning types of parental involvement in the Epstein model (2001) involve the same

teacher-parent activity, but on different topics, these two categories were merged into one parenting scale. The internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha for the overall scale is .91, whereas the values for each category range from 0.60 to 0.82.

Relationship with parents questionnaire

The relationship with parents measure evaluates the perceived teacher experience with parents. It consists of 12 items, of which some are negatively worded in order to reduce social desirability. Teachers were asked to what extent they agree with the statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1=disagree, 5=agree). After the data gathering process, due to low internal consistency of the overall scale, only five items were selected and thus used for this research. This selection was done based on the theoretical rationale for this research, while also taking into account the correlations between the items. These items were computed into a scale with internal consistency of $\alpha = .50$. The scale evaluates the experience of the teachers with parents. The items consisted of statements such as, "*I have trouble communicating with some parents*", "*I mostly talk to parents when there is a problem*", "*I tell parents that as a professional I know what is best for a child"*. Four of the items were reversely coded, and the scaled assessed a more open, not problem-oriented communication with a common understanding. Additionally, a single item from this measure (*The main responsibility for a child's development and learning lies with the professional*) was used as a variable to measure teachers' beliefs for parental involvement.

Demographic questions

The questionnaire also involved two demographic questions regarding the school. These were answered by the school directors. One item measured the socioeconomic status level in the school population, whereas the other measured the cultural diversity. Directors were asked to indicate the percentage of students coming from a low socioeconomic background, and different ethnicity on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *Almost none*, (2) *About 25%*, (3) *About 50%*, (4) *About 75%* and (5) *Almost all of it*. For the purpose of this research, two dummy variables were created. Schools scoring 1 and 2 on the question regarding socioeconomic status were assigned into high socioeconomic school, whereas those that scored 3-5 were assigned into the low socioeconomic group. Similarly, schools that scored 1 and 2 in the item regarding different ethnicity were grouped as schools with low different ethnical composition, whereas the rest of the values were assigned a value of 1, meaning high ethnical composition.

Interviews

Along with the online survey, qualitative data were also collected in order to gain some insights into the parental involvement practices and opinions of school directors and teachers in Kosovo. This allowed for open-ended answers that added on the quantitative data. As such, four semi-structured interviews were conducted, with one director and teacher from preschool, and one director and teacher working in primary school. The participants were given a definition and examples of parental involvement, similar to the ones in the survey and asked to elaborate on their practices and experiences. Also, participants were explicitly asked for their relationship with parents from a low socio-economic background, factors that might hinder their participation and the (pre)school's approach for their inclusiveness.

Results

Table 1 reports the results of the first research questions of this research, respectively, what efforts the schools make on five types of parental involvement and what experiences and beliefs teachers have. Overall, (pre)schools reported moderate levels of effort for involving parents (M = 3.23, SD = .71) and teachers showed to have quite a positive experience with parents (M = 3.35, SD = .79), but scored less than average on the belief for sharing responsibility with parents (M = 2.66, SD = 1.56).

To address the second research question, whether there are differences across the different school compositions, the means of the parental involvement factors were compared using multiple MANOVA's. Initially the scores were compared between preschool and primary school, and then between low SES and high SES groups, and low-ethnicity and high-ethnicity group, fo. Low and high ethnicity preschools were not compared because the assumptions for comparisons were not met. Descriptive statistics can be found in Table 1. The multivariate tests revealed a significant difference between low and high SES preschools, (F (1, 23) = 4.42, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .16$) and between low and high-ethnicity schools, (F (1,46) = 6.45, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$) on the teacher experience measure. No other significant differences were found between schools and preschools, and sub-groups within preschools and schools in terms of ethnicity and SES on school efforts and teachers' beliefs.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics and group differences in school efforts, teacher experience and teacher beliefs*

	Preschool			
	SES		Ethnicity	
	Low (N=8)	High (N=6)	Low (N=13)	High (N=1)

	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
School efforts				
Parenting	3.00 (.46)	3.08 (.70)	2.96 (.47)	4
Communication	2.77 (.40)	2.83 (.77)	2.73 (.53)	3.62
Decision-making	3.25 (1.03)	3.33 (.86)	3.17 (.87)	4.66
Collaboration	3.25 (.80)	3.08 (1.11)	3.07 (.86)	4.50
Volunteering	3.00 (1.06)	2.91 (.97)	2.84 (.92)	4.50
	N= 7	N= 18	N = 20	N = 5
Teacher Experience	2.91 (.88)	3.65 (.74)	3.56 (.78)	2.96 (.96)
Teacher Belief	2.14 (1.34)	2.44 (1.46)	2.40 (1.50)	2.20 (1.09)

	Primary school			
	SES		Ethnicity	
	Low (N=12)	High (N=6)	Low (N=10)	High (N=8)
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
School efforts				
Parenting	3.29 (.96)	3.66 (.60)	3.55 (.76)	3.25 (1.00)
Communication	3.19 (.74)	3.54 (.69)	3.35 (.82)	3.26 (.63)
Decision-making	3.36 (.88)	4.22 (.50)	3.90 (.78)	3.33 (.90)
Collaboration	3.62 (.74)	4.16 (.98)	3.95 (.92)	3.62 (.74)
Volunteering	3.12 (.88)	3.33 (.98)	3.15 (.91)	3.25 (.92)
	N= 35	N=14	N = 23	N = 23
Teacher Experience	3.41 (.80)	3.03 (.59)	3.05 (.75)	3.60 (.71)
Teacher Belief	2.57 (1.61)	3.45 (1.50)	2.86 (1.57)	2.69 (1.69)

Table 2 reports the results of the bivariate correlations between variables in this study for preschools and primary schools. The results show a significant positive relation between school efforts and teacher experience for preschool. Whereas for primary school, teacher experience has a significant positive correlation with ethnicity. In addition to the correlations in the table, a partial correlation was employed to test the relation between school parental involvement variables, while controlling for SES and ethnicity. A significant positive relation is found between the schools' overall efforts for parental involvement and teachers' rated experience (r = .41, $p < 0.47$).

Table 2. *Correlation matrix of variables in Preschools and Primary Schools*

	Preschool				Primary School			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1. SES	-				-			
2. Ethnicity	-.02	-			-.58*	-		
3. Teacher Experience	.40*	-.29	-		-.21	.35*	-	
4. Teacher belief for PI	-.26	-.05	.18	-	.23	-.05	.00	-
5. Parental Involvement	.24	.18	.46*	-.10	.34**	-15	-.01	.21
Parenting	.00	.00	.41*	.27	.29*	-.20	-.10	.17
Communication	.34*	.06	.44*	-.37	.21	.12	.07	.07
Decision-making	.29	.17	.35	-.13	.57**	-.35**	-.07	.22
Collaboration	.40*	.26	.40	-.42	.23	-.11	.05	.14
Volunteering	.85	.19	.40*	.19	.11	.02	.04	.19

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

To further answer the third research question, regarding the relations between school efforts, teacher beliefs and teacher experience, a two stepwise regression analyses using pairwise deletion predicting teacher experience separately for primary school and preschools was conducted. School composition variables, SES and ethnicity, were added in the first step and school efforts and teacher beliefs in the second step. The results show that for preschool, the overall model explains 33% of the variance and is a significant predictor of teachers' rated experience scores, $F(3, 21) = 5.10$, $p < .01$. However, while parental involvement efforts significantly predicted teachers' rated experience, (B = .58, $p < .05$), ethnicity showed a marginal significance, (B = -.79, $p = 0.53$) and SES (B = .43, $p > .05$) did not contribute to the model. Also for primary school, the results show a significant model, ($R^2 = .13$, $F(3, 42) = 2.14$, $p > .05$) in which ethnicity is a significant predictor to teachers experience (B = .63, $p < .05$).

Discussion

Results of this study show that overall, (pre)schools in Kosovo make moderate levels of effort for involving parents; teachers have quite a non-problem oriented, egalitarian and understanding experience with parents and 35.8% of them agree or strongly agree with the statement that child education should be a shared responsibility between school and home.

No significant difference is found on the efforts made for parental involvement neither between (pre)school comprised of students coming from low and high socioeconomic background, nor between schools comprised of low or high student population with a cultural minority background.

Significant differences are found in teacher experiences. Teachers working in preschools with children from a higher socioeconomic background report a more positive experience than those working in preschools comprised of lower SES population. However, in primary schools, interestingly enough, teachers in the low SES group report a more positive experience, although the difference is not significant. Other studies have found that parents who are employed full-time are less likely to be involved at the school (Castro et al., 2004; Ross Phillips, 2002) and have reported less satisfaction with their parental involvement experience than parents who are unemployed or employed part time. It might be the case that parents coming from a low socio-economic background in these schools, specifically unemployed mothers have more time to commit to their participation in the school than employed mothers from high socioeconomic backgrounds, thus resulting in a better teacher experience. When asked about the participation of minority parents, and the factors that might hinder their involvement, a teacher in the current study answered about the parents in her group by saying "On the contrary, they are more collaborating. They contribute more and are excited to come [to the kindergarten]".

Next, interestingly, in terms of ethnicity, the results show that teachers working with parents from different ethnicities have reported a significantly higher positive experience. To further understand this finding, the explanation might be in the community around these schools. In a study by Smith and colleagues (1997) neighbourhood climate was significantly associated with parent involvement at school and at home for elementary school students. While in different cultures it might be the case of unfamiliarity and discontinuity between schools and families of different ethnicity that hinder positive relations (Hill & Taylor, 2004), the context of these schools in Kosovo is quite different. Schools with high ethnical diversity and low socioeconomic status are mostly located in more peripheral rural areas, consisting of a smaller number of families, hence a smaller student population. According to Barker's theory (1978), in smaller, more intimate communities, social networks are more common. Thus parents in smaller schools are more likely to be involved. From the interviews conducted in the current study, one teacher who was talking very proudly about their partnership with parents said "We are not a big school, and that is probably why we have managed to engage parents to this extent". Schools in this research are part of a community

that meet each other more often and are familiar with each other's lives and histories. Positive interactions that proceed and take time apart from problem-oriented discussion may foster trust, which is a crucial element for establishing professional-parent collaboration (Lopez, Kreider, Caspe, 2004; Nakonezny & Denton, 2008) and parent satisfaction, regardless of the background status (Adams & Christenson, 2000). It might also be the case that these parents highly value the authority of the teacher, thus do not challenge it, resulting in a more positive experience for teachers (Lareau & Weininger, 2003)

Further, the study investigated the relationship between school organisational policies for parental involvement, teacher perceived experience and their beliefs about sharing responsibility with parents. The results show that schools' organisational efforts, mediated by teacher experience do not predict teacher beliefs about parental involvement. It might be a limitation of this study that that teachers beliefs about parental involvement were not captured by the single item used to measure it. Further, the item asked about the child's development and learning as a shared responsibility between teachers' and parents. Grouping development and learning together in one item might have affected the answers, as teachers may have a different understanding of the relationship between education and each of them, thus have different opinions for each of them (Hornby, 2011). For example, if they believe educations concern merely schooling, then they might believe that teachers have the main responsibility for child education. However, they may believe that development is a shared responsibility. In addition, teachers' beliefs are also deeply rooted within their own historical, economic, educational experiences. Radu (2011) reasons that in the countries of South East Europe, education was solely perceived as the responsibility of the school. This also came forward in the interviews, as one primary school director expressed that they are working hard to change the former mindset that parents' responsibility is only to bring the child to the school. A preschool teacher and director also argued that preschool is broadly perceived as a place where children only eat and sleep; thus, parental involvement is not considered necessary. As such, it might be that parental involvement is on a transition phase in Kosovo. Given this, this finding should be perceived with caution as it is one snapshot in time. However, it may also be a limitation in the measure.

The second focus of this study was to test whether institutional efforts promote teachers' individual experience. Evidence was found suggesting that parental involvement efforts predict teachers' rated experience. However, this was only found for preschool. Douglass (2011) also suggests that the context of the school and the relations among the schools staff, reflect on the school-home interactions. She found that the organisational

structures and processes that offer a balance of power, opportunities to express knowledge, show care, reciprocity and respect, are associated with higher quality partnership in early childhood education. One reason that in the current research the school efforts predict teacher experience only in preschool might be because these are smaller institutions, with smaller groups for each teacher. This may leave more time for teachers to devote to parents and collaboration with them. Also, as preschools are the first environment that introduces families to an educational institution, major efforts to welcome and involve parents are reported (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). As the number of students for which teachers are responsible increases, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to communicate individually and maintain relationships with each parent.

Limitations and future research

The present study has several limitations. First, a sample for adequate group comparison, clearly distinguishing schools low and high in socioeconomic status was not established due to time and administrative issues. The low SES groups of this research consisted of schools scoring very high in low SES student population, but also 20 institutions that fall in the 50% of its student population from a low socioeconomic background. There was a considerable survey return from low SES schools, which may have biased the results. Future research should include more representative groups. Further, the questions in this survey concern the practices, experiences and beliefs towards parents in general, the answers of which, especially on the individual teacher level, might not be representative for minority parents. As one kindergarten director said when asked particularly for the involvement of parents from a low socioeconomic background: “You know, we make efforts to involve parents, but for minority parents, you know how they are, there is not much they can do”. Future research should also add questions explicitly directed for the involvement of minority parents.

Next, the answer scale of schools’ efforts for parental involvement ranged from *never* to *always*, which could be ambiguous. Future research should quantify the answer in weeks or months in order to avoid subjective perceptions and misinterpretations. Another limitation is the teacher belief variable. As the scale did not show sufficient internal consistency, only one general item was used. This might not have captured the full picture of teachers’ beliefs. Future research should aim to measure teacher beliefs for parental involvement in more components.

Social desirability might be another limitation, as this thesis research was also introduced as part of an international research project, involving similar research in Western countries. Finally, during the interviews, one school director said: “…we have parent council,

class councils, which I have to say, in the beginning, they existed only in letter, but are active now…". As such, it is important to keep in mind that this research measures the schools' organisational efforts as reported by the school directors, however, it does not measure their actual implementation, as it also does not account for the actual involvement and professional-parent interactions.

Conclusions and implications

Despite these limitations, the present study provides some insights into school factors that are suggested to influence parental engagement, especially with regards to parents from various backgrounds. This research gives new insight into parental involvement in Kosovo, showing that overall, the participating schools make a considerable effort for parental involvement, showing no significant difference among schools of various backgrounds. Further, teachers have a moderately positive experience with parents. That is, they share an understanding, have a more egalitarian relation, and don't communicate only when there are problems. However, only 35.8% agree or strongly agree that child development and learning is a shared responsibility between school and home. Future policies and programmes should address these beliefs of professionals in a contextual approach.

Lastly, a more positive teacher experience in this study is predicted by organisational policies in preschools, and by higher cultural background population in schools. It has been argued that the reason for this might be that in practice, in preschools, parental involvement might occur more frequently, and teachers have a smaller number of parents to collaborate with, and neighbourhoods of schools comprised of high cultural minority backgrounds in Kosovo might have more intimate, trusting communities. How teachers work and feel about their relationship with parents is of crucial importance to establish and maintain parental involvement. Their interaction should be critically reflective, identifying the beliefs and power dynamics they bring to these relations and the biases they may have. Future research should further investigate the contextual factors behind these findings on teacher experience and teacher belief in order for professionals to implement practices that foster a positive, more equal, teacher-parent relation.

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