

Parental involvement in Kosovar education: Relationships with gender, education and employment variables

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Abstract

This article aims to make an initial probe into parent involvement in children's academic-related activities and how this is affected by the parents' gender, education and employment variables. Most of the articles written on parental academic support focus on corroborating the positive relationship of parental involvement with student school achievement and cover samples from countries other than Kosova. This is the first correlational study which aims to show the significance of relationships of the specific demographic variables of Kosovar parents and the frequency of their homework help. Data are analysed using frequency distribution and chi-square for the correlation significance. The findings corroborate a higher percentage of females in parental involvement, and a negative correlation of parental involvement with employment and level of education. Implications and explanations for future research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: Academic success, homework help, Kosovar education, parent involvement, primary level.

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1. Introduction

In today's fast-changing society, schools too need to make their share of adaptation in order to deliver the educational services to the community in the most efficient way. Involving parents in the education process is one way schools can increase their efficiency. However, these changes have not progressed evenly throughout the globe leaving some countries still struggling with the right educational policies for their respective countries. Kosova is one of them. Twenty years on, the country is well into its nationhood, but its current educational system is still a newborn.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST, 2016a) in Kosova has identified several priorities until the end of 2021, including quality assurance in teaching, professional development of teachers and higher education. Despite this newly administered strategic planning and the institutional awareness that more is needed to advance education in Kosova, there are a lot of challenges Kosovars face such as loss of social trust in schools, widespread copying phenomena (MEST, 2016a) and insufficient support for teachers and the teaching (Turtulla, 2019). It is evident that there is a need for a more diverse and organised action if Kosova is to tackle these deep-rooted educational challenges.

1.1. Conceptual framework

This study draws on two theoretical models of education: Epstein et al.'s (2002) theory of overlapping spheres of influence and Coleman's theory of social capital. The former recognises the strength of parents in increasing academic achievement of children (Epstein et al., 2002) and the latter identifies the physical presence of parents at home and the attention they give to their children at home as specific elements within parental involvement (Coleman, 1988). The importance of including parents in the education of their children has been recognised as early as 1960s, which brought into attention two facts: schools are not the only places where children get education and parents should be included as co-partners in national educational documents and national curricula (Arthur et al., 2006). Education researchers have studied the possibilities of how parents, schools and the community, the three most influential factors in students' academic success, can work together to raise children's achievement in schools (Epstein et al., 2002).

These three factors are grouped in Epstein et al.'s (2002) theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which lays the firm foundation for children to learn and grow within their caring families, protective schools and supporting communities. All these three actors have a stake at students' success: parents feel proud, schools increase reputation and community expands its social capital and they work together to reaffirm to children the importance of schooling and to motivate them to take the responsibility for their own learning (Epstein et al., 2002). In order to achieve this, the three stakeholders join in partnership programmes where mutual dependency and assistance is shared transferring schools into environments of 'academic excellence, good communication and productive interactions involving school, family and community' where children, once they finish their education, take out positive experiences with them from schools (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 10).

However, the effectiveness of parental involvement is possible only when parents and children have a healthy relationship at home, which Coleman (1988) defines as social capital within family where parents spend quality time with their children while helping them become successful at school and passing on to them the importance of learning. The social capital as defined by Coleman (1988) is the relationship between people within any given social structure including the family with the ability to produce human capital, amongst others. This relationship is based on mutual trust, inter-dependence, share of valuable information and effective norms. Despite having all of these essential elements, families can produce academically successful children if they can actually find time to physically interact with their children, i.e., get involved with their school achievements.

1.2. Related research

There are various ways how parents can interact and help their children grow academically. Research reveals that parental influences can take various forms in the education of their offspring within the home environment. Some of the best ways that show how parents can help are monitoring and helping with homework (McNeal, 2014), as well as discussions where parents instil the 'habits of a positive attitude to knowledge, good communication skills and positive behaviours towards others' (Arthur et al., 2006, p. 383). This form of behavioural pattern of education used by parents is in positive correlation with students' academic achievement and also conforms to what schools expect from parents (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Sujarwo et al., 2021).

However, most of this research is undertaken in the States and less in other countries (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011), particularly in Kosova. Those few undertaken are usually the ones supported by international institutions such as the Centre for Democratic Education in Albania or the Centre for Education in Kosova. Such studies focus mainly on the importance of including parents in school activities, teacher meetings and parent boards (CDE, 2008; Gashi & Pupovci, 2010), but there are scarce studies on correlational relationships between specific variables of influence.

The issue of parental involvement in Kosova is slow to enter into the national educational strategies and far from getting the merit it deserves. For example, parental involvement is referred to only within the aspect of awareness in the strategy of MEST (2016b) for Quality Insurance in Primary and Secondary Education in Kosova for the period 2016–2020 where parental involvement is seen as a prerequisite to advance educational policies. While in the 5-year strategic plan 2017–2021 report, parental involvement is included as one of its objectives in managing the education system where parents are empowered to have a greater role in decision-making processes of schools. In the same report, parent–school partnership is emphasised through the use of parent councils and parent information (MEST, 2016a).

In practice, parental involvement in Kosovar education is still feeble and there is a need for more research to increase the positive influences of parents in the academic achievement of their students and decrease the negative ones (Cooper, 2007). This cross-sectional study focuses on specific aspects of parent involvement and aims to gather initial data for further research on this important aspect of children's academic success, hoping results obtained here will contribute to Kosovar education by addressing the challenges of its 5-year strategic plan 2017–2021 in order to base policymaking on research results rather than individual presumptions (MEST, 2016a). Referring to Epstein et al.'s (2002, p. 15) theory of overlapping spheres of influence, we focused on the fourth type of involvement 'Learning at home', which includes in itself helping with homework and other interactive activities such as monitoring and guiding. This is a specific parent involvement which differs from other aspects of such involvement, for example, partnerships with schools or with other parents (McNeal, 2014). Research shows that the most effective parent involvement in school matters of their children are parent–child discussions. These are talks about the importance of school, active monitoring of children's activities at home and making sure homework and other school projects are done and submitted timely (McNeal, 2014).

1.3. Purpose of the study

Therefore, this article looks at parental involvement related to help with homework (Cooper, 2007) rather than other forms of parent–school or parent–teacher relationships because it is more productive as compared to others (Williams, 1998). This study is the first large-scale inclusion of parents in the educational research in Kosova with over 3,000 participants (Lee & Bowen, 2006) and specific variables of interest including gender, education and employment status of parents. The study included only the primary grades because research has shown that parent involvement in earlier grades can help increase

academic success later on (Cooper, 2007; Hill & Taylor, 2004; McNeal, 2014; Williams, 1998). Unlike other researches, this study did not focus on marital status because Kosovar society has significantly low levels of single parents based on the average of divorces at only 4.63% in 2019 as per the Kosovar Agency of Statistics (Agjencia e Statistikave te Kosoves, 2021). Because previous researches showed that higher female involvement did not vary across ethnic groups (Fleischmann & de Haas, 2016), we did not have a separate variable for ethnic groups either. However, we have included employment status and parent educational level because of positive correlations with involvement (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

2. Method and materials

2.1. Research model

This study used the survey research design and correlational methods. As explained by Cohen et al. (2007), surveys are used to gather cross-sectional data from a large group of participants for a variety of reasons including to describe the present state of events, identify standards for purposes of comparison and present relationships between specific variables. The survey design was used by researchers in order to collect relevant data through questionnaires including gender, education, working status of the parents and the amount of homework help that parents give to their children. On the other hand, correlational research in this study is used to determine the significance of relationships between the variables of interest through the use of chi-square analysis which is usually used with bivariate and categorical data such as gender or employment status (Cohen et al., 2007).

2.2. Participants

Participants in this study were parents of the first-, second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students ($n = 3,242$) who attended a total of 13 public primary schools located in the community of Prizren, which is the second largest town in Kosova. This study included only the public schools because parents of these children are more involved with their academic activities than the parents of children who attend private schools (Karibayeva & Bogar, 2014). From a total of 3,502 questionnaires, and after removing questionnaires with blanks, the sample size in this study reached a total of 3,242 parents with the following breakdown: 76% of the parents are female ($n = 2,465$) and 24% are male ($n = 777$); 78% of the parents have finished high school ($n = 2,520$), 18% university ($n = 589$), 3% MA ($n = 107$) and 1% PhD ($n = 26$); and 59% of them are unemployed ($n = 1,915$) while 41% are employed ($n = 1,327$). From the total number of children, 49.6% are girls

($n = 1,609$), 50.3% are boys ($n = 1,633$), 28% of them attended first grade ($n = 907$), 19% second grade ($n = 608$), 21% third grade ($n = 669$), 16% fourth grade ($n = 520$) and 17% fifth grade

($n = 538$).

2.3. Data collection tools

This study used questionnaires developed by the researchers themselves to get the necessary data. Apart from the rationale and description, the questionnaires consisted of two sections: one about parents and the other about children. For the purposes of this study, we focused on demographic variables of only one of the parents who was the most involved with the child's homework, including gender, educational level, employment status and homework help. The variable of homework help consisted of three possible response options, including *no*, *sometimes* and *yes*. The second section included data about children's gender and the grade they went to.

2.4. Data collection process

In this research, the data collection process began with researchers sending official letters to get the permission from the Community Education Board of Prizren region in order to conduct the research.

Next, the researchers contacted the school principals of the 13 primary schools and gave them the board’s permission and the questionnaires. They were asked to give these questionnaires to all the first-through-fifth-grade teachers in their respective schools who would in turn through students deliver them to the parents. The questionnaires were received through the same route. A total of 3,502 questionnaires were administered while questionnaires with blanks were removed.

2.5. Data analysis

Data were analysed using frequency count and percentage distribution for the variables of interest, while the chi-square test was used to analyse the correlation of bivariate variables with reference to gender, education and employment. This data analysis compares the expected results with the actual one to measure how significant is the difference between the two results (Cohen et al., 2007).

3. Results

Based on gender distribution of parental involvement, the findings show an uneven gender distribution where 76% of the parents are female and only 24% are male, as seen in Table 1. Because of the highly skewed results for parent gender, the education level of participants follows the similar pattern, where females show higher percentage than males in all levels of education, as seen in Figure 1, where 78% of the females are high school graduates as opposed to 22% of males; 72% of the females compared to 28% males are university graduates. For the last two levels MA and PhD, there is a slight decrease in the number of females that hold MA and PhD degrees (60% and 58%, respectively) as opposed to males where we see an increase in the percentage (40% and 42%, respectively).

Table 1. Distribution of parents based on gender

Parent gender	Frequency	Relative frequency	Percentage
Female	2,465	0.7603	76
Male	777	0.2397	24
Total	3,242	1.0000	100

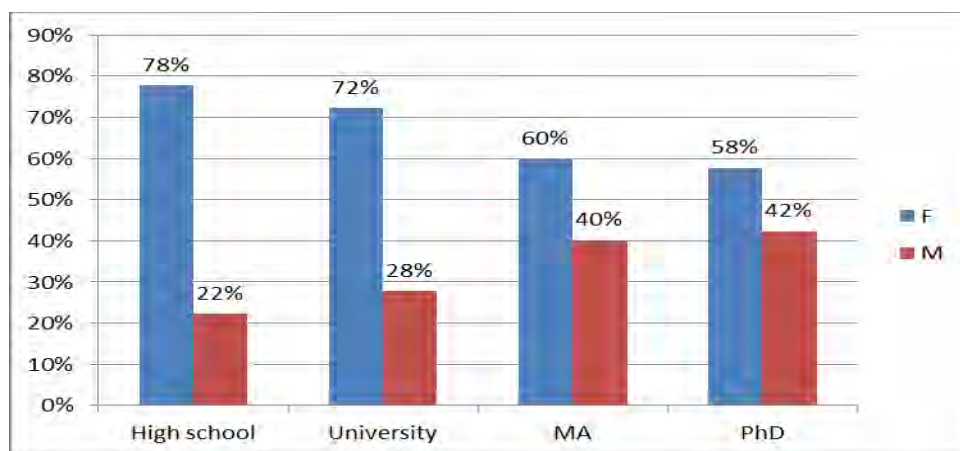


Figure 1. Distribution of gender variable based on education level

Further findings for employment show that 59% ($n = 1,915$) of the participants are unemployed, of which 70% are females and 25% are unemployed males (Table 2), while 41% ($n = 1,327$) are employed, of

which there is a higher percentage of males who are employed (75%) as opposed to only 30% of females (Table 3).

Table 2. Distribution of employment variable

Employment	Frequency	Relative frequency	Percentage
Unemployed	1,915	0.591	59
Employed	1,327	0.409	41
Total	3,242	1.000	100

Table 3. Contingency table of employment and gender variable

Employment status	Female	Male	Row total
Unemployed	70%	25%	59%
Employed	30%	75%	41%
Grand total	100%	100%	100%

The results for distribution of education level show highest percentage for high school degree holders (78%), followed by 18% of university degree holders, 3% MA and 1% PhD holders (Figure 2).

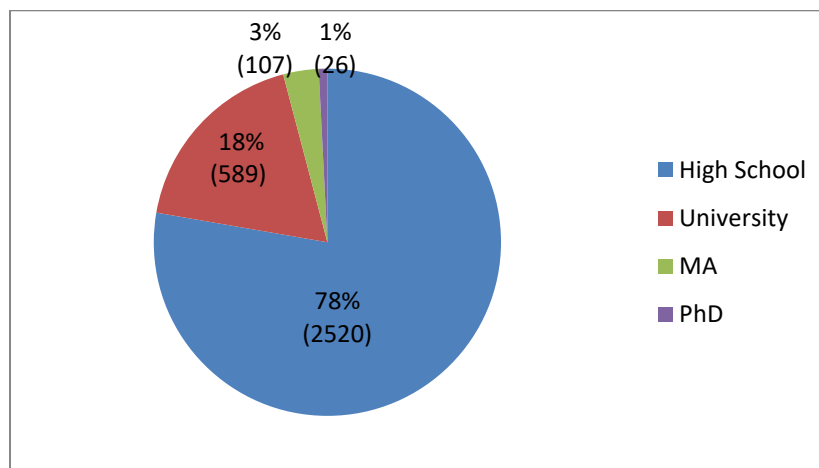


Figure 2. Distribution of education level of parents

Table 4. Distribution of homework help

Homework help	Frequency	Relative frequency	Percentage
Yes	1,902	0.587	59
Sometimes	1,234	0.381	38
No	106	0.033	3
Total	3,242	1.000	100

From the total of all parents, 59% stated that they help children with their homework, 38% said they help sometimes and only 3% said they do not help (Table 4). The observed frequency of homework help for parent gender differed significantly from what would be expected: $\chi^2 (2, n = 3,242) = 9.04, p \leq 0.05$; our problem χ^2 was 9.04 and our critical $\chi^2 (0.05, 2)$ was 5.99. Therefore, parent gender is significantly related to homework help (Table 5).

Table 5. Correlation of gender and homework help variables

Gender	No	Sometimes	Yes	Total
Female	2%	28%	46%	76%
Male	1%	10%	13%	24%
Total	3%	38%	59%	100%

Chi-square = 9.04, $p = 0.05$.

Out of 59% of the parents that help their children with homework, 36% are unemployed and 23% are employed (Figure 3). The similar pattern is seen in other options of homework help where the percentage of unemployed parents is higher as compared to employed ones (21% and 17%, respectively). The observed frequency of homework help for parent employment differed significantly from what would be expected: $\chi^2 (2, n = 3,242) = 10.585, p \leq 0.05$; our problem χ^2 was 10.585 and our critical $\chi^2 (0.05, 2)$ was 5.991. Therefore, parent employment status is significantly related to homework help (Table 6).

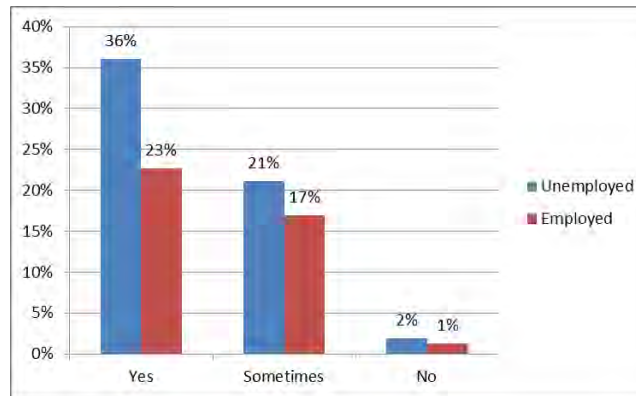


Figure 3. Distribution of employment status and homework help

Table 6. Correlation of employment and homework help variables

Parent employment	No	Sometimes	Yes	Grand total
No	63 (2%)	685 (21%)	1,167 (36%)	1,915 (59%)
Yes	43 (1%)	549 (17%)	735 (23%)	1,327 (41%)
Total	106 (3%)	1,234 (38%)	1,902 (59%)	3,242 (100%)

Chi-square = 10.58503, $p = 0.05$.

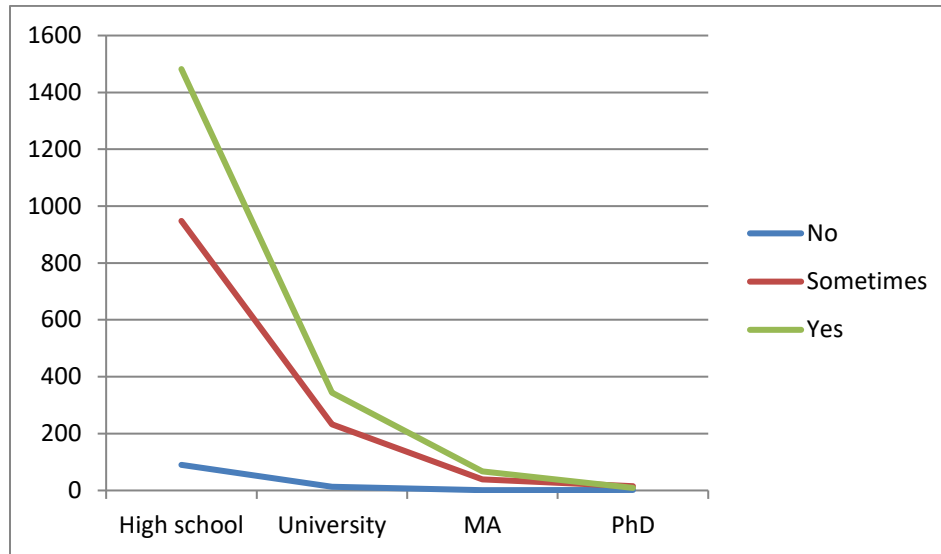


Figure 4. Distribution of education level and homework help

The findings for correlation of education level and homework help show negative correlation, where less education results in higher parent involvement, a staggering 78% (Figure 4). The observed frequency of homework help for parent education level does not differ significantly from what would be expected: $\chi^2 (6, n = 3,242) = 12.04708, p \leq 0.05$; our problem χ^2 was 12.04708 and our critical $\chi^2 (0.05, 6)$ was 12.59159. Therefore, parent education level is not associated with homework help (Table 7).

Table 7. Correlation of education level and homework help variables

Education level	Homework help frequency			Grand Total
	No	Sometimes	Yes	
High school	90 (2.78%)	948 (29.24%)	1,482 (45.71%)	2,520 (77.73%)
University	13 (0.40%)	232 (7.16%)	344 (10.61%)	589 (18.17%)
MA	1 (0.03%)	39 (1.20%)	67 (2.07%)	107 (3.30%)
PhD	2 (0.06%)	15 (0.46%)	9 (0.28%)	26 (0.80%)
Grand total	106 (3.27%)	1,234 (38.06%)	1,902 (58.67%)	3,242 (100%)

Chi-square = 12.04708, $p = 0.05$.

The results for distribution of homework help and school grade show the highest percentage of homework help is given to first graders 20%, followed by second graders 12.3%, third graders 11.8%, fourth graders 7.4% and fifth graders 7.2% (Table 8). There is a negative association between homework help and school grade where homework help declines with an increase in grades, as opposed to parents who do not help and help sometimes where the curve is somewhat stable (Figure 5).

Table 8. Distribution of homework help and school grade

School grade	No	Sometimes	Yes	Total
First	0.2%	7.7%	20.0%	28.0%
Second	0.4%	6.0%	12.3%	18.8%

Third	0.5%	8.3%	11.8%	20.6%
Fourth	1.1%	7.6%	7.4%	16.0%
Fifth	1.0%	8.5%	7.2%	16.6%
Grand total	3.3%	38.1%	58.7%	100.0%

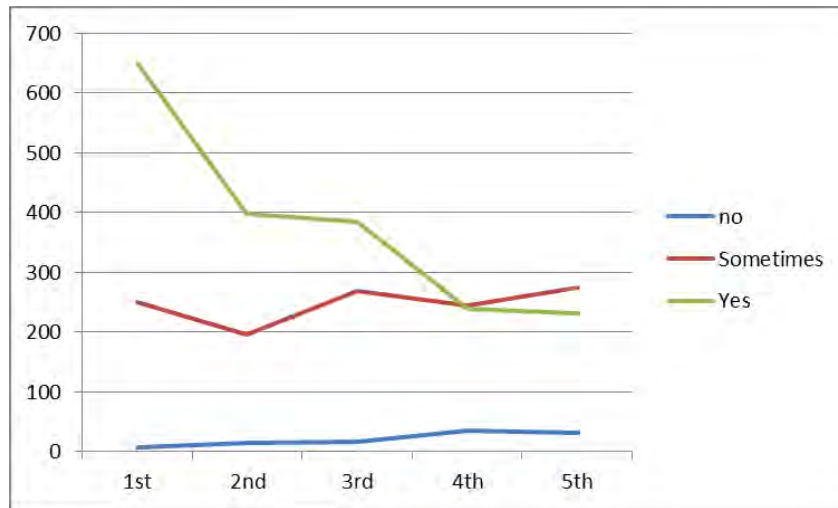


Figure 5. Distribution of school grade and homework help

4. Discussion

The results in this study corroborate previous research findings where the percentage of mothers is much higher than that of fathers, suggesting that mothers take the responsibility for school involvement more than fathers (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Williams, 1998), and parent working hours do not affect their involvement (Fleischmann & de Haas, 2016; Sujarwo et al., 2021). Although parental involvement over years has been redefined due to social changes in different countries where the number of fathers who participate in schoolwork has increased (Arthur et al., 2006; Williams, 1998), this study failed to confirm that.

Furthermore, employment status is another factor that affects parental involvement showing higher levels of involvement from unemployed mothers than from employed fathers. This may be explained due to the fact that parent involvement is influenced by the amount of time that parents can afford to work with their children at home (Williams, 1998), helping them with homework and other school projects. Other researches revealed that daily obligations can be some of the reasons that prevent parents from giving quality time to learning at home (CDE, 2008). This involvement is seen as more important in poorer families and impoverished communities as compared to wealthier families (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006) who can afford private schooling where children need less assistance with homework (Karibayeva & Bogar, 2014). These findings are supported with this study also because our data sample is collected from public schools only, not private ones.

In addition to factors such as time restraints, parental involvement is affected also by parents' own academic level (Fleischmann & de Haas, 2016; Karibayeva & Bogar, 2014). Highest frequency of homework help is recorded from parents who have the lowest education level suggesting that more education decreases the time parents spend helping their children with homework. These findings are consistent with other research where positive correlation is seen between parent educational level and

school involvement, but negative with homework help frequency (Lee & Bowen, 2006), but are contrary to research where parents with higher educational level show higher levels of involvement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Additionally, these findings are in line with previous research where earlier parent involvement can help increase academic success later on (Cooper, 2007; Hill & Taylor, 2004; McNeal, 2014; Williams, 1998), which suggests that if the highest frequency of homework help is given within first 2 years of children's schooling, this need can decrease later on with fourth and fifth grades; however, this decrease is not observed when help is infrequent or absent.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The results of this study reflect that parents play an active role in the lives of their children taking their share of responsibilities in increasing academic success of their children (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Karibayeva & Bogar, 2014; Lee & Bowen, 2006). This open and scientific acknowledgment entails with it governmental changes in school policies. These changes should address specific needs of parents, which seem to prevent or promote better involvement, so that their school involvement is improved for the benefit of future generations. Educational institutions should find alternative methods to align their efforts with each individual parent (Lee & Bowen, 2006). This also means decreasing the negative impact that this involvement might have, i.e., leaving parents feeling 'uncomfortable or unable to take on the role of teacher' (Cooper, 2007, p. 59). Such endeavours by school administrators or other educational institutions such as parent trainings for longer periods of time (Cooper, 2007) should be considered carefully when loading parents with even more training on top of their daily jobs.

We hope that the results from this study will contribute to state policymakers to make the necessary adjustments in the education and employment policies in order to increase the support to parents in helping their children achieve academic success. Due to limitations of this study, future research should include data from other areas of Kosova in order to reach a better comparison of parental involvement across regions.

Still, the results of this study should exercise caution when generalised to the entire Kosovar society due to the following limitations of this study: (1) we relied on data only from Prizren town; (2) only public schools are included, not private ones; and (3) we relied solely on self-reported aspect of questionnaires without considering other data to validate results, which makes these results biased from the aspect of social approval (Fleischmann & de Haas, 2016).

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