



SCHOOL-PARENT PARTNERSHIP AS PART OF SCHOOL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

School- parent partnership plays an important role in student development by providing a stronger school-parent relationship leading to student achievement with the cooperation of teachers, parents and school administrators (Aslanargun, 2007). Also, the partnership is generally a part of school governance structure and should be involved in the learning and teaching process to increase the quality of learning and students' achievement through parental involvement. In this context, the purpose of this study was to evaluate how the current school-parent partnership policy was functioning in Turkey and explore its different dimensions from the perspectives of its different stakeholders to better understand the current interactions and roles its stakeholders have in this process. Qualitative research design was employed to obtain rich and in-depth information and the sample school was purposefully selected due to its distinct success in a disadvantaged area and its recent reputation in the media. Michael Patton's Utilization-Focused Evaluation Model was taken as the basis and the data were collected via semi-structured interviews from parents, teachers, school administrators and the partnership members in this public school and analyzed through content analysis. The results revealed that the partnership was functioning well in terms of its formation and daily duties related to the school's short-term needs, but that it was having some difficulties in providing constant financial support for the school, organizing and taking part in extra-curricular educational activities for the students and involving the parents in their children's school education.

Keywords: school-parent partnership, parent involvement in education, school governance

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Theoretical Background and Origin of the Program

Recent global developments in technology, communication and transportation have brought about economic globalization and democratization in numerous service sectors including education, and primary education seems to be getting its own share in the unescapable process. Specifically, with the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the governments are, in a way, expected or forced to eliminate any barriers to trade in services, one of which is education, and to promote the policies of liberalization, privatization and market expansion in education and this seems to change the purpose and the function of the state together with its agencies and policies regarding education. This whole process requires a less interventionist state in public services like primary education causing it to pass the buck to schools and makes way for the private sector in the short term and maybe the global corporate power in the long run in what is now called a "free, open and state/community-sponsored endeavor". This new system also brings changes to the roles and responsibilities of schools and the parents, who are the real and direct providers



and the receivers of this service. With the democratization process in the education sector, parental involvement in education has gained even more importance and parents have become an essential part of school governance especially in primary education level. Today, more than ever, do schools and families need to cooperate to be able to help the education system in general and the schools in specific to realize their goals (Steketee, A. M., 2004).

School and family are the two core social structures in the society, with the child at the centre, working together for a common goal to nurture social individuals along with academic success. Therefore, these two parties are expected to take their own responsibilities and to fully cooperate to reach their ultimate goal, which is ensuring student development. School- parent partnership (SPP) enters into discussion here as it plays an important role in this by providing a stronger school-parent relationship, which subsequently leads to effective student achievement by the efforts and contributions of teachers, parents and school administrators. Also, the partnership is generally a part of school governance structure and is involved in the learning and teaching process to increase the quality of learning and students' achievement through parental involvement (Clase et al., (2007).

In the literature, it is assumed that parent is one of the most important voluntary contributors of schools and managerial processes, and may take on different roles in the abovementioned parental involvement. As stated by William&Chovkin(1989), there are six types of parental roles as audience, home tutor, programme supporter, co learner, advocate and decision maker while there are four types of parental involvement according to Cervone&Oleary (1982) as reporting progress, attending special events, becoming educated and teaching. Greenwood& Hickman(1991) talks about five types of parental involvement as acting as audience, volunteering, teaching their own children, learning and decision making. As for parental involvement, according to Epstein (1995), Voorhis and Sheldon(2004), there are basically six types of involvement and these can be listed as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, collaborating with the community (as cited in Sabancı, 2010). Today, however, parental involvement seems to mean more than those above.

In addition to the different roles parents can take on, studies also focus on different stakeholders' opinions about factors related to functioning and effectiveness of teacher- parent associations and their suggestions. In general, parents' opinions focus on the necessity of forming a foundation to provide school- parent partnership while those of teachers emphasize the execution of school –parent cooperation in a systematic way and determining the subjects of meetings to improve this cooperation process. It is also mentioned that teachers and parents should be provided with activities on serving common values and ideas about collaboration (Balkar, 2009).

The related literature also sheds light on the different expectations of schools and parents in this process. Gökçe (2000) states that school administrators and teachers expect parents to ease their job by attending school meetings and sharing their responsibilities while parents want to take active roles, express their choice and voice, and see improvements in the quality of education and social activities. On the whole, teachers' suggestions are clustered around providing school- parent cooperation and participation of parents to work in the school parent partnership and giving importance to the opinions of parents. On the other hand, parents' suggestions are about their active involvement in school administration and forming effective communication, arrangement of regular meetings and providing a functional school- parent partnership. Overall, both groups agree on the need of continuous cooperation.

The literature also reveals the problems of school-parent partnership in general. As stated by Porsuk&Kunt (2012), socioeconomic status of the school region might produce problems between schools



and parents. Furthermore, problems might arise due to financial problems of administration, educational problems of parents, or dysfunctional school parent meetings. Another study by Aslanargun (2007) mentions the restrictions of active participation of parents in school processes as dysfunctional school-parent partnership in schools, lack of communication between school administration and parents, unfruitful and ineffective meetings of school-parent partnership. According to these studies, parents complain about the ineffectiveness of the partnership whereas schools tend to attribute the failure of school-parent cooperation mostly to parental factors.

There are many factors which play a crucial role in the quality of relationship between schools and parents. School-parent partnership is mentioned as one of these factors. An ineffective school-parent partnership might have adverse effects on building school-parent cooperation while the opposite may yield very positive results in schools. There are examples of this in different countries.

Studies show that school board politics operate differently in the world. For instance, the literature on school boards for the USA mostly relies on the board's relationship with superintendent, superintendents' viewpoints and management of the board while there is also some information on school boards' management of community relationships in order to help a school district for enactment of a particular policy. Generally, local school boards play an important role for the continuity of democratic society because they have power of hiring, firing and approving school curriculum as an example. Hence, school boards play prominent roles in policy making or shaping and micromanagement (Ehrensals & First, 2008).

On the other hand, the term "school board" gains a different name as school council involving elected members of the school community for Victorian State School in Australia as a different example. These councils are responsible for school accountability, improvement processes with particular responsibilities for economic issues, strategic planning, policy development and review (as cited in Gurr, Drysdale & Walkley, 2012). Importantly, parents play major roles for the welfare of school councils consisting of approximately 6 to 15 members in government schools. Actually, they take active roles in representing all children and promoting the quality of the school. The partnership focuses on some issues like understanding the roles of each partner, home and school learning connection, participation in school programs, activities and decision making processes, collaboration beyond the school and so on. It should be noted that principals are viewed as vital for the establishment of effective school-parent partnership. Nevertheless, parental involvement remains at a managed level in which school-parent partnership is supervised by the school and is classified as a passive school-parent partnership having restricted capacity to help teachers in Catholic and independent schools for Victorian schools (Gurr, Drysdale & Walkley, 2012).

Another study conducted in Kenya shows the existence of school governing bodies as Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and Board of Governors (BOG) both based on voluntary activities with the latter having a legal structure. This formal structure helps parents participate in their children's education process. Although the people working for these structures are unpaid and non-professional, it is accepted that with the help of these structures educational provision is enhanced and quality of education is improved. (Onderi, Makori, 2012). The role of BOG in schools include mainly arranging physical facilities for improving teaching and learning in the school, finding monetary sources (fees, grants, donations and other types of income) and their management. This board is also responsible for recruitment, appointment, discipline of non-teaching staff and management in the school (Wanderi, 2008). The other board, PTA, has emerged from the school Board of Governors' failures and their need for additional financial support from the local community (Hurt, 1985). They have many roles including



bringing school staff and parents together, creating discussion environment for exchanging ideas, organizing social activities, and raising funds. Both PTA and BOG aim to increase the school's academic standards (Onderi, Makori, 2012). These two boards work on different issues but complement each other.

Shortly, most of the studies about school-parent partnership included in the international literature support the involvement of parents, which is effective on academic achievement, school attendance, students' behaviors, and discipline, and the quality of school programs. Moreover, the partnerships seem to have some roles regarding raising financial support and management of monetary issues. Actually, these correspond with the results of many studies in Turkey, where this study was performed, about parental involvement and school parent-partnership.

In Turkey, School- parent partnership is defined as a school board involving managers, teachers, and parents as members who are responsible for school development (ResmiGazete, 1961; ResmiGazete, 2005a). It was discussed in National Education Council in 1946 for the first time and several suggestions were made to strengthen this relationship. Later, school-parent partnership and school preservation societies were established by the Ministry of National Education, but these could not accomplish their intended goals sufficiently. Schools started developing new systems to enrich their relationships with parents in the 1980s (Demirbulak, 2000). Then, school-parent partnership was changed in 2005. According to the new regulation, each parent was a member of the partnership and the chair was selected from among the members. The new regulation differed from the old one in that parents were forced to build cooperation instead of voluntary work (as cited in Ereş, 2009).

According to the regulation, the school parent partnership aimed at providing communication between school and parents, supporting teaching and learning activities, meeting the needs of poor children and supporting schools financially. Overall, this partnership tried to integrate school and parent factors on a common dimension (Anon, 2005).

However, the partnership has not proved very effective as the school-parent relationship has not been considered at a sufficient and qualified level in Turkey (Gökçe, 2000). This might be because of the different expectations or perceptions of parents and schools towards the partnership. According to Kınca (1991), parents mostly expect an increase in their kids' academic achievement, while the schools may have other priorities. Thus, each side should take their own responsibilities and cooperate, which is only possible by revealing the expectations and suggestions of each side clearly to solve the problems and improve the cooperation (Gökçe, 2000), which is one purpose of this study.

There are ample studies in Turkey evaluating the partnership in state schools in accordance with the 2005 regulation. To illustrate, Ereş (2009) tried to determine teachers' opinions toward the duties of school parent partnership in practice. Results show that parents occasionally carry out the duties of improving the physical conditions of schools, socialization of individuals, and duties related to students who need special education. On the other hand, parents don't make adequate effort to help students gain habits for their individual development. Generally, parents succeed in carrying out school responsibilities and obey the rules whereas they fail to support students' socialization and contribute to improvement of activities related to teaching and learning, which might result from the educational, sociocultural and financial levels of families. Different opinions and perceptions of stakeholders may also result in failure on the part of the partnership.

There are other studies in the related literature investigating school-parent relationships from the perspectives of the different stakeholders. For instance, in their study conducted with 25 teachers and 287 parents in a secondary school, Ceylan and Akar (2010) revealed the barriers in front of forming healthy



school-parent relationship as being mainly parents' financial problems, mobility, inconvenience of work hours, students' negligence of transmitting necessary information between their school and parents, unplanned parental visits, and parents' lack of knowledge on the functions of schools and on how to assist them. The study also revealed the agreement of the both sides on a need for development in school-parent cooperation. Another study investigated the opinions of teachers and parents towards school-parent relationship at primary education level in Erzurum and found gaps between the perceptions of parents and teachers in terms of the function of school-parent partnership meetings. The opinions of both teachers and the parents towards school-parent partnership show that school-parent meetings are generally based on the urgent needs of the school, provision of financial aid, students' achievement profiles and discipline problems (Genç, 2005). Indeed, active and healthy school-parent cooperation might help schools accomplish their goals, influence students' behaviours positively and affect students' future lives in a prosperous way. For example Çelenk (2003) states that students whose parents are in a close relationship with the school and have a common understanding are more successful than the others. Besides school achievement, increase in the motivation of students and decrease in behaviour problems might be observed thanks to this cooperation. This is well supported by Sabancı's study (2010) on the views of primary school administrators, teachers and parents to determine the level of parental involvement in Turkey. Results showed that both groups agreed on participation of parents in decision making processes. In addition, a need for the encouragement of participation of families was identified to provide them with more experience in school situations. Parents' attitude was also positive for the effective parental involvement in Turkey. Shortly, systematized knowledge about parental involvement in pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes was suggested.

All of the studies above provide information as to the functioning and effectiveness of the School-Parent Partnership in line with the 2005 and even earlier versions of the Regulation in Turkey. However, with the possible impact of the global policies in primary education and as in many other countries, Turkey also changed its SPP Regulation in 2012 laying the burden on schools and parents via the partnership and leaving schools and families with a big educational and financial responsibility to maintain the schools and to finance the related expenses. Considering the related literature, it appears that it is essential for parents to have a voice in decision making processes in educational issues occurring in schools as much as in management and monetary issues, but burdening the schools, the parents and the partnerships with the whole responsibility may cause serious problems given the various socio-economic conditions of different school contexts. There is an urgent need to investigate this new regulation in practice. Thus, the purpose of this preliminary study is to describe the current school-parent partnership functioning and explore its different dimensions from the perspectives of its different stakeholders to better understand the current interactions and roles its stakeholders have in this process.

1.2. Goals of the Program

According to act 5 in the current School-Parent Partnership Regulation (2012) by the Ministry of National Education, the main goals of the partnership are as follows:

- 1) to provide the integration between the school and the family
- 2) to enable communication and cooperation between the school and the family
- 3) to support the activities that improve the education and instruction at schools
- 4) to meet the vital educational and instructional needs of the school and the financially-deprived students

Apart from these main goals, the partnership aims at supporting schools for strategic planning and its implementation, contributing to the organization of courses, exams, seminars, library and lab work, arts



and sports events and trips in schools, providing financial support for schools through donations, campaigns, kermesses and the use of school facilities for public purposes, keeping records of the school expenses, cooperating with all kinds of education-related institutions and non-governmental organizations and participating in national and international projects.

1.3. Characteristics of the Program

As described in the regulation, the school-parent partnership is a required body in all ministerial schools and educational institutions that serve in Turkey. The partnership has three distinct organs within its main body: a General Assembly, an Administrative Body and a Supervisory Board. The General Assembly is made up of all the members of the partnership and mainly responsible for electing the members of the Administrative Body, which includes five permanent and five substitute members from amongst the parents and any philanthropists, and the Supervisory Board, which contains three permanent members (two teachers and a parent) and three substitute members (two teachers and a parent). The Administrative Body represents the whole partnership and is supposed to gather monthly to carry out its duties and discuss any emerging issues. Overall, the partnership is expected to provide financial support for the school and facilitate the education and instruction at school, but to what extent they can do this is related to many factors such as the school district and the context, the school climate, the parent profile and expectations from the partnership.

1.4. School Context and the Stakeholders

The school that we worked with started providing education during the 1974-1975 academic year as a two-storey building with only 5 classrooms, upon the needs of the emerging Mamak District in Ankara. Later, as the population of the district increased, restorations and additions were made to the building. Finally, an extension was added to the school building in 2002 and today education is carried out in 12 classrooms, with 20 classes, one computer lab and one library. The school went through a general modification during the March-September period of 2012 and was completely renewed with the roof, the toilets, the windows, the doors, and the electrical wiring reconstructed and the inner-outer paint of the walls redone. In addition, projection devices and computers were installed in all classrooms to serve the students during the lessons.

After the advent of the new 4+4+4 system in education, the school became a primary school serving only the first four grades, but at the moment, it is functioning as a middle school as well until it graduates all its middle school students in a gradual fashion till 2015. Now, it serves as a middle school in the mornings and a primary school in the afternoons. There are 24 teachers in total. The school administration is composed of one school principal and one assistant principal. There is also a janitor helping with physical errands in the building.

There are totally 467 students attending this school and most of them come from low-income families living nearby. Most parents work as physical workers in different parts of Ankara while some work as civil servants for the state. There are also immigrant families among the parents. The parents are disadvantaged not only income-wise, but also in terms of their educational and cultural status. They are mostly primary school graduates, and the fathers provide for the family while the mothers are usually at home caring for the kids. That's why most of the parents interested in their child's education and school work are the mothers as the responsibility seems to fall to them. The profile of the parents is reflected on the students negatively because they have difficulty providing their children with suitable conditions to study effectively and helping them with their school work and homework. The students cannot go to private courses or take private lessons to support their school work due to financial constraints. The school



is trying to support some of these students financially, but the school itself seems to have a tight budget, which is not enough even for the basic expenses in the school.

Despite all those disadvantaged conditions mentioned above, the school has gained public and media attention (see Appendix F for the media coverage) during this academic-year after the modifications and renovations carried out within its body. It is now renowned with its changing face, sports achievements and academic success. There is also general satisfaction with the administrative and the teaching staff. There seems to be an actively functioning school-parent partnership in the school although the school context seems to limit its operations because of economic constraints.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATION STUDY

2.1. Purpose of the evaluation

As indicated in the introduction and literature review parts in detail, the relationship between families and the school is of vital importance in school education. In this context, an appropriate relationship basically comprises meaningful communication and prolific interaction between two sides, the school staff and the parents, with the ultimate aim of “the betterment of the educational process”. In today’s schooling system, this is an indispensable need for contemporary education.

In order to achieve this aim, School-Parent Partnership (SPP) systems are assigned by ministries of education (by MoNE in Turkey) as the official authoritative mediating organ. What this organization must do is defined in the regulations as documents; however, what the actual function of the SPP is, how it is working in real conditions, to what extent it can fulfill the assignments written in the regulations, to what extent it can attain the objectives planned/expected, etc. are all crucial points to be evaluated in order to draw inferences to correct the failing parts and to improve the well-working units. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the genuine conditions and deeds of the SPP with the ultimate aim of improvement of the system while finding out positive aspects that will lead other schools to the extent the findings can be transferable.

2.2. Evaluation model

Since the crucial points presented above are directly related to the actual processes rather than the bureaucracy, it is proper that a model which is focused on the stakeholders should be preferred for analysis. On the other hand, the evaluation should also emphasize the significance of “the utility” of the whole study since the evaluation of the actual conditions and authentic environment will be conducted. Accordingly, the inferences obtained from the findings will be directed to actual use by actual users. Thus, Patton’s “Utilization-focused Evaluation Model” was regarded as the best-fitting design for the study. Specifically, Patton himself indicates this viewpoint through these words defining evaluation: “A decision-making framework for enhancing the utility and actual use of evaluations.” “A process for making decisions about and focusing an evaluation on intended use by intended users” (Patton, 2008).

The most important aspect of the model concerning this study is that it addresses the primary/intended users, stakeholders rather than general/possible audiences. In this context, we studied on the members of the SPP, the teachers, the parents and the administrators of the school.

Concerning the roles of the (external) evaluator, both during the planning and implementing stages, we considered the following points about the model:

- to facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful consideration of how everything that will be done, from beginning to end, will affect use.



- to help intended users clarify their purpose and objectives.
- to make implications for “use” part of every decision throughout the evaluation (the driving force of the evaluation process).
- to focus and manage tensions among different purposes of different intended users.
- to offer conceptual and methodological options.
- to help by questioning assumptions.
- to facilitate evaluative thinking and capacity-building.

During the study, we also considered the evaluation process as an opportunity for learning (both through outcomes and the process) in terms of both the evaluators and the participants.

Again on the side of the participants, during every phase, we appreciated and utilized the principle of the model about the use of the process as in: “It refers to and is indicated by individual changes in thinking and behavior, and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture, that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process.” Moreover, we paid special care to the fact that the participants should internalize the evaluation process and develop a possessive attitude towards it as Patton signifies “Intended users are more likely to use evaluations if they understand and feel ownership of the evaluation process and findings” (Patton, 2008).

As for utilizing the outcomes, we mainly focused on “program improvement, organizational change and individual development” as the model requires.

While Patton’s Utilization-focused Evaluation Model was taken as the major model, we also utilized some aspects of Stake’s Responsive Evaluation Model (2005), and Fetterman’s Empowerment Evaluation Model (2001) in an eclectic manner, especially in terms of participant involvement and using evaluation as a process of learning for the improvement of the stakeholders.

2.3. Methodology

Since the model is available for both quantitative and qualitative data analysis and we wanted to obtain as rich information related to our research question as possible by exploring the subject in depth, we preferred working with qualitative data. The evaluator’s role was of external nature to be able to collect more objective and richer data. We did a comprehensive study on the context (regarding the environment) since it is always essential in the model. For the proper optimization of the use, we tried to match the evaluation design to the evaluation’s purpose, resources, and timeline. In this context, we visited the school within the instruction time periods in order to see and observe the actual environment. We made the interviews again in this time period. We informed the related parties and took appointments beforehand; however, we indicated and comforted the participants that we wouldn’t need or demand anything special but the authentic conditions.

At the beginning of the process, a research plan was made and the activities to be conducted were listed and scheduled chronologically in a monthly work flow table chart (see Appendix B). In terms of data, we utilized interviews, observations and archival data such as the minutes of the meetings, the documents of the accounting -incomes and expenses- etc. (see Appendix E for samples) for triangulation purposes. The semi-structured interview questions were prepared by a team of eight, whose members would conduct similar studies in some other schools. The items were prepared in four groups, having certain differences / modifications among them: 1. Administrators, 2. Teachers, 3. Non-Member Parents 4. SPP Members. The questions were revised many times and finally, after the expert opinion (by our leader) the questions were printed under these headings (in the original order): a. Personal, b. school profile, c. general operations of SPP, d. Ideals of SPP (based on regulations) e. interactions among the stakeholders, f. the management of the financial sources of SBB (see Appendix A for interview questions).



The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees and transcribed later (see Appendix C for the transcription). Then, from the derived codes, the data was processed into categories of themes, listed in tables of frequencies to be analyzed through content analysis and discussed. Participants were given pseudo names and coded using abbreviations (see Table 1) and their real names were not used for the purpose of propriety.

As for sampling, we used purposive sampling while selecting the school to maximize the range of information which is collected. Through informal communication with schools and analysis of media coverage, we chose the school we worked with as it promised to provide us with rich and in-depth data both related to the context and the school-parent partnership. During the interviews, we also used snowball sampling with the administrators referring us to some teachers and parents who might provide us with related information. Information related to the participants is as follows.

Table 1
Demographic Information related to the Interviewees

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Educational status</i>	<i>Job</i>	<i>Work experience</i>	<i>Membership to SPP</i>
M1	male	Primary school	Retired driver	-	yes
M2	female	Primary school	housewife	-	yes
A1	male	university	Assistant principal	11 years	no
T1	female	university	teacher	7years	no
T2	female	university	teacher	16 years	no
P1	female	Primary school	housewife	-	no
P2	female	Primary school	housewife	-	no
P3	female	Primary school	housewife	-	no
P4	female	Primary school	housewife	-	no
P5	female	Primary school	housewife	-	no
P6	female	Primary school	housewife	-	no

In the table, M stands for member of SPP, A for administration, T for teacher, and P for parent.

Trustworthiness of the findings was provided through credibility as the results reflect the participants' genuine opinions as their authentic answers were used to formulate the results, transferability as use of thick description as much as possible made it transferable to similar contexts, dependability as any replication may provide stable results excluding the conscious and unpredictable changes in the emergent design and confirmability as objectivity and confirmability of the data, not the evaluators themselves, were focused on by two different evaluators.

3. RESULTS

The results of the interviews are discussed in relation to the emerging themes from the data from the perspective of different stakeholders. A summary table for the whole data is provided at the end.

1. School Context

Context of the school is perhaps the most important factor in the functioning of the SPP. Concerning the school context in our case, participants mostly focused on the regional features of the school district and stated that it was in the process of urbanization and mostly inhabited families from low-socio economic background (M2, T1, P1, P2, P5, P6, T2, A1). It was understood that most of the fathers work in seasonal jobs such as construction work while the mothers are mostly housewives (M2, T1, P1, P2, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1). They stated that this disadvantageous situation is reflected on the student profile



negatively as they cannot afford all the needs of their children due to their economic constraints. One of the parents expostulated about this saying “*We are all primary school graduates and we don’t have a job. Because of our financial problems, we cannot send our kids to good schools, courses or private tutors. In fact, our kids are highly successful but money problems are hindering us*”. This low socio-economic status also seems to result in lack of participation in SPP since they do not have the necessary qualifications and self-confidence to carry out the duties required by the partnership (M2, T1, P1, P2, P5, P6, T2, A1). Despite the disadvantages of the district and the low profiles of parents and students, all the participants seemed glad with their school and agreed that the school staff are qualified and high-profile. Overall, the participants’ views related to the context were consistent with each other and also with on-site observations carried out by the evaluators.

2. Extra-Curricular Activities

As far as the extra-curricular activities, which are expected to be carried out with the support of the SPP, are concerned, it seems that the school encourages arts and sports activities and school trips despite the lack of educational materials and insufficiency of the physical conditions (M1, M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, T2, A1). According to the interviewees’ views, the SPP tries to help with all these activities through both financial support like free cinema tickets for poor students and service such as provision of free bus transport for school trips from the municipality (M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, T2, M1), but that is all. It appears that in spite of the unfavorable financial and physical conditions, both the school staff and the parents are interested in the students’ social and cultural development and the partnership proudly does its part in facilitating this although they can only manage small-scale activities. The SPP member in charge of the accounts expressed this pride by saying “Lots of wonderful activities are undertaken in this school..For example, the students are going to the cinema together and seeing the most recent movies. These are very nice activities”. However, it seems that the SPP cannot afford bigger educational and financial expenses.

3. Management and Leadership

All of the participants attributed the well-working of the current school system including the SPP to the appropriate management and the successful leadership in the school. The new principal seems to have led all the positive changes, which is quite clear from all the interviewees’ comments. One example for this was the SPP member’s final comment that she wanted to add herself :“ Like I said, the school has become this beautiful from a terrible state and this has happened thanks to our principal. We really owe her a lot. She has done everything for us, and we always support her”. While the parents mostly emphasized the transparency of the school administration in operating the school affairs, managing the financial matters and informing the stakeholders about the school expenses, which lead the parents to develop trust in the school and the SPP (A1,M2, P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1), teachers focused on the managerial and entrepreneurial competency of the school principal especially in providing the school with external financial support by using her leadership skills (T1, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, T2), experience and apparent but not-mentioned connections. All the participants seemed to appreciate the school in terms of the decision-making process and the communication between the school and the parents.It is clear that the school could finance most of its expenses with the help of the principal, not the partnership itself.



4. Positive Aspects of the School

The leading aspect of this category includes the improvements in physical conditions, on which all the stakeholders agreed. They were all content with the renewal of the whole school from the changes in the physical setting like construction of sensory tabs and faucets in the toilets to the improvements in the instructional environment such as the installation of projection devices to the classrooms (M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, T2, A1, M1). These improvements also seem to have increased safety in the school and the parents apparently feel more comfortable sending their kids to the school everyday. One of the mothers expressed this comfort very clearly in saying “My son started primary school two years ago and the classroom windows were so bad that I was afraid something bad would happen or he would fall down. I would warn him every single day and I was really worried. But now, after all these changes, the school feels like home and I feel relieved while sending him to school”. The school owes these improvements to the external financial support independent from the SPP, but the SPP provided support by informing the parents about these improvements on time so that they could see the concrete progress in school and thus gaining their trust both in the school and the SPP (M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, T2, A1, M1). The partnership seems to have helped the school build trust and bound with the society. Also, all the parents seem to appraise the teaching staff unquestionably (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6). All this appreciation of the improvements and the teaching staff seems to have brought about trust in the school, which enabled success both in terms of academic achievement and the relationships between the school and the parents (M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, T2, A1, M1). The parents are especially happy about the fact that their children can now go to Anatolian high schools after they finish this primary school (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6).

5. School Needs

While talking about the positive aspects of the school, some needs also came out. The interviewees generally mentioned physical needs that hinder the students’ academic performance as well as their personal and social development. To illustrate, they all stated that the school urgently needs a canteen, a sports hall, a music room, a science and language lab, and a new library (M2, T1, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1). Moreover, the members and one parent (who was also a classroom mother) especially emphasized the importance of the maintenance of the services such as paying the school bills and provision of cleaning substances, and they claimed that this responsibility falls into the SPP even though it cannot realize this duty at a desired level at the moment (M2, P6, M1). It seems that the SPP cannot fully realize its duty of maintaining the school financially as expected by the state. In addition to the financial support, moral support for the school in general and the SPP was emphasized as it was considered necessary for a healthy relationship between the school and the parents (M2, T1, P5). The parents were well aware of the fact that the school needed more than just money to be able to fulfill its goals, indicating care, and provide a successful education. This was apparent in the parents’ comments such as “Moral support is also needed. You cannot do everything with money. When you come to school and help with something, it also counts” (M2) and “We cannot really provide financial support for the school but I am always in touch with the principal and the teachers and ask them if there is anything I can do to help, not money-wise maybe, but moral support” (P1).



6. Functioning of the School-Parent Partnership

Although the SPP seemed to fail in fulfilling the school needs at a desired level, the participants' views in general showed that it was functioning well in other aspects such as its formation and activities. For example, they all expressed that the partnership members were selected through voting in a democratic way and that they tried to support the school by organizing school activities and providing financial support as much as possible (M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1). It was also obvious that they spent the money properly for school expenses and recorded everything in the account book and the decision log, which were open to all the stakeholders (M2, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, A1, M1). That transparency policy seems to have attracted more parents to the school and gained their trust. One member parent confirmed this by saying "Before the SPP, we really wondered and did not know what the school spent the collected money on, but now, especially with our new principal, we are at ease as we know how the money collected from the parents is spent".

7. Positive Aspects of the School-Parent Partnership

The interviewees listed a number of positive aspects related to the SPP, but the most prominent one is that it enables parents to be more involved in the school and thus their children's education compared to the past. The SPP seems to have given the parents formal and active roles both within the body of the SPP and outside it like in the case of "classroom mothers" who voluntarily help the SPP and the school administration carry out their duties (M2, T1, P1, P2, P5, P6, T2, A1). They all stated that the partnership brought about better communication between the school and the parents thanks to the transparency of its affairs and the resulting trust in what the school and the SPP try to do together (M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1). This bonding between two parties was expressed by one of the parents like the following: "We can communicate with the principal easily and without stress..with the principal, the assistant principal and the teachers...Even other teachers who are not teaching my kid help me whenever I need it. Sometimes, I ask them questions about the homework that my kid's teacher gave and they never scold us. They sit down with us and explain the material or the assignment. This is very nice. You can ask any teacher anything and they never say "No". They help as much as they can". The parents partially attribute this successful communication to the SPP. They also made it very clear that they now donate money easily to the school as they can see what their money is spent for and how it is directly reflected on their children's education. A well-functioning and transparent SPP encourages the parents to force their limits to be able to support the school financially as much as they can (M2, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1). This was also strengthened by the flexible approach to parents related to both financial matters (different amounts of money asked for from families with varying incomes) and any other concerns about their children (M2, P1, P2, P3, P5). Parents expressed their gratitude in relation to the fact that they felt valued because their children were valued and well cared at school and they put forward that they want to cooperate with the school more as a result of it (M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, A1, M1). The teachers and the administrators confirmed this by stating that the parents were far more cooperative than they were in the past and that they were ready to help with anything whenever the school needed their support. The partnership seems to be doing its job in bridging the school and the families.



8. Weaknesses of the SPP

In spite of the general content with the way the SPP works and its benefits both for the school and the students, the interviewees touched upon some issues that need to be addressed so that the SPP can fully realize its mission. To begin with, both the school staff and the parents complained about lack of participation in the meetings and the activities led by the SPP and the school. This shows that the level of participation, or parental involvement, is still not at the desired level although things are better compared to the previous years (M2, P1, P2, P3, P5, T2, A1, M1). Another weakness of the partnership is the insufficient amount of financial support both from donations from the parents and from external bodies such as independent institutions, NGOs, companies or philanthropists (M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P6, T2, A1, M1). Not surprisingly, this was a common concern for all stakeholders, which is again probably related to the low socio-economic status of the families. Especially the school administration and the SPP members were worried about the sustainability of the school maintenance and continuous support for poor students (A1, M1, M2). They insistently expressed the need for a system in which the school community and outside organizations support the school financially as they know they cannot ask for too much from the parents and they all expressed that the SPP may help with this. Another interesting point is that the parents and the school staff considered the SPP members as lacking in competency in providing financial support for the school although they were all glad with the honest and transparent way they performed their duties (A1, P1, P2, P3, P6). This was probably related to the parent profile mentioned earlier as the members seem to lack self-confidence and the required skills to carry out some duties because of their low educational and cultural background. Also, considering that some members in the partnership were mothers, thus women, it might be more difficult for them to go out, ask for support from different bodies and be assertive as they are mostly housewives without a proper education and the necessary skills. The same disadvantage seems to hinder more parental involvement in education and instruction-related issues at school. This point was clear in one of the members' comment as "We do not get involved in educational issues much. It is beyond us, because education and instruction are things that we do not have knowledge about. In this respect, we rely on our teachers".

9. Expectations and Suggestions related to the SPP

The participants also expressed their expectations from the partnership and came up with some suggestions so that it can benefit all parties more. All the parties stated that there should be more involvement and participation on the part of the parents, but they seemed to have different reasons for that (A1, M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6). While the administration wants the parents to form closer relationships with the school and share the financial and non-financial responsibilities with them (A1), the parents want to be more involved in what is done for their children's education (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6). The SPP wants parents to participate more in their work and support them financially as they believe this will contribute to their children's education in all aspects and help the school maintain its good status (M1, M2). The teachers want more cooperation on the part of the parents because they believe it might motivate the students academically and help with attendance problems (T1). Another suggestion from the parents is that the SPP can help the poor students prepare better for the SBS exams by providing them with practice books and extra courses at the weekend. One last suggestion is related to training for parents in order to minimize the negative effects of the low parent profile and equip them at least with basic knowledge and skills that they can use to help their children while dealing with school work (T1, P1, P2).

For triangulation purposes, apart from the interviews carried out, documents provided by the school administration and the SPP were reviewed. The samples from the meeting minutes and income and



expense reports (see Appendix E) were examined and it was understood that the SPP gathered every month to discuss issues mostly related to the school needs and expenses, and the decisions taken were recorded in detail in the minute book. This was consistent with what the assistant principal told us about the functioning of the SPP, but it was inconsistent with what the parents and the teachers stated about the frequency of the SPP meetings as they had expressed that the partnership came together only 3 or 4 times a year. This may be because the parents and the teachers were not informed enough about the meetings held by the SPP. It seems that partnership works in close cooperation with the administration, but not the non-member parents and the teachers. The transparency policy mentioned during the interviews, on the other hand, was well reflected on the income and expenses book as every little detail was recorded there and any parent who wishes can easily see how much donation is received by the school and what it is spent for.

As the third part of the triangulation process, observations were carried out in the school by the evaluators. During these, it was seen that the school walls were all covered with student work, successful projects from different lessons, photos showing the activities of different school clubs, pictures from students' art lessons, especially from the first graders, and some certificates and medals received from sports competitions. These were all consistent with the interview data as the participants repeatedly mentioned that the school was now more interested in the students' both academic and extra-curricular work, which was reflected on the walls everywhere. Also, the observations enabled us to see for ourselves the physical needs such as a canteen and a new library expressed by the interviewees. All in all, the data from the observations, document review and the interviews were to a great extent consistent with each other.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Depending upon the findings of the study, the following conclusions have been obtained and the gist of each item is listed below:

1. School Parent Partnership is a significant and integral organ in the school educational system, and it should function by both representing the parent side and school side through coherent interaction.
2. SPP has certain concerns both in its formation and functioning in the underdeveloped regions/districts; two fundamental ones are:
 - a. The members are mostly uncultivated housewives, who do not have self-confidence and education to work effectively in such organizations.
 - b. Since the region comprises mostly poor people, the SPP has difficulty in collecting sufficient donations.
3. Strong communication, transparency and mutual trust are the basic aspects of a well-working SPP, which in turn leads to community building in and around the school.
4. The benefits of appropriate SPP activities are influential not only on the physical needs of the school environment but also on the instructional strategies and emotional conditions of learning; therefore, more SPP involvement is needed on the latter points.
5. Financial support from the state is needed for the provision of the basic requirements of the schools so as to facilitate SPP activities to be directed to other dimensions useful for education.

In the light of these findings, in order to maintain a healthy SPP, the following suggestions can be presented:

1. Parents should be encouraged more to participate in the activities of SPP, to be candidates for SPP membership and at least to attend the meetings. To do this, they should be assured that no obligatory payment (as donation) will be demanded.



2. Teachers should also be elected as board members in order to represent the school side among the board members (as it was before). Otherwise, the board functions as a one-sided organ, and the principal or the vice principal is forced to spare extra time for the settlement of concerns/discrepancies after a certain time while those can be handled by the teacher member(s) of the board as soon as they appear. This may also help teachers keep informed about the SPP activities.

3. Every activity concerning the students and the parents in the school should be shared with the parents, their suggestions and criticism should be evaluated in a democratic manner. This attitude both helps to improve the trust in the administration and encourage parent involvement/assistance, and accordingly, it contributes to the empowerment of the SPP as well.

4. All activities of the SPP should be transparently transmitted and messages should be clearly conveyed to the parents so that:

- a. they will develop more trustful attitude towards both the school and the SPP,
- b. parent involvement will increase to lead more progress through plurality
- c. the SPP will get more financial support.

5. Informing the parents, evaluating their suggestions and criticism, and encouraging their participation in both SPP activities and other school functions should be regarded as part of empowerment of the stakeholders (parents, teachers, administrators) and their feeling of ownership for school concerns (Patton, 2008; Stake, 2005, Fetterman, 2001).

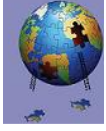
6. The government should consider varying contexts of different schools and school districts and review its current policy forcing schools to maintain their own financial and educational activities.

5. SELF-EVALUATION IN RELATION TO THE PROGRAM EVALUATION STANDARDS

We paid meticulous care to the accomplishment of the evaluation standards. For “Utility”, we mainly ensured relevance and use, trying to address the stakeholders’ needs and to prove trustworthy and competent for maximum credibility and acceptance before, during and after the study at the school, either verbal or in action. We designed information scope and selection to be responsive to the needs and interests of the participants by also evaluating the information we had from the vice principal. The perspectives, procedures and rationale were carefully defined to provide bases for the clarity of the value judgment through empathy and feeling like one of the participants. We paid special care to the report clarity by revising any information many times, especially about proper word selection, before finalizing. We tried to be timely in sharing and disseminating information with the related people before the data got old by starting with the vice principal and the SPP members, and finally with teachers and the school principal lastly. We believe and hope that the evaluation impact will be influential positively in the following times because all the participants appreciated and supported our study.

For “Feasibility”, basically we were careful about designing realistic, practical and attainable procedures. In this context, the procedures were carried out smoothly mostly with the unending assistance and transparency of the vice principal, as he prepared anything we needed on time and without any shortcomings. We didn’t pay much attention to the political viability issues since such an attempt was not needed, nor any threats were seemingly probable. Our evaluation was cost-effective in terms of the materials we used and the time we spent.

For “Propriety”, our processes were ethical, legal, respectful (consent forms, ethical committee requirements, proper negotiations and communication etc.). We served for the needs of the school we worked on; formal agreements were fulfilled; we were extremely attentive about the rights of human subjects and human interactions since the participants were from a poor region with low SES, who might have been vulnerable and tender for many points about their conditions and who might easily get resented.



Our assessments (judgments and inferences) have been complete and fair, and we disclosed the results which might be useful to the related participants at every phase of the study. We didn't meet any conflicts of interest luckily, and in terms of fiscal responsibility we didn't cause any financial cost to any person or institution.

For "Accuracy", we were careful with our study results to be technically adequate, true and correct to determine the merit/worth of the program appropriately. At the outset, the program was documented clearly in detail, including the national and international literature. The context of the school was analyzed; purposes and procedures together with information sources were depicted clearly; the information/data collected and inferences made were tested and revised several times evaluating, cross-checking the information/data and the interpretations obtained from other possible sources (triangulation) for ensuring that the information was valid, reliable and systematic. We utilized qualitative information obtained through interviews, observation and archival documents properly in order to answer our evaluation questions. We strived to draw explicitly justified conclusions so that the stakeholders can assess and utilize them. We were careful to be impartial and unbiased while writing our reports to reflect the evaluation findings. With the feedback of expert leader we completed meta-evaluation formatively and summatively against evaluation standards and from now on the stakeholders will be able to examine the strengths and weaknesses of our evaluation.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It would have been ideal if we could have gone back to the interviewees with our data and results so that they could check them and confirm what we understood from what they said to be true to ensure validity, but as there was no sufficient time, member checks could not be done. We could only share the results with the interviewees. Two evaluators had to check each other's data to confirm the inferences. Also, data were collected from one school only. A range of data from different school contexts could have yielded even richer results.

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Appendix A - Themes Derived from the Interviews

Codes	Themes frequency
<i>School Context</i>	
Regional features	M2, T1, P1, P2, P5, P6, T2, A1
Parent profile	M2, T1, P1, P2, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1
Student profile	M2, T1, P1, P2, P5, P6, T2, A1
School staff	M2, P1, P5, P6, T2, A1
<i>Extracurricular activities</i>	
arts	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, M1
sports	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, T2, A1
School trips	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, T2, M1
<i>Management and leadership</i>	
Decision making	M2, T1, P1, P2, P5, P6, A1, M1
Communication	M2, P1, P2, P5, T2, A1, M1
transparency	M2, P1, P2, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1
Trust in the administration	M2, P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1
Managerial and entrepreneurial competency	T1, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, T2
<i>Positive aspects of the School</i>	
Improvements in physical conditions	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, T2, A1, M1
Teaching staff	M2, P1, P2, P3, P5, M1
Relationships with parents	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P4, T2, A1, M1
School success	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, T2, A1, M1
<i>School needs</i>	
Physical needs	M2, T1, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1
Maintenance-related needs	M2, P6, M1
Moral support	M2, T1, P5
<i>Functioning of SPP</i>	
formation	M2, P5, P6, T2, A1
activities	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1
Financial support	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1
expenditures	M2, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, A1, M1
<i>Positive aspects of SPP</i>	
Parent involvement	M2, T1, P1, P2, P5, P6, T2, A1



Communication	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1
transparency	M2, P1, P2, P3, p6, T2, A1, M1
trust	M2, P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1
Financial support	M2, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, T2, A1, M1
Valuing / caring for students	M2, P1, P2, P3, A1, M1
Assistance to administration	T1, P1, P5, P6, A1
Flexible approach to parents	M2, P1, P2, P3, P5
Voluntary collaboration of families	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, A1, M1
<i>Weaknesses of SPP</i>	
Lack of participation	M2, P1, P2, P3, P5, T2, A1, M1
Insufficient financial provision	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, p6, T2, A1, M1
Unsatisfactory support to poor students	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, T2
Lack of community support	M2, P6, M1
Misconceptions about SPP memberships	P1, P2, P3, T2
Gender discrimination	M2, T2
Lack of competency of SPP members	P1, P2, P3, P6
<i>Expectations/suggestions about SPP</i>	
Involvement and participation (balance)	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3
Contribution to ss' education	M2, T1, P1, P2, P3, A1, M1
Help with attendance problems	T1
Training for parents	T1, P1, P2
Helping poor students	P1, P6