

The Importance of Parental Involvement in School Development in Georgia (Case of Private School 'Logos')

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Abstract

The presented paper examines how parental involvement in education can facilitate school development and improvement in Georgia. The study, which was conducted in the private school "Logos", Tbilisi, Georgia, sought to find out the types and categories of parental involvement, parent's assessment of school and family responsibilities in the process of education, and finally, barriers that impede successful school-parent cooperation. The aim of the research was to identify whether the interviewed parents felt involved in their children's education and school life as well as find out what activities they would be willing to get involved in. The research also studied the strategies that would help parents to be better involved and the barriers that prevented them from engaging in school life. Based on the findings of the research, we were able to draw conclusions and recommendations that are useful for school administrators in order to turn Georgian schools into open-type, democratic institutions that are ready to achieve better academic results for the future generations.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, School Development, School-Parent Cooperation

Introduction

It is notable that schools in Georgia gained a certain degree of independence only a couple of decades ago, they still have to take numerous efforts towards turning into open and democratic institutions. In Georgian society there are some patterns of communication between families and schools; however, it is more of a school-towards-family type communication, mainly about children's academic progress and general aspects of behavior. Unfortunately, not much is done to trigger the initiative from parents, nor are they educated on how they could contribute to the process of children's education. Nevertheless, we have to mention a couple of positive steps taken by the Government to change the situation. An amendment has been made in terms of legislation to enhance parental involvement in education. Developed under the ongoing reform, Georgian Law on General Education (2005) officially contains a chapter about School Board of Trustees – the body that governs public schools and has to include some parents in the board. The downside of the fact is, however, that, even though officially all public schools elect and run the Boards, parents' voice in decision-making is still very formal, insignificant or silent.

Another and much more promising development of the

topic is that about two years ago, the department of the National Curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Science (2011-2016) started working on the concept of a "Child-Friendly School" which automatically encompasses parental

involvement as one of the significant strategies, says Rusudan Tevzadze, expert of Geography and Civic Education of the department (Tevzadze, 2014). The project not only includes recommendations on the forms of parental involvement in education, but also envisages inviting parents to the Ministry to collaboratively work on further development of the National Curriculum (Tevzadze, 2014). These two examples clarify that the issue of parental involvement in education becomes more outspoken and important in the legislative and educational circles. Now it is the matter of outreaching the community and raising the public awareness.

To investigate the existing situation in Georgia, we conducted a small-scale research study in a private high school 'Logos' located in Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia. Logos is a small, independent, coeducational high school, located in Tbilisi, Georgia. It is authorized to teach students from the 7th through 12th grades and nowadays serves the official Geor-

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gian high school level grades: 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th. It was founded in 2010 and its first class graduated in the same year. The distinguishing feature of Logos is its student-centric approach to education: small class sizes, qualified faculty, seven of which hold PhDs and twenty hold Masters Degrees in their prospective fields, and an academically rigorous curriculum. The curriculum is based on the Liberal Arts philosophy, emphasizing critical thinking skills and personalized education. Logos is accredited by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. All classes are based on the official Georgian National Curriculum. The school successfully prepares students for Georgian universities and utilizes elective classes and additional intensive English-based college preparatory classes for students interested in studying at universities abroad, especially American universities; therefore, Logos is a preparatory high school for students applying to Georgian, American, and European universities (Logos School Profile, 2014). The school fosters strong communication with parents, regarding them as partners in the process of students' education. Regular Parent-teacher Association (PTA) meetings, Open Houses, informal meetings and activities, such as attending theater shows together as a community, are the initiatives endeavored by the school administration to strengthen relationship with parents. Even despite the fact that Logos has a long and difficult path to follow in order to break the ice and establish strong parental engagement, we still chose the school as a field of our study and surveyed parents and guardians of the students currently enrolled or applying for admissions at Logos.

I. Research Method & Data Collection

An anonymous questionnaire specially designed for the research was administered at school, through group and individual sessions. 35 parents of students already enrolled or applying to get enrolled in School Logos were surveyed in the spring of 2013. Most of them were female. Seventy respondents were selected through a convenience selection. After this, we randomly selected 35 parents and asked them to participate in the survey. It took them approximately 15 minutes to fill in the survey tool. Most of the parents were enthusiastic and took the process seriously. This gives us hopes that the outcomes are valid and trustworthy. The questionnaire consisted of nine questions. Five of them were multiple-answer questions, two Stapel Scale questions and the other two - open-ended questions. The questions were easy to read and understand. It is notable to mention that the questionnaire was designed in English and then translated and administered in Georgian for the parents to understand it. The translation was closely edited in order to sustain a clear sense and avoid interpretational misunderstandings. The research was qualitative in its character.

I.1.1 Results of the Research

Results of the study were calculated and transformed into various charts using Microsoft Excel. Answers to the open-ended questions were generalized and coded. The results will be presented following the order of the questions in the questionnaire.

Question # 1: How involved do you personally feel in your child's education?

The majority of the respondents, that is 26 out of 35 (74 %), felt that they were very much or fairly involved in their children's education. 9 parents replied that they were not very involved. This equals to 26 % of all respondents. Unfortunately, over a quarter of our respondents feels that they are not very much involved in their children's education. For more details, see figures 1.1(for percentages) and 1.2 (for number of respondents).

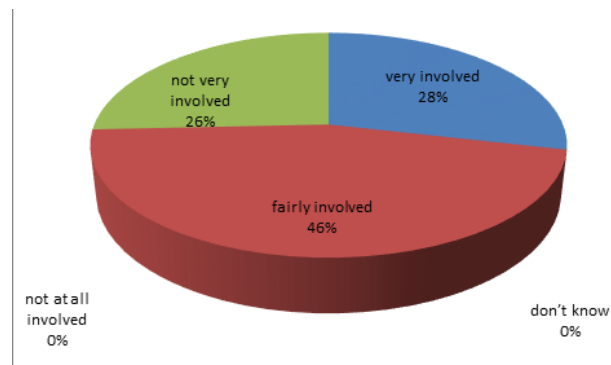


Figure 1.1. Parents' opinions about how involved they feel in their children's education

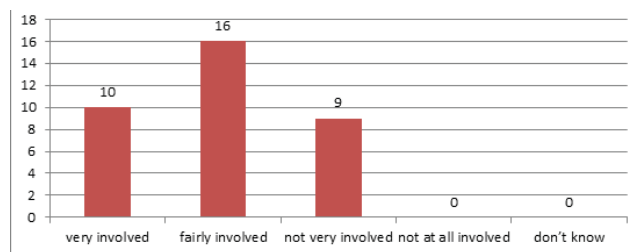


Figure 1.2. Parents' opinions about how involved they feel in their children's education

Question # 2: In terms of involvement in education, what kind of support do you provide to your child? You may choose more than one option.

This question incorporated 10 answer choices and the respondents were not limited with the number of possible answers. They could choose as many as they felt were relevant. We will list the top 5 types of support that the parents were offering their children.

1. 28 % answered that they make sure their children attend school regularly and on time.
2. 26 % answered that they talk with their children about what they learn at school.
3. 13 % answered that they find private tutors when school education does not seem to be enough.
4. 11 % answered that they explain material when children do not have a clear understanding.

5. 8 % answered that they supervise while doing homework and check the quality when it is done.

It is notable to say that only one respondent chose the last option that stated: "I hardly provide any support due to my noninvolvement." Based on the data, we can conclude that the majority of the respondents provide their children with some form of support, and therefore, are involved in their education to a certain degree. The 5 types of support also give us an idea about the most widespread ways of parental involvement in Georgian society.

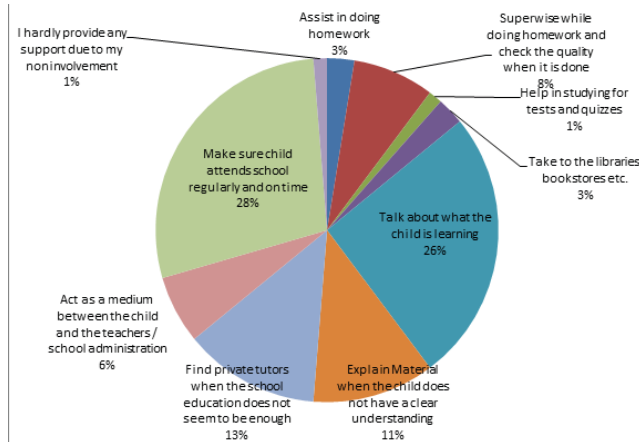


Figure 1.3. Types of support provided by parents in their children's education

We asked this question in order to differentiate between parental involvement in children's educational process at school and educational process beyond or after school. In our working experience, we have encountered parents who actively support their children at home, but are reluctant to engage into the school life.

Unlike question #1 that asked about parental involvement generally in education, question #3 gave us a different picture. While only 19 parents said that they were very much or fairly involved in their children's school life, 14 answered that they were not very involved. We also had 2 extreme answers stating that respondents were not involved in school life at all.

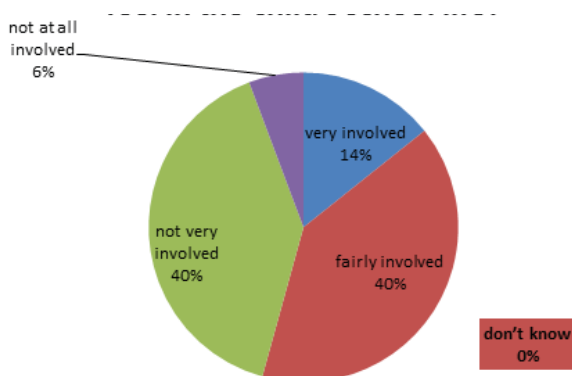


Figure 1.4. Parents' opinions about how involved they feel in their children's school life

Question # 4: What would help you to be better involved in your child's school life? You may choose more than one option.

This question incorporated 8 answer choices and respondents were not limited with the number of possible answers. They could choose as many as they felt were relevant. The eighth answer choice was open-ended, asking about respondents' suggestions. Most of the respondents left the 8th answer choice blank. We will list top 3 activities that parents thought were helpful to get better involved in their children's school life and also analyze other outcomes of the question.

1. 31 % answered that day-to-day information from school regarding the child's academic progress and behavior in a written form i.e. electronic journal would be helpful.

2. 22 % chose frequent communication with teachers and administration.

3. 15 % chose regular PTA meetings, where children's academic achievement and personal development are discussed.

4. Only three percent i.e. 2 parents chose the 8th answer offering other activities that could help them to be better involved. We can conclude here that parents may not be aware of the type of activities that could facilitate their engagement. The top three answer choices also dictate that the activities that parents chose are traditional ways of school-family relationships. It is advisable that schools take the lead in raising awareness of the society concerning innovative forms and activities to promote parent-school partnerships.

5. Participation in excursions and fund-raising activities earned only 14 %.

6. Moreover, activities such as enrollment in parents' clubs or participation in everyday studying process were not popular. Total of 3 % chose these activities. This again tells us that our respondents view parent participation more as a formal procedure or think that it is solely school responsibility to conduct and supervise the studying process. For detailed information, please see Figure 1.5

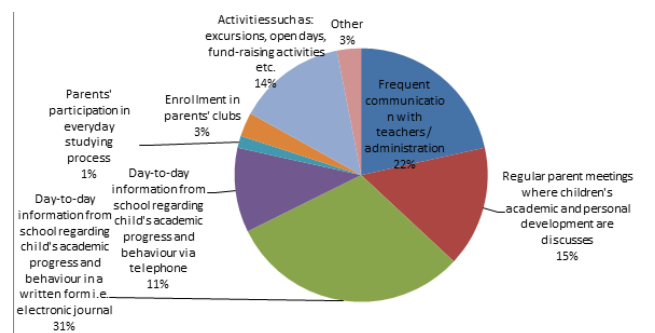


Figure 1.5. Types of support that parents provide their children

Question # 5: What do you think are the schools' main responsibilities? Grade the following items from 1 to 4 provided that 1 is very important and 4 is not important at all. Please, choose "don't know" – 5, in case you do not have an answer.

For the process of school improvement, it is essential to know what expectations parents have regarding schools' responsibilities. Table 1.1 demonstrates the data in detail. 88.6 % of parents assume that schools must educate students and prepare them for the future careers independently, without private tutors' intervention. About 77% of parents think that it is very important for schools to offer additional classes if students fail to understand the course material. 80 % of respondents believe that it is school's major responsibility to provide consistent and up-to-date information regarding children's academic success and behavior.

It is noteworthy to mention that at least 50% percent of parents considered each type of school responsibility as important or very important. These results clearly demonstrate that from our respondents' standpoint, schools have a tremendous role in children's academic development and education. This fact has its positive and negative effects: because parents acknowledge the importance of secondary education, it is more likely that after relevant trainings and awareness raising campaigns, they will be ready and enthusiastic to partner with schools and support them in attaining and sustaining high-quality educational services. However, the downside of the attitude is that in it we encounter the long-rooted Protective and Expert Models of parental involvement, where parents stay behind, try not to interfere and believe that schools and teachers are the only experts on education.

Table 1.1 . Schools' Main Responsibilities

What do you think are the schools' main responsibilities?		very important	Important	not very Important	not at all important	don't know
1	Schools should educate and prepare children for further career ventures independently (without hiring private tutors at home);	<u>88,6</u>	2,9	0,0	0,0	5,7
2	Schools should provide a day-to-day information regarding child's academic progress, attendance and behavior in a written form i.e. electronic journal;	40,0	31,4	11,4	5,7	11,4
3	Schools should provide a day-to-day information regarding child's academic progress, attendance and behavior via telephone;	25,7	25,7	17,1	11,4	14,3
4	Schools should provide a day-to-day information regarding child's academic progress, attendance and behavior both in a written form i.e. electronic journal and via phone;	31,4	31,4	11,4	11,4	14,3
5	Schools should immediately contact parents when a problem arises;	<u>80,0</u>	11,4	0,0	5,7	0,0
6	Schools should provide additional classes to make sure that students understand the material;	<u>77,1</u>	17,1	0,0	0,0	0,0
7	Schools should provide study halls, as it is their responsibility that students prepare their homework for the next day;	20,0	34,3	25,7	8,6	5,7
8	Schools should organize regular meetings with class parents every month;	31,4	31,4	8,6	11,4	5,7
9	Schools should organize one-on-one meetings with parents once in a semester;	45,7	22,9	17,1	5,7	0,0
10	Schools should involve parents in decision-making.	42,9	37,1	8,6	2,9	8,6

Question # 6: What do you think are parents’ main responsibilities? Grade the following items from 1 to 4 provided that 1 is very important and 4 is not important at all. Please, choose “don’t know” – 5, in case you do not have an answer.

Majority of our respondents thought that parents’ main responsibilities in their children’s education process were: providing children with books and study materials; being aware of what is going on with their children at school; making sure that children arrive at school on time. It is noteworthy to mention that parents were not so demanding towards themselves as they were towards schools. Only about 3 % thought it is very important to help/monitor their children doing homework, while 54 % answered that it is not that important or not at all important to help/monitor their children doing homework assignment.

Analyzing questions # 6 and #7, we can conclude, that parents have higher expectations towards school role and responsibilities; while they do not regard their own participation in children’s educational process as important and essential. Our research does not inform us why parents think so. Schools need to initiate change in this mindset and educate parents on the diverse ways to become more involved. Otherwise, prevailing Protective and Expert models of co-operation will never develop into Partnership Model, which remains the most refined way of engaging parents in their children’s education.

Question # 7: Is there anything that stops you getting more involved with child’s school life?

56 % of respondents in total mentioned that work commitments and lack of time acted as the main barrier that stopped them from getting involved. Luckily, only 2 % thought that if they often talked to the teachers, they would be regarded as trouble-makers or unwanted intruders. 7 % thought that they did not feel qualified to get involved. Another 7 % said that they did not know what schools wanted them to do. As small as 14 % of respondents mentioned that they had no specific barriers to engage in their children’s school life. For more information, please see Figure 1.6.

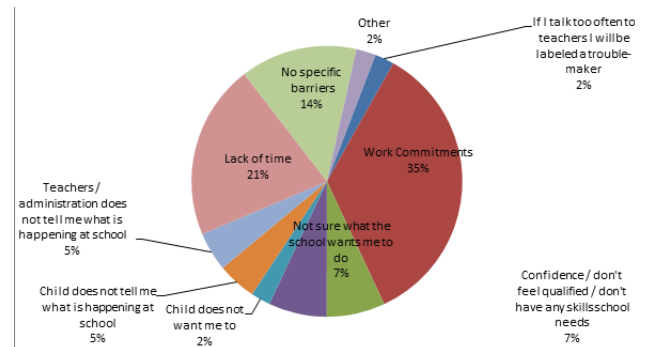


Figure 1.6. Barriers of Parental Involvement

Table 1.2 . Parents’ Main Responsibilities

What do you think are parents’ main responsibilities?		very important	Important	not very Important	not at all important	don't know
1 Parents should provide all the necessary books and material for proper education of their child;	88,6	11,4	0,0	0,0	0,0	
2 When a problem arises, parents should immediately contact and discuss it with school teachers and administration;	62,9	31,4	0,0	2,9	0,0	
3 Parents should be aware of what their child is doing at school;	85,7	14,3	0,0	0,0	0,0	
4 Parents should make sure the child attends school regularly and on time;	74,3	17,1	0,0	5,7	0,0	
5 Parents should help/monitor their child doing homework;	2,9	31,4	34,3	20,0	5,7	
6 Parents should make sure the child does homework at home ;	14,3	40,0	14,3	20,0	2,9	
7 Parents should supervise while doing homework and check the quality when it is done;	11,4	25,7	37,1	14,3	5,7	
8 Parents should attend parents’ group and individual meetings;	62,9	28,6	2,9	0,0	0,0	
9 When asked, parents should get involved in extracurricular activities such as: parents’ clubs, open days etc.	42,9	40,0	5,7	0,0	8,6	

Question # 8: Can you suggest any ways we could improve school and parent cooperation for the better academic achievements of your child? And, Question # 9: Which school activities would you be willing to involve in?

We decided to incorporate these two open-ended questions in one block. Unfortunately, more than 60% of the questionnaires did not contain answers to these questions. Only 37% i.e. 13 respondents offered their answers. We will list the ones that were the most common and interesting for the research.

Answers to question # 8: Parents thought that the following activities could improve school and parent cooperation for the better academic achievements of the child:

- *Frequent communication / contacts / PTA meetings to discuss problematic issues;*
- *Day-to-day information from school regarding students' academic progress;*
- *Individual meetings with parents;*
- *Parents attending classes without giving a prior notice to teachers and students;*
- *Communication via e-mail;*
- *Schools should organize joint educational trainings / activities for parents and students;*
- *Schools should demand active participation from parents' side;*
- *Visits to museums.*

One Parent answered that it is not necessary to be overly involved. We had a couple of answers saying that parents did not know what to suggest or had no suggestions to improve the cooperation between schools and families.

Answers to question # 9: Answers to this question were more general. Most of the respondents did not list or name any specific activities; however, we could still draw several conclusions that give an overview of the areas that parents would be willing to get involved in.

- *Any activity;*
- *Any activity that would support children's development;*
- *Any activity but the extent of involvement would depend on the work-load;*
- *Creative activities;*
- *Intellectual and fun activities;*
- *Educational activities;*

- *Any activity that would increase school's qualification;*

- *Individual meetings with parents and their children to discuss children's future educational and career opportunities;*

- *Excursions, volunteering, training, project.*

I.1.2. Limitations of the Study

One of the shortcomings of the research is its small scale. We wish to have been able to study more. Unfortunately, time and resources did not allow us to collect reliable and valid data to generalize the results. This requires a larger-scale effort and is a matter of further research. Moreover, we have not been able to diversify in terms of gender and social class. We had to randomize from the respondents that we had – in this case, mostly female and from the middle or even upper social class. The research was limited to one private school. Also it is of interest to be able to compare answers of parents from both private and public schools.

I.1.3. Conclusions and Recommendations of the Study

- In terms of the extent of parental involvement, we asked 2 different types of questions: to what extent parents thought they were involved generally in education and to what extent they were involved in school life. While the majority of parents (76%) thought that they were generally involved in their children's education through various activities (talking with children about what they learnt at school, helping children with homework or hiring private tutors), only 54 % felt involved in their children's school life. The top three suggestions to ameliorate their own involvement in school life were: day-to-day information from school regarding the child's academic progress in a written form (electronic journal); frequent communication with teachers and administration; and regular PTA meetings. This gives us the reason to emphasize that schools should take on the responsibility for regular and frequent communication with parents regarding students' academic and behavioral development. Most of the surveyed parents feel that they are involved in their children's education. However, after analyzing the answers, we can state that the types of involvement are not diverse. In addition, parents feel more involved in their children's education beyond school than in their school-life. As a result, we can conclude that **schools should take initiative to raise parents' awareness about different types of involvement as well as invite them to actively participate in their children's school life;**

- We have interesting findings concerning the families' and schools' main responsibilities in education. 88.6 % of parents assume that schools must educate students and prepare them for the future career independently, without private tutors' intervention. Moreover, about as many parents think that it is very important for schools to offer additional classes if students fail to understand the course material. Parents also believe that it is school's major responsibility to provide consistent and up-to-date information

regarding children's academic success and behavior. Generally speaking, most of the school responsibilities garnered higher percentages and were assumed as important. On the other hand, when assessing parents' responsibilities, the answers showed that the most important responsibilities, according to our respondents, were the following: providing children with books and study materials; being aware of what is going on with their children at school; making sure that children arrive at school on time. To our great surprise, we found out that parents were not so demanding towards themselves as they were towards school. Only about 3 % think it is very important to help / monitor their children doing homework, while 54 % answered that it is not that important or not at all important to do so. Our research clearly demonstrates that parents are not wellaware of their role in supporting children with the educational process at home. **It is recommended that school teachers and administration offer trainings and educational projects on how parents can participate in home-work monitoring / preparation process.** In terms of school and parent responsibilities, respondents think that schools have a much greater responsibility in educating their children. Each type of school responsibilities listed in the questionnaire, garnered a higher percentage among the respondents. We can translate these results into the demands that the Georgian society sets for the secondary educational system. Schools should pay attention to these demands and try to fulfill them. This will help schools to regain parents' trust that unfortunately has been long since largely lost.

- The biggest barriers of parental involvement mentioned in our research were work commitments and lack of time. **It means that schools should become more flexible with scheduling PTA-s, various events and activities so that parents could fit them into their busy schedules.**

- In order to improve school and parent cooperation, parents are suggesting frequent communication, PTA meetings, e-mailing and educational trainings organized by school among other activities. To sum up, it seems extremely important for parents to have all kind of information regarding their children. They aspire for frequent and consistent communication between schools and families and clearly state: "Schools should demand active participation from parents' side" – meaning that it is the school's responsibility to engage parents in their children's education and school life. Unlike perceiving school responsibilities very seriously, parents were not as demanding towards themselves, as they were towards schools. Many of our respondents think that it is not very important to support/monitor their children while doing homework or supervise the process of education at home. This is another instance, **when schools should organize training seminars or educational projects that would help parents learn more ways to assist their kids after school, at home.**

- For the final question of the survey that asked about the activities that parents would be willing to involve in, answers were too general. Only 2 answers were more elaborate and stated concrete activities: individual meetings with parents and their children to discuss children's future educational and career opportunities; excursions, volunteering, training, and projects. This is a good reason to think that **parents need more education about the ways they could get involved in and that schools should take the initia-**

tive to design and offer engaging activities. On the other hand, we think it is a topic of a further qualitative research to deeply explore areas of the involvement that would culturally and traditionally fit with the society.

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