

## The Link Between Parental Engagement and Attitudes Towards Change among School Principals in South East Europe

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### Abstract

The attitude that school principals have towards change is crucial for the improvement of education. The success of schools in achieving educational goals is related to the role of principals. This paper aims to rediscover the role of school principals by looking at the link between the attitude towards change and parental engagement. The objective of the study is to discover if there is a positive relationship between the organization of different activities for parental involvement in schools, and attitudes towards change among school principals. A model for improvement is proposed for the school principals in South East European countries. Based on the results, countries are divided into two groups, according to the confirmation of expectations. Albania, Montenegro and Serbia are part of the group where most of the expectations have been confirmed. The second group consists of countries in which expectations have not been confirmed: Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Moldova. The recommendations for improving are in the direction of changing the attitudes of school principals. This aim should be achieved through workshops with principals. The main topics of workshops should be parental engagement and change management. The expected results of workshops are higher awareness for parental engagement and a positive attitude towards change.

**Key words:** parental engagement, change, school principals

### Introduction

#### **Background**

Strong parental engagement is essential for school success. Studies (Englund, Luckner, Whaley & Egeland, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002) have shown that parental engagement in schools promotes the following:

- better student attendance;
- increased graduation rates;
- less grade retention;

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- higher parent and student satisfaction with the school;
- fewer discipline reports;
- higher achievement scores in reading, math; and
- improved scholastic outcomes.

School principals, as managers of their schools, are responsible for the organization of activities which encourage parental engagement. If principals are willing to change the system and have a positive attitude towards change, then it is expected that these principals will organize more activities geared toward parental engagement in schools. The importance of the relationship between offering different school activities for parents to join in, and the positive or negative attitudes school principals have regarding change, deserves further research. Therefore, this will be examined here.

The research question can be formulated as follows.

*Is there a relationship between the organization of activities for parental engagement in schools and the general attitude that school principals have towards changes of school system in South East European countries?*

This paper will answer this research question separately for each country. At the end, the main aim is to create recommendations that redefine the role of school principals as initiators of change in schools.

### **Research methodology**

Considering the primary goal of this research – to give a proper response to the research question – it is necessary that a hypothesis be identified. The stated prediction will be appropriately tested during data analysis.

This section will illustrate several issues. Bearing in mind some of the factors listed in the introduction, the author has decided to use empirical research methodology combined with literature-based research while testing the hypothesis. This approach involves desk and field research and analyses of quantitative data.

Literature-based (desk) research covers the research of secondary data coming from various academic sources.

The field research will include data from the Cross-National Survey of School Principals in South East European countries. This survey was conducted under the auspices of the Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe Initiative, which was funded by the Education Support Program of the Open Society Institute.

The general aim of the cross-national survey was to better understand the opportunities created by school leadership for parents to participate in school life. In light of the general aim of the initiative, the purpose was to gather evidence with a view to provide an enhanced and contextual understanding of the perceptions and actions of school leadership related to the improvement of parental participation in school life.

### **Results and implications of the study**

This research investigates the relationship between the organization of different activities for engaging parents in schools, and attitudes towards change. Taking into consideration the overall situation among schools, the author expects to find a positive relationship between the organization of activities for parental engagement in schools and attitudes towards change.

The results of the study will be used to work out recommendations for redefining the role of school principals as initiators of change in school. However, regardless of its background, the publication of this research will be of great assistance to the work of school principals in South East European countries.

### **Literature review**

The literature review will provide an overview of the current literature related to this topic in order to establish the best possible foundation for this research. More specifically, it will help explain the relationship between attitudes towards change and the organization of different activities for parental engagement in school.

In the author's opinion, there is a wealth of literature touting the tremendous benefits of parental engagement in schools; however, there is a dearth of literature (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Constantino, 2003; Englund et al., 2004; Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005) that directly links the role principals have in including parents in academic and social activities to improve student learning, or the school environment.

To begin with, an explanation of parental involvement and parental engagement will be given. Also, this section will include a brief explanation of the attitudes principals currently hold toward change and the role that principals and parents can play as initiators of change.

#### ***Parental involvement and engagement: two different terms***

According to Pushor and Ruitenberg (2005), there is a clear distinction between involvement and engagement, and use the terms very purposefully in their writing and research. However, these authors state that other researchers use the terms interchangeably. The following section describes what the literature has to say about these two terms.

#### ***Parental involvement***

Parental involvement programs "tend to be directed by the school and attempt to involve parents in school activities and/or teach parents specific skills and strategies for teaching and reinforcing school tasks at home" (Kellaghan, *et al.*, 1993, p. 85). Typically, parents are asked to assume roles such as "audience, spectators, fund raisers, aides and organizers (McGilp & Michael, 1994, p.2).

Benson (1999) notes that the word 'involvement' comes from the Latin, 'involvere,' which means 'to roll into' and by extension implies wrapping up or enveloping parents somehow into the system". Beare (as cited in Benson,

1999, p. 48) adds that “the implication in the word is that the person ‘involved’ is co-opted, brought into the act by another party”.

Parents who are ‘involved’ serve the school’s agenda by doing the things educators ask or expect them to do: volunteering at schools; parenting in positive ways; and supporting and assisting their children at home with their schoolwork. Meanwhile, knowledge, authority and decision-making all continue to rest with the educators (Pushor, 2001).

### **Parental engagement**

Parental engagement, distinct from parental involvement, is an alternative way to bring teachers and parents together in schools. ‘Engagement’, in comparison to ‘involvement’, is formed from ‘en’, meaning ‘make’, and ‘gage’, meaning to make a moral commitment. With parental engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be streamlined, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being seen to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005).

Constantino (2003) consciously adopts the word ‘engagement’, defining it as “the interaction between schools and families and the degree to which families are involved in the educational lives of their children”. Further to this first differentiation, Constantino has chosen to use the word ‘family’ in place of ‘parent’ as this word “helps to include all of those adults who play a significant role in rearing children”.

### **Attitudes**

When social psychologists define *attitudes*, they focus on the tendency to like or dislike an attitude object or behavior. That is, attitudes are defined as tendencies to evaluate objects favorably or unfavorably (views of Bem, 1970; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fazio, 1990; Olson & Zanna, 1993; Petty, Wegener, & Fabrigar, 1997; and Wood, 2000 as cited in Olson & Maio, 2003).

Attitudes can be directed toward any identifiable object in our environment, including groups of people (e.g. ethnic groups), controversial issues (e.g. legalized abortion), and concrete objects (e.g. pizza). In fact, the potentially unlimited range of attitudes sometimes causes confusion about the relations between attitudes and other social-psychological constructs. For example, there is a conceptual overlap between attitudes and values, which are abstract ideals that people consider to be important guiding principles in their lives (e.g. freedom) (Rokeach, 1973 and Schwartz, 1992) as cited in Olson & Maio, 2003). The importance component of values makes them distinct from attitudes (Feather, 1995; Maio & Olson, 1998; as cited in Olson & Maio, 2003), because positive attitudes do not imply that the targets are important guiding principles in life.

One fundamental attribute of attitudes is that they are subjective – that is, they reflect how a person sees an object and not necessarily how the object actually exists. Consequently, attitudes should be considered a part of the subjective self, which is the stream of thoughts, feelings, and actions that govern how someone lives (James, 1980 as cited in Olson & Maio, 2003).

### ***Role of principals as initiators of change***

School principals are responsible for the schools. The management of schools is given to principals and, therefore, it can be said that school principals are managers of the school. The success of schools in achieving educational goals is related to the role of principals. The role of school principals is to take care of the successful function of the school. This includes initiating a process of change in schools and, therefore, principals have the responsibility for raising the level of parental engagement. Apart from organizing sessions with parents, school principals should perform additional actions such as organizing and supporting teachers to attract parental involvement in schools, and to give examples to teachers as to how sessions for parents should be organized.

If the principals have positive attitudes towards change and see the role of principals as initiators of change, then it is expected that the principals should organize activities in order to engage parents in school life. Another interesting aspect which deserves further exploration is the principal's evaluation of activities for parental engagement. If principals evaluate such activities as important, then it is expected that those principals will include organizations of such sessions in the schools' annual plans.

### **Research methodology**

This section will present the research background (i.e. the way the research will be conducted) and identify the research problem. Firstly, the research design will be revealed. The research objective is presented, as well as research hypothesis. Then, the research strategy will be presented.

#### ***Research objective***

The purpose of this research is to explore the interdependency between organizing different activities for parental engagement in schools, and attitudes towards change among school principals in South East European countries.

#### ***Research hypothesis***

The topic of this research was stated at the beginning of this study, and it highlights the question of whether positive relationships exist between the organization of different activities for parental engagement in schools, and attitudes towards change among school principals. The assumption is that if principals have a positive attitude towards change, then it is expected that these principals will organize more activities for parental engagement.

Based on a literature review, and in regards to the aforementioned research objectives, the author proposes the following hypothesis: there is a positive relationship between the organization of different activities for parental engagement, and attitudes towards change among school principals in South East European countries.

#### ***Research strategy***

The research strategy is a data collection and analysis technique, which transforms theory into action. This part covers methods for data collection.

**Methods of literature data collection:** in the first stage of the current study, the literature-based research will be conducted. The main objective is to collect as much information and data as possible using secondary sources (e.g. magazines and papers, academic peer-reviewed journals, as well as textbooks and bulletins). This stage has dominantly qualitative elements.

**Methods of survey data collection:** the second stage (primary research) covers a survey/questionnaire approach based on quantitative dimensions. The survey data collection was conducted with standardized questionnaires. These consisted of several parts dealing with various factors which, according to the opinion of the authors of the study, are related to parental engagement in schools. Attitudes towards change among school principals were also measured.

### **Sample**

The interviews were conducted with school principals in the region. A total of 1603 principals took part in the study (300 in Albania; 237 in Bosnia and Herzegovina; 225 in Kosovo, 200 in Macedonia; 296 in Moldova; 145 in Montenegro and 200 in Serbia). The field research included the usage of data from the [Cross-National Survey of School Principals in South East Europe](#). The survey was conducted for the Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South East Europe Initiative under the auspices of the Education Support Program of the Open Society Institute.

The data were collected using a stratified, random selection of sample units (primary schools). The main advantage of using such stratification procedures (the division of the sample into sub-groups and randomly selecting from those sub-groups) is that it reduces sampling error.

The equal probability of school selection was ensured by carrying out school stratification by region, so that regional distribution was reflected in the population of schools.

### **Measurement of key concepts**

There are several key concepts of interest in this survey:

- attitude towards change;
- evaluation of the frequency of organized sessions to help parents assist their children with homework;
- evaluation of the frequency at which parents are provided with materials helping them with their children's homework;
- evaluation of the frequency at which parents are provided with materials helping them monitor their children's homework;
- evaluation of the frequency at which parents are provided with information on creating a home-learning environment;
- evaluation of the frequency at which parents are provided with a counseling service;

- evaluation of the frequency at which parent issue-based support groups are organized (e.g. on violence and behavioral problems).

The measurement of data from the primary research was made with specific questions from the questionnaire. The text below explains each measure of key concepts.

#### ***Measurement of attitude towards change***

Attitude towards change was measured via data available from the following question: how much can you, as a school principal, influence changes in the school system?

The principals indicated the extent to which they agreed on a four-point Lickert scale (1 = extremely, 4 = not at all). If the score was lower, then the principal was shown to have more positive attitude towards change.

#### ***Measurement of organized sessions to help parents assist their children with homework***

This was conducted via answers provided by principals on the same question. The principals indicated the frequency of organization of such activity in their school. The answers were given on a four-point scale (1 = at least once a month; 2 = at least once a semester; 3 = at least once a year; and 4 = not at all). If the score was lower, more sessions were held.

#### ***Measurement of providing parents with materials for helping their children with homework***

This was conducted via the answers provided by the principals on the same question. The principals indicated the frequency of organization of such activity in their school. The answers were given on a four-point scale (1 = at least once a month; 2 = at least once a semester; 3 = at least once a year; and 4 = not at all). If the score was lower, more materials were provided.

#### ***Measurement of providing parents with materials helping to monitor their children's homework***

This was conducted via the answers provided by the principals on the same question. The principals indicated the frequency of organization of such activity in their school. The answers were given on a four-point scale (1 = at least once a month; 2 = at least once a semester; 3 = at least once a year; and 4 = not at all). If the score was lower, more materials were provided.

#### ***Measurement of providing parents with information on creating a home-learning environment***

This was conducted via the answers provided by the principals on the same question. The principals indicated the frequency of organization of such activity in their school. The answers were given on a scale from 1 to 4 (1 = at least once a month; 2 = at least once a semester; 3 = at least once a year; and 4 = not at all). If the score was lower, more information was provided.

### ***Measurement of provided counseling services to parents***

This was conducted via the answers provided by the principals on the same question. The principals indicated the frequency of organization of such activity in their school. The answers were given on a scale from 1 to 4 (1 = at least once a month; 2 = at least once a semester; 3 = at least once a year; and 4 = not at all). If the score was lower, more counseling services were provided.

### ***Measurement of organization of parent issue-based support groups (e.g. on violence and behavioral problems)***

This was conducted via the answers provided by the principals on the same question. The principals indicated the frequency of organization of such activity in their school. The answers were given on a four-point scale (1 = at least once a month; 2 = at least once a semester; 3 = at least once a year; and 4 = not at all). If the score was lower, more support groups were organized.

### ***Statistical analysis***

The hypothesis was tested through a calculation of the Pearson correlation. The calculations showed whether there was a positive relationship between the organization of different activities for parental engagement in schools, and attitudes towards change among school principals in the region. The statistical analysis was performed separately for each country.

## **Results**

Results for the hypothesis testing will be shown here. Results for each country are presented separately. Hypotheses were tested through the calculation of the Pearson correlation. The presentation of the results will be shown alphabetically: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, and Serbia. Then, a short conclusion regarding the confirmation of the hypothesis will follow. Finally, a short summary of the results will be presented.

### ***Albania***

The results show the relationship between the organization of different activities for parental engagement, and attitudes towards change among school principals in Albania. The results are presented in Table 1.



**Table 1.** Relationship between attitudes towards change and the organization of different activities for parental engagement (Albania)

Different activities for parental engagement in schools	Pearson coefficient of correlation between attitude towards change and each activity	Level of significance
School organized sessions to help parents assist their children with homework	0.086	$p > 0.05$
School provided parents with materials helping their children with homework	0.249	$p < 0.01$
School provided parents with materials helping to monitor their children's homework	0.201	$p < 0.01$
School provided parents with information on creating a home-learning environment	-0.040	$p > 0.05$
School provided counseling service to parents	0.177	$p < 0.01$
School organized parent issue-based support groups (e.g. on violence, behavioral problems etc.)	0.177	$p < 0.01$

Table 1 shows a confirmation for four out of six tests for Albania. The results confirm that there is a positive relationship between attitudes towards change and the organization of the following activities:

- providing parents with materials helping their children with homework;
- providing parents with materials helping to monitor their children's homework;
- providing a counseling service to parents and organizing parent issue-based groups.

The model does not function in school-organized sessions to help parents assist with homework, and when the school has provided information on creating a home-learning environment.

The conclusion is that the proposed model works in most of the organized activities in Albania. The results confirm that activities are related to the attitudes towards change that principals have. The confirmation of the majority of assumptions is a good starting point for the organization of workshops for change management and parental engagement among school principals in Albania.

### ***Bosnia-Herzegovina***

The results show the relationship between the organization of different activities for parental engagement, and attitude towards change among school principals in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Relationship between attitudes towards change and organization of different activities for parental engagement (Bosnia-Herzegovina)

Different activities for parental engagement in schools	Pearson coefficient of correlation between attitude towards change and each activity	Level of significance
School organized sessions to help parents with their children's homework	0.165	$p < 0.05$
School provided parents with materials helping with their children's homework	0.082	$p > 0.05$
School provided parents with materials helping to monitor their children's homework	0.001	$p > 0.05$
School provided parents with information on creating a home-learning environment	0.172	$p < 0.01$
School provided counseling services to parents	0.162	$p < 0.05$
School organized parent issue-based support groups (e.g. on violence, behavioral problems etc.)	0.008	$p > 0.05$

Table 2 shows a confirmation of three out of six tests for Bosnia-Herzegovina. The results confirm that there is a positive relationship between attitudes towards change and the organization of the following activities:

- instructional sessions to help parents with their children's homework;
- providing parents with information on creating a home-learning environment; and
- providing counseling services to parents.

Bosnia-Herzegovina is a specific case where only half of the assumptions were met. This could be a result of the specific background in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Further analyses (regarding regions or areas) are needed in order to find the determinants of such situation.

The results show that the proposed model works in some of the organized activities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The conclusion is that the model does not work in areas where school principals do not have much influence (e.g. providing parents with materials). Providing parents with materials is always related to finances, and perhaps this is the reason for the confirmation of half of the assumptions. Although the model doesn't behave in this situation as expected, the organization of workshops for parental engagement among school principals should be encouraged due to the fact that the model works in situations where principals can exert their influence.

**Kosovo**

The results show the relationship between the organization of different activities for parental engagement and attitudes towards change among school principals in Kosovo. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Relationship between attitude towards change and the organization of different activities for parental engagement (Kosovo)

Different activities for parental engagement in school	Pearson coefficient of correlation between attitude towards change and each activity	Level of significance
School organized sessions to help parents with their children's homework	0.129	$p > 0.05$
School provided parents with materials helping with their children's homework	0.003	$p > 0.05$
School provided parents with materials helping to monitor their children's homework	-0.016	$p > 0.05$
School provided parents with information on creating a home-learning environment	0.052	$p > 0.05$
School provided counseling services to parents	-0.009	$p > 0.05$
School organized parent issue-based support groups (e.g. on violence, behavioral problems etc.)	0.042	$p > 0.05$

Table 3 shows no confirmation for each of the six tests for Kosovo. The results do not confirm that there is a relationship between attitudes towards change and the organization of activities for parental engagement in schools.

The results show that the proposed model does not apply to Kosovo at all. The conclusion here is that the model does not work because principals are not aware of change management. The recommendation is that policy-makers focus on organizing workshops for change management in order to improve the educational process in Kosovo.

**Macedonia**

The results show the relationship between the organization of different activities for parental engagement, and attitudes towards change among school principals in Macedonia. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Relationship between attitudes towards change, and the organization of different activities for parental engagement parents (Macedonia)

Different activities for parental engagement in schools	Pearson coefficient of correlation between attitude towards change and each activity	Level of significance
School organized sessions to help parents with their children's homework	0.147	$p < 0.05$
School provided parents with materials helping with their children's homework	0.072	$p > 0.05$
School provided parents with materials helping to monitor their children's homework	0.174	$p < 0.05$
School provided parents with information on creating a home-learning environment	0.050	$p > 0.05$
School provided counseling services to parents	0.031	$p > 0.05$
School organized parent issue-based support groups (e.g. on violence, behavioral problems, etc.)	0.076	$p > 0.05$

Table 4 shows confirmation of two out of six tests for Macedonia. The results confirm that there is a positive relationship between attitudes towards change and the organization of the following activities:

- organizing sessions to help parents with their children's homework; and
- providing parents with materials helping to monitor their children's homework.

The situation in Macedonia shows that the proposed model did not confirm most expectations. The conclusion here is similar to Kosovo. The model doesn't work because principals have a low level of awareness for initiating change. Again, the recommendation is that policy-makers focus on organizing workshops for change management in order to emphasize the importance of change processes in the educational system.

**Moldova**

The results show the relationship between the organization of different activities for parental engagement, and attitudes towards change among school principals in Moldova. The results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Relationship between attitudes towards change, and the organization of different activities for parental engagement (Moldova)

Different activities for parental engagement in schools	Pearson coefficient of correlation between attitude towards change and each activity	Level of significance
School organized sessions to help parents with their children's homework	0.061	$p > 0.05$
School provided parents with materials helping with their children's homework	0.100	$p > 0.05$
School provided parents with materials helping to monitor their children's homework	0.046	$p > 0.05$
School provided parents with information on creating a home-learning environment	0.035	$p > 0.05$
School provided counseling services to parents	-0.084	$p > 0.05$
School organized parent issue-based support groups (e.g. on violence, behavioral problems etc.)	0.158	$p < 0.01$

Table 5 shows confirmation of only one out of the six tests for Moldova. The results confirm that there is a positive relationship between attitudes towards change and the organization of parent issue-based support groups. The conclusion is that the proposed model does not apply to Moldova either.

Moldova is a very specific case, because the model functions only in a very sensitive area (the organization of parent issue-based support groups, e.g. on violence and behavioral problems). Again, the recommendations here would be that policy-makers stress the importance of change management through workshops in order to raise the quality of education.

**Montenegro**

The results show the relationship between the organization of different activities for parental engagement and attitudes towards change among school principals in Montenegro. The results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Relationship between attitudes towards change and the organization of different activities for parental engagement (Montenegro)

Different activities for parental engagement in schools	Pearson coefficient of correlation between attitude towards change and each activity	Level of significance
School organized sessions to help parents with their children's homework	0.224	$p < 0.01$
School provided parents with materials helping with their children's homework	0.227	$p < 0.01$
School provided parents with materials helping to monitor their children's homework	0.284	$p < 0.01$
School provided parents with information on creating a home-learning environment	0.141	$p > 0.05$
School provided counseling services to parents	0.203	$p < 0.05$
School organized parent issue-based support groups (e.g. on violence, behavioral problems, etc.)	0.310	$p < 0.01$

Table 6 shows confirmation of five out of six tests for Montenegro. The results confirm the positive relationship between attitudes towards change and the following activities:

- organizing sessions to help parents with their children's homework;
- providing parents with materials helping with their children's homework;
- providing parents with materials helping to monitor their children's homework;
- providing counseling services to parents; and
- organizing parent issue-based groups.

The conclusion is that the proposed model works perfectly in Montenegro. The results confirm that the activities are related to the attitudes towards change that school principals have. The model does not work when schools provide parents with information on creating a home-learning environment. Perhaps the reason for this is lack of provision of such information by the principals. Confirmation of the majority of assumptions is a good starting point for organizing workshops for change management and parental engagement among school principals in Montenegro.

**Serbia**

The results show the relationship between the organization of different activities for parental engagement and attitudes towards change among school principals in Serbia. The results are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Relationship between attitudes towards change and the organization of different activities for parental engagement (Serbia)

Different activities for parental engagement in schools	Pearson coefficient of correlation between attitude towards change and each activity	Level of significance
School organized sessions to help parents with their children's homework	0.224	$p < 0.01$
School provided parents with materials helping with their children's homework	0.162	$p < 0.05$
School provided parents with materials helping to monitor their children's homework	0.189	$p < 0.01$
School provided parents with information on creating a home-learning environment	0.149	$p < 0.05$
School provided counseling service to parents	0.095	$p > 0.05$
School organized parent issue-based support groups (e.g. on violence, behavioral problems, etc.)	0.129	$p > 0.05$

Table 7 shows confirmation of 4 out of the 6 tests for Serbia. The results confirm the positive relationship between attitude towards change and organization of the following activities: organizing sessions to help parents assist their children with homework, providing parents with materials helping to assist their children with homework, providing parents with materials helping to monitor their children's homework, and providing parents with information on creating a home-learning environment.

The conclusion is that the proposed model works in most of the organized activities in Serbia. The results confirm that activities are related to the attitude towards change that principals have. The confirmation of the majority of assumptions is a good starting point to endorse planning workshops for change management and parental engagement among school principals in Serbia.

### **Summary of results**

The results reveal the relationship between the organization of different activities for parental engagement in schools and attitudes towards change among school principals in South East European countries. Based on the results, using the rule of confirming of the majority of expectations (more than three out of six) the countries can be divided into two groups. The first group is comprised of countries in which most of the expectations were confirmed: Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia. The second group consists of countries in which expectations are not confirmed: Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Moldova.

### **Discussion and recommendations**

In this section, analysis of the results will be provided. The analysis will consist of two parts. The first part is about the role of school principals. The second part offers possible reasons for the confirmation of expectations in the countries where the model works, versus the countries where the model does not work. In the end, specific recommendations based on empirical findings from the study are outlined. The recommendations are given to support and improve the work of school principals in South East European countries.

According to Efremov (2005), education today is faced with the formidable task of building cosmopolitan societies, which will positively and constructively meet the challenges of globalization and the world's growing interconnectedness. Keeping this in mind, there is a need for educational models which will bring about educational change. The proposed model underlies the assumption that positive attitudes towards change brings about positive change in schools. The emphasis is on the role of school principals, because they have the crucial role in managing schools. They are in charge of the everyday management of schools and are responsible for engaging parents in school life. This paper is focused on the psychological components of school principals by highlighting the effects of their attitude regarding change, because this is essentially what determines success in improving education. If principals have faith in the feasibility of change, and if they believe that change is necessary, then the expected outcome (parental engagement in schools) will rise as a consequence. This will be the first step toward change. The next step for school principals is to accept their new role as active supporters of engagement. At the same time, with the acceptance of their new role, school principals send a clear message to all parties (parents, teachers) that the engagement of parents in schools is both desirable and achievable. This will give a strong signal to parents that they are invited to participate in the performance of their child. An open attitude towards change will stimulate parents to support the organization of activities for their engagement. Also, parents will bring new ideas regarding parental engagement. The mutual benefit that will result from this model will be expressed through a higher level of parental engagement, which will be visible and beneficial to all stakeholders.

This research has revealed the effectiveness of the proposed model, demonstrating the link between attitudes towards change and offering different activities for parental engagement in schools. According to the analysis, the model works in Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia. The reasons for the confirmation of these expectations can be



found in the awareness of school principals as initiators of change. The positive attitude and perception of the principal's role as an initiator of change – as shown by the analysis – clearly contributes to offering more activities. Consequently, this leads to positive consequences for the stakeholders involved. This serves as empirical proof in the debate of whether the proposed model for educational improvement works.

On the other hand, expectations were not met in Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Moldova. Perhaps in these countries school principals are not aware of their role as initiators of change and therefore are not active in the organization of activities for parental engagement in schools. As a consequence, the model does not function in these countries. Also, social and organizational components of schools in these countries should be taken into account in the discussion as to whether the proposed model works.

There are countries where the model was strongly confirmed, and on the other hand, there are countries where the proposed model was not confirmed at all. The clear distinction between these two situations (confirmation of most of the expectations versus very low confirmation) directs a very reinforcing and promising strategy. The strategy for parental engagement in schools should follow the empirical proof of the proposed model, and the output will be a higher level of parental engagement. At the end of the day, school principals and parents share the same goal, which is to help pupils perform better at school. This mutual interest will fulfill its integrating function through the proposed model.

The recommendations given for the improvement of school principals' work are in the direction of changing their attitudes. This can be accomplished through the organization of workshops with school principals. The workshops should consist of two parts: change management and parental engagement. The main aim of these workshops should be to raise awareness about parental engagement, and to engender positive attitudes towards change.

The first part of the workshops should define the role of school principals as initiators of change. School principals should gain basic skills in how to manage the process of change and how to set goals for the change process. This will contribute to changing schools from traditional, outdated organizations to innovative, modern organizations. Finding a positive relationship between attitudes towards change and planning activities for the engagement of parents in several South East European countries strengthens the argument for the implementation of such workshops.

The second part of the workshop should focus on the engagement of parents in schools as one of the main goals of education (apart from pupils' performance, although these two phenomena are related). Also, parental engagement should become part of school principals' goals and strategies. Principals should find ways to translate this overall goal into specific actions, which should be taken into account by the ministries of education in the region.

The aforementioned recommendations should be applied in South East European countries in order to change and improve the work of school principals. This especially refers to those countries where the expectations have

not been met. This does not mean that such workshops should not be organized in those countries where expectations *have* been confirmed, and the reason for this is obvious. The proposed model, due to its positive consequences, should strengthen its position and reach as many parents and families as possible. This paper demonstrates the mutual benefits of the proposed model, and the final conclusion is that the model represents a 'win-win' situation both for school principals and parents.

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