



Parental involvement and student achievement in two language domains: Indirect relations and generalizability across migration status



A. Katrin Arens*, Nina Jude

German Institute for International Educational Research, Germany

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses students' reports of two facets of parental involvement (i.e., family activity and parents' subjective importance) in a sample of ninth-grade German secondary school students, related to German language (Sample 1: $N = 4476$) and English language (Sample 2: $N = 4440$). The aim was to test the direct and indirect relations between the two facets of parental involvement and student achievement and the generalizability of mean levels and patterns of relations across students' migration status. The results did not demonstrate any significant direct relations between both facets of parental involvement and student achievement. However, in both language domains, family activity was found to be indirectly related to student achievement with students' domain-specific academic self-concept serving as a mediator variable. The student sample was divided into four groups of students with different migration status (students and parents born in Germany; only one parent born in Germany; only the student born in Germany; student and parents born abroad). For both language domains, the pattern of relations between the two facets of parental involvement and student achievement was invariant across these groups of students. When considering mean level differences, the students reported similar levels of parents' subjective importance across the four groups with respect to both German and English languages. Regarding family activity in the domain of German language, students whose parents had both been born abroad reported lower mean levels. Mean level differences in the level of family activity in the domain of English language were found to be less clear-cut.

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1. Introduction

Students' achievement has multiple determinants on the individual student level such as students' cognitive abilities (IQ; Frey & Detterman, 2004; Furnham & Monsen, 2009; Spinath, Spinath, & Plomin, 2008), motivation and emotion (Marsh & Craven, 2006; Pekrun, 2006), and learning behavior (e.g., self-regulation, Zimmerman, 2008). However, student achievement can also be influenced by students' social environment including experiences with peers, teachers, and parents (e.g., Wentzel, Russell, & Baker, 2016). Regarding parental influence, a line of research focuses on the construct of parental involvement which encompasses different practices and behaviors of parents, all aiming to contribute to, and support the educational achievement and progress of their children (see for example Jeynes, 2005; Reynolds, 1992). The present study adds to research on parental involvement by examining several outstanding research questions simultaneously. We

target the question of an indirect relation between parental involvement and student achievement mediated through students' academic self-concept. Moreover, this study explores differences in the mean levels and in the relation between parental involvement and achievement across students with different migration status. To investigate these research questions, two facets of parental involvement (i.e., family activity and parents' subjective importance) are considered in two language domains (i.e., German and English), thus taking into account the multidimensionality and domain specificity of parental involvement.

2. Parental involvement

2.1. The multidimensional nature of parental involvement

Parental involvement is consistently seen as a multidimensional construct comprising different forms of parents' practices and behaviors related to their children's learning (e.g., Castro et al., 2015; Fan, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005; Manz, Fantuzzo, & Power, 2004; Wilder, 2014). Although there are numerous different conceptualizations of facets of parental involvement, they seem to overlap. In fact, different classifications all include parental socialization

* Corresponding author at: German Institute for International Educational Research, Department of Education and Human Development, Centre for Research on Individual Development and Adaptive Education of Children (IDeA), Schloßstr. 29, D-60486 Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

E-mail address: arens@dipf.de (A.K. Arens).

processes (e.g., parents' expectations, values, and aspirations) as well as parents' explicit or overt behavior at home and in school contexts.

Parental involvement has often been demonstrated to be positively related to student achievement (e.g., Fan, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005). In their meta-analysis, Fan and Chen (2001) demonstrated a mean correlation of $r = 0.25$ between different facets of parental involvement and student achievement across 25 studies. In their recent meta-analysis, Castro et al. (2015) revealed an average effect size of 0.124 for the relation between parental involvement and student achievement. However, the size of the relation seems to differ contingent upon the specific facet and manifestation of parental involvement considered. Among the five facets of parental involvement distinguished in their study, Fan and Chen (2001) reported the strongest achievement relation for parents' expectations and aspirations for their children's educational achievement, while supervision of children at home was found to display the weakest relation. Similarly, in the meta-analysis by Castro et al. (2015), the largest effect size was found for parents' expectations (see also Jeynes, 2005; Wilder, 2014).

Hence, it can be stated that different facets of parental involvement yield differential effects on students' achievement, the highest relations being found for those facets that address parental socialization processes, while parents' explicit behavior in the home context seems to have smaller effects (Fan & Chen, 2001; Castro et al., 2015; Jeynes, 2005; Trivette & Anderson, 1995; Wilder, 2014). Whenever studying the relation between parental involvement and achievement, it is thus advisable to take the multidimensional conceptualization of parental involvement into account and to consider various facets of parental involvement.

2.2. The domain specificity of parental involvement

Most of the studies examining the relation between parental involvement and student achievement have included measures of parental involvement that are unrelated to any specific academic domain (e.g., Dearing, McCartney, Weiss, Kreider, & Simpkins, 2004; Desimone, 1999; Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Fan, 2001; Hill & Craft, 2003; Hill et al., 2004; Hong & Ho, 2005; Keith et al., 1998). However, it seems worthwhile to investigate domain-specific relations between facets of parental involvement and student achievement since domain-unspecific approaches might mask domain-specific idiosyncrasies. For instance, the same facet of parental involvement might positively affect student achievement in math but not in language domains, whereas another facet of parental involvement might show a reverse pattern.

Among the few studies pursuing a domain-specific approach on parental involvement, some target the domain of math (Hong, Yoo, You, & Wu, 2010; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Regarding the verbal domain, the domain of reading has often been targeted (Sénéchal & Young, 2008). Fewer studies have considered the language domain in broader terms addressing students' overall language achievement including various language skills. Furthermore, the reported relations between parental involvement and achievement within the narrow domain of reading have been primarily demonstrated with preschool and elementary school students (e.g., Aram & Levin, 2002; Dearing et al., 2004; Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). In addition, so far, many of the studies on parental involvement in the domain of reading have only included behavioral manifestations of parental involvement such as reading books to children or practicing reading skills (Ehri et al., 2001; Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000; Sénéchal & Young, 2008). Hence, these studies do not consider socialization processes which, however, demonstrate substantial relations to achievement that have been found to be even higher than achievement relations of overt parental behavior and actions (Castro et al., 2015; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hong et al., 2010; Wilder, 2014).

Against this background, the present study aims to examine the relation between family activity and parents' subjective importance on

the one hand and student achievement on the other hand in the two language domains of German and English with secondary school students in Germany. Family activity depicts a behavioral, directly observable facet of parental involvement which is manifest in shared activities of parents and children. Parents' subjective importance refers to the extent to which parents attribute high relevance to their children's learning and school accomplishments. Parents' subjective importance thus can be allocated to the category of parental socialization processes as a subcomponent of parental involvement. Therefore, the present study follows the multidimensional approach to parental involvement and includes one facet of overt parental behavior and one facet of parental socialization, applying this approach to two language domains (German, English) when considering adolescent students.

2.3. Generalizability across students' migration status

Another strand of research on parental involvement focuses on group differences which first can be tested regarding the mean levels of reported parental involvement. Secondly, group differences can be examined regarding the relation between parental involvement facets and student achievement since "one should not assume that the types of parental involvement that most affect academic outcomes are identical across racial, class, gender, and culture background" (Jeynes, 2010, p. 765). In the present study conducted with secondary school students in Germany, group differences are tested with respect to students' migration status. In analogy to recognized large-scale studies such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) or the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), we distinguish four groups of students with different migration status. The first group consists of students without any migration status as both the students' parents and the students themselves had been born in Germany. The remaining three groups consist of students having a migration status. In the second group, students have one parent who was born abroad; the third group comprises students who were born in Germany, while both parents were born elsewhere. The fourth group is defined by students who themselves as well as their parents were born abroad.

As can be assumed from this classification, the groups of students with different migration status might differ with regard to their parents' skills and experiences with the German language – the language of instruction in the German educational system. This might affect the mean levels of parental involvement regarding German language. Students with one parent born in Germany (Group 2) might still report high levels of parental involvement since one parent might offer adequate levels of support. If both parents were born abroad (Groups 3 and 4), parents might lack skills and experiences to adequately support their children's learning in German leading to lower levels of students' reported parental involvement. With respect to English language, it is important to note that English is a foreign language learned at school for nearly all students in Germany. Given that English is learned at school in many foreign countries, immigrant parents might have at least some prior knowledge and experiences with English which might enable them to provide some level of support to their children. Group mean level differences in parental involvement might thus be more pronounced with regard to German than to English.

Group mean level differences might also vary with the specific facet of parental involvement considered. Mean level differences between students of different migration status might be more pronounced when considering family activity whose realization depends on parents' adequate skills and competences. On the other hand, regardless of migrant status, parents might similarly place a high value on their children's learning and achievement, which might lead to no or only low mean level differences in parents' subjective importance as a subfacet of parental involvement (Spera, 2005).

Beyond mean level differences, this study tests whether students with different migration status vary in their pattern of relations between achievement and the two facets of parental involvement

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