The Role of Parents in the Achievement of Turkish-Speaking Students in British Schools: Why They Fail in Supporting Their Children?

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In this paper, the role of parents in supporting their children's progress, as a factor affecting Turkish-speaking children's achievement, has been explored. It is a fact that Turkish-speaking pupils, when compared with other ethnic groups, such as Bangladeshi and Somali, struggle, underachieve, and still continue performing low in the British education system. The Turkish community has been resident in the United Kingdom (UK) for over 70 years with the current estimated population of 450,000. However, the community is invisible in the society; their diverse needs are not known; and there are limited research and government reports. The relevant data and research findings indicate that there are various factors for the underachievement of the Turkish-speaking pupils. This study shows the degree of importance of parental participation for Turkish-speaking parents in supporting their children's achievement. As a result, lack of parental involvement is one of the important factors in achievement; and a majority of parents stated that they could not involve in their children's learning because a number of reasons evaluated in the paper.

Keywords: achievement, role of parents, Turkish speakers, diverse needs, Turkish community

Introduction

Turkish-speaking communities in the United Kingdom (UK) are a diverse group and comprise Cypriot Turks, mainland Turks, and Kurds. Their residency goes back to the 1930s when first settlers arrived to the UK, and the current population is estimated almost a half million.

The study aims to investigate the role of parents as a factor on Turkish students' attainment through taking a whole parental approach, investigating the role of parents on the underachievement. It will begin by an analysis of educational achievement of Turkish-speaking students supported by the latest government report. This will be followed by a literature review in parental involvement, including types of, the impact of, and the role of school in parental involvement. It will then examine parental factors affecting Turkish-speaking students' achievement in British schools.

Finally, the paper will conclude with analysis of findings and suggestions for improvement. This paper is based on mainly qualitative study seeking illumination and understanding, not aiming to establish a sample which is representative and can be used in a general manner.

Educational Attainment of Turkish-Speaking Students in the UK

In the British education system, academic achievement refers to the attainment of grades in most subjects taught in English, and a numerical subject, mathematics, which is one of the core subjects. This can be defined by a national test of achievement, and the results can be classified as achievers and underachievers. In contrast, underachievement is the “school performance, usually measured by grades that are substantially below what would be predicted on the basis of the student’s mental ability, typically measured by intelligence or standardised academic tests” (McCall, Evahn, & Kratzer, 1992, p. 54).

Low attainment and underachievement of children from ethnic groups in the British schools have been evident and cause for concern in the last few decades. Range of studies conducted, mainly at local level in the UK, led to two major government initiatives (i.e., Rampton Committee (1981) followed by the Swann Committee (1985)). The literature suggests that parental involvement, among other factors—such as race, religion, gender, socio-economic status, English as an additional language (EAL), and school factors—may have a considerable impact, whether by intention or default, on students’ attainment. Findings from the evaluation of excellence in cities/ethnic minority achievement (Cunningham, Lopes, & Rudd, 2004), for example, confirm existing research as to some of the key factors necessary if schools are to narrow achievement gaps for students from ethnic groups including a strong focus on leadership, involving students and parents and local community as well as effective use of data.

Attainment records on Turkish-speaking pupils show that they are amongst the lowest achieving ethnic groups in the UK. For example, Modood et al. (1997) found that Turkish-speaking students were more disadvantaged than the most disadvantaged, the Bangladeshi, in terms of facility in English, educational qualifications, unemployment, occupational levels, and earnings. Furthermore, a recent Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) (2003) report, which evaluated test scores of students who spoke EAL, who make up a considerable proportion of English schools, found that Somali, Kurdish, and Turkish students performed significantly worse than others.

Turkish-speaking pupils make up a significant portion of the overall number of pupils with EAL. The Greater London Authority (2009) report shows that in Hackney, 8.1% of secondary school students were recorded as Turkish or Turkish Cypriot; 1.8% of primary school students and 1.7% of secondary school students were recorded as Kurdish. In Enfield, 5.5% of people were recorded as Turkish, 3.5% as Turkish Cypriot, and 1.6% as Kurdish. The proportions of Turkish and Kurdish pupils have been increasing since 1993.

However, their position according to their achievement amongst the other communities is remarkably poor. The 2001 census showed that adults born in Turkey and Cyprus were less likely than the general population to have gained higher level qualifications and far more likely to have no recognised qualification. This situation did not change in 2003. “Ofsted analysed test scores of people who spoke English as an additional language, who make up a tenth of students in English schools, and found that Somali, Kurdish and Turkish speakers performed considerably worse than others” (Times Educational Supplement (TES), 2003).

The Commission on Race and Education at the Association of London Government (London Councils) reported a similar report in 2003: In Islington, Turkish and Turkish Cypriot pupils’ level fell down from a high level at Key Stage 1 to the lowest level at Key Stage 2 and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE); in Lambeth, their level improved from the lowest level at Key Stage 1 to an average level at Key Stage 2, but the second lowest at GCSE; in Lewisham, Turkish pupils’ level was at average for GCSE results;

and in Walthamstow, Southwark, and Enfield, their level was low (Commission on Race and Education, 2003).

In the same year, the London Challenge Turkish Community Action Forum was set up by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (now the Department for Children, Schools and Families) with the aim of obtaining information about the Turkish community in London to find out the reasons for the underachievement of Turkish speakers, and how parents could be provided with support to help their children improve their grades. Its report was published in 2004, in which a number of factors considered as affecting the underachievement of pupils from Turkish, Turkish Kurdish, and Turkish Cypriot communities were identified by the forum (The London Challenge Turkish Forum, 2004). These included family structure and cultural differences; lack of parental knowledge about the British education system; poor language skills of parents affecting their involvement and children's learning; lack of support for parents and students from schools; pressures on parents, including financial issues; long working hours; uncertainty about immigration status; and living in temporary accommodation causing frequent movement. The latest report also showed that while attainment rates amongst other minority groups, such as Bangladeshi pupils, have significantly improved over recent years, Turkish pupils continue to perform below the UK average (Strand et al., 2010).

Parental Involvement

What is Parental Involvement?

Defining the phrase "parental involvement" is not an easy task, because it includes a broad range of activities. The words "involvement", "participation", "collaboration", "engagement", etc., are used synonymously to define the meaning of parental involvement. It means the participation of parents in regular mutual and meaningful communication involving student learning and a wide range of other school activities. Chrispeels (1992) defined "parental involvement" as "the mutual collaboration, support, and participation of families and school staff at home or at school site in activities and efforts that directly and positively affect success of children's progress in school" (p. 2).

The term "parental involvement" includes a number of different forms of activities, some of which take place at home and some at school. Activities that parents involve themselves in at home encompass talking with their children; enhancing their children's self-esteem; and monitoring out of school activities, such as supervising homework; etc.. Activities parents participate in at school include attending school events, such as open days and parents days; working in the school in support of teachers, such as helping with activities in the classroom; assisting in the governance of the school; regular meeting with teachers to discuss their children's progress; etc..

Types of Parental Involvement

As Epstein (1987) identified, types of parental involvement might be in various forms: 1. Parents might be involved with their children at home so that they are mentally as well as physically healthy and strong and such an environment supports learning; 2. Parents might be in contact with the school as often as possible to make sure that they understand the school's programmes and follow their children progress in those programmes; 3. Parents might be involved actively in the school as tutors, classroom assistants, and coaches; 4. Parents might be involved with their children's assignments, providing support and assistance at home; and 5. Parents might be involved in school groups to provide direction for the school and its mission. Thus, parental involvement can

extend to parents to take role as volunteers to support the school, either through activity within schools, such as classroom support on governing bodies, or community activities. For younger children, parents provide their children with school-related skills, such as basic reading and numeracy, whereas for older pupils, parents' role is more about motivating their children and modelling aspirations.

Several other reviews of parental involvement have been made by authors, such as Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), who stated that:

Good parenting at home, including the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance. (p. 2)

Importance of Parental Involvement

It is generally accepted that pupils need full support of their parents in order to maximise their potential in terms of skills, knowledge, and achievement in school. Those who receive full support from their parents are likely to achieve better, and, in contrast, those students who are not supported by their parents are academically disadvantaged. According to the review of literature, parental involvement is crucial for students to achieve at the highest levels in schools. The literature has shown that parents need to become involved for their children to perform better.

Epstein (1985) argued that "The evidence is clear that parental encouragement, activities and interest at home, and parental participation in schools and classrooms positively influence achievement, even after the students' ability and family socio-economic status are taken into account" (p. 19). In addition, there may be evidence to support this approach that the most useful variety of parental involvement is the contact that parents have with their children at home when such contact is used to encourage and support school achievement.

However, it is argued that parents are not as involved in their children's education as they should be. Researchers suggested possible reasons for lack of parental involvement in their children's education:

1. Epstein (1985) and Steinberg (1996) claimed that disengagement of parents is a cause whereas Rosow (1991) stated that parent illiteracy plays a part in this outcome;
2. Barber and Patin (1997) argued that uninviting schools discourage parental involvement;
3. Miller (1995) argued that "Cultural dissimilarities also account in part for the diversity of parenting strategies and parent-school relations associated with variations in student achievement patterns" (p. 338);
4. According to McKenna (2005), "Evidence also suggests that parents and carers from some minority ethnic communities are generally less involved" (p. 38) in their children's education.

Impact of Parental Involvement

Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, and Taggart (1999) and Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, and Taggart (2001) stated in their studies that parental involvement in learning activities in the home is strongly related to childrens' better cognitive achievement, particularly in the early years. However, it was reported that parents took education more seriously when their children started secondary school (Mehmet, 1997; Apitzsch, 1997).

It is likely that some parents have always been interested in their children's attainment, so they have been providing good parenting at home; visiting school to keep updated with their children's progress; establishing a good relationship with the school; discussing with the teachers relevant issues regarding their children; and

actively participating in activities which refer to a broad range of programmes in the school. This shows that parental aspiration and expectation on their children's achievement has a strong impact on results at school, while the effect of supervision of their work is only marginal, as claimed by Fan and Chen (2001).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) emphasised the significance of the positive decision on the parts of the parents to be engaged as the basis for parental modelling and feedback which are accepted as important for enhancing the child's performance and progress. They stated why parents make this decision: the perception or definition of their role and responsibilities for their children's education; the parental sense of competence and self-efficacy to help their children; and parents see themselves as being encouraged or welcomed by school staff for the supportive role.

The Role of School in Parental Involvement

Pena (2001) concluded that the most effective way in improving parental involvement is to make parents feel more welcomed; involving more direct communication with parents on the part of school staff; direct planning of parental activities; and adopting a more positive and open approach towards parents by the staff. However, McGrane (2007) concerned about the lack of practical advice about how to make these links between school staff and parents. She emphasised the importance of activities, such as parents' evenings, open days, advice sessions about homework, etc., but she believed that these types of engagements likely involve one-way communication, because parents are largely listeners in such events in the school, where their children's progress are discussed and where there is a limited opportunity for parents to discuss what strategies are being planned to enhance achievement as well as to determine how they may involve in such developments.

McGrane (2007) stated that there is no such evidence to define the best strategies in terms of parent-school relations, she believed that the following issues might be included: teachers and parents should be aware of the purpose of the meeting with an opportunity to share experiences and information; parents should be provided with adequate knowledge and advice in order to help their children and the staff should be open to gain and share information from the parents; parents should be equal partners in discussions; and finally parents should be well presented in discussions about various school issues, such as dealing with homework and behaviours of children. In order to achieve these, especially for those parents who are bilingual, McKenna (2005) argued that:

Effective communication, using interpreters and translators as appropriate, between the school and parents/carers and where appropriate, social workers, is important in order to disseminate information about expectations and the school system, as well as to negotiate collaborative and creative solutions to problems. (pp. 23-24)

Researches and Surveys on Parental Involvement

B. Williams, J. Williams, and Ullman (2002) surveyed parents of children aged 5-16 attending schools in England to find out their level of involvement in their children's education. According to the findings of this study, 29% of the parents were believed to be very involved and 35% strongly agreed that they wanted to be more involved. This also showed that 2% of the parents felt that only the school should be responsible for education, whilst 58% stated that it should be equal responsibility. It was also found that 72% of the parents agreed that they wanted more involvement, and 40% of the parents were somewhere between. When parents were asked about barriers to becoming involved in their children's education, they stated that they faced some difficulties in their lives, such as work commitments, demand of other children, childcare difficulties, and lack of time.

In addition, according to Douglas (1964), children's progress can be hindered by lack of parental involvement. The key findings were that children of those parents who showed a high level of interest achieved

higher grades in tests at ages 8-11; the grades of those children whose parents showed less interest became worse; and the children with interested parents progressed well whatever their initial starting point was.

In 1995, Basic Skills Agency's research in the UK showed that parents' difficulties with basic skills are a barrier to being involved in their children's education (Basic Skills Agency, 1995). Thirty-four percent of the parents had difficulties in reading from a children's book, and 18% of the parents found it difficult to understand and recognise numbers.

Dave (1963) and Wolf (1964) studied relations between family environments and measures of academic attainment and intelligence. A range of family processes, such as parental aspirations, provisions for intellectual activity, home literacy, and encouragement for language development, was indentified. These processes increased performance on academic achievement tests by 69%, and on intelligence test grades by 49%. Several researches also showed that family environments which are supported by high socio-economic status were more important than school environments in encouraging girls' achievement in secondary schools. While it is generally accepted that female learners even from high socio-economic status have lower aspirations than male learners, female learners have been observed to achieve high grades when economic factors are positive (P. M. Wilson & J. R. Wilson, 1992).

The School Standards and Framework Act (Office of Public Sector Information, 1988) declared the need for state schools to have home-school agreements by which it was aimed to explain the school's aims and values, the school's responsibilities towards its students, the responsibilities of parents, and the expectation of the school from its pupils. Parents were expected to sign these agreements which could contribute to establishing effective parental involvement.

Government Strategies on Parental Involvement in the UK

The government's strategy towards parental involvement was first set out in 1997 in the UK. In the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 1997), the strategy described three important issues as providing parents with information; giving parents a voice; and encouraging parental partnerships with schools. Since then, this strategy has been followed through a wide range of activities including enhancing the role of parents as governors and involving parents in the inspection processes. In the following year of 1998, the School Standards and Framework Act introduced the need for maintained schools to have home-school agreements (The Office of Public Sector Information, 1998). This would be a statement explaining the school's aims and values, responsibilities towards its people, responsibilities of parents, and what the school expects from the children.

In 2005, DfES published the schools White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All—More Choice for Parents and Students* (DfES, 2005). In this paper, parents were placed at the centre of the issue to raise standards by emphasising upon their involvement in the education system. This policy claimed that parental engagement makes a significant difference to the achievement of young people and parents have a key role in improving educational standards.

The importance of parental involvement was emphasised in government publications, such as *Every Parent Matters* (DfES, 2007). In this document, the importance of parental engagement in achieving high standards and in improving educational performance was emphasised. This research was carried out as a part of an extensive developmental project, "Engaging Parents to Raise Achievement" (EPRA), funded by DfES. The aim was to find new approaches of engaging parents in schools, especially hard to reach parents. As a result, it

was explored that engaging those parents had a positive effect on children's achievement and behaviour. Epstein (1990) indicated that parental involvement will take place if the school has policies and programmes for that purpose. Because it is suggested that the most significant stakeholders in the school community are parents (Fullan, 1991). Swap (1993) supported the above statement by suggesting that:

Home-school partnership is no longer a luxury. There is an urgent need for schools to find ways to support the success of all our children. One element that we know contributes to successful children and successful schools across all population is parent involvement in children's education. When our focus is on improving the achievement of children at academic risk, partnership with families is not just useful—it is crucial. (p. 1)

One of the projects was principally orientated towards the Turkish-speaking community because the community was suffering from underachievement both in primary and secondary schools. A project named "Mothertongue GCSE (TGCSE)—Islington and Hackney" was set up, aiming at improving parental involvement and the development of family literacy. This would be achieved through the study of home languages and the preparation for a GCSE exam for parents as well as children. Thus, bilingual children would be given a chance to learn and use their native language in official exams, such as GCSEs with the help of their parents. The project run between 2002 and 2003 was successful. Although it was limited to a small number of pupils—five children and their parents studied for a GCSE in Turkish—90% of them achieved high grades in the GCSE exam (Carpentier & Lall, 2005).

The Mayor's Board for Refugee Integration in London (now London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP)) focused on the education of refugee and asylum-seeker children, including parental involvement, community links, good data and information collection, and effective support services with a strong policy (Arnot & Pinson, 2005).

In 2008, a case study in "English as an additional language—Reception class mother tongue project" was conducted in Islington by the National Assessment Agency (2008). The aim of this study was to provide further support to practitioners who are in a position of assessing the achievement of bilingual children at the foundation stage. The study results show significant gaps in attainment between children from identified ethnic groups. In 2006, 50% of Kurdish children and 38.6% of Turkish children in Islington were in the lowest 20% of the overall foundation stage grades. It was aimed to find out whether assessing children in their mother tongue would improve the accuracy of the assessments made and to raise the grades of Turkish-speaking children.

The teachers involved in the project stated that this project was a good opportunity to strengthen links with parents. As a result, parents became confident to discuss their children's progress with the class teacher; increased involvement with parents through informal and formal meetings had a positive effect on their willingness to be involved in their children's life in the school; parents became more confident when discussing their children development and learning; parents became more receptive for information about how to support their children's progress; parents became aware of the British education system; and parents' involvement in school was positively affected.

Parental Factors Affecting Turkish-Speaking Students' Achievement

Parents' Education/Ethnic Backgrounds

In 1985, the Swann Report suggested that the rural background of Turkish Cypriot students' parents and their low educational levels and lack of English language were possible reasons for the results of the learners (Swann Committee, 1985). It was argued that these circumstances explain the "observed shyness" of the

parents to approach teachers and lack of attendance to parents' evenings, which were essential for obtaining feedback about the progress of their children and for gaining information about the British education system. In the same report, Turkish Cypriot students' parents expressed their dissatisfaction with the British schools: They stated that there was lack of discipline in schools.

Bridgwood (1986) and Beetlestone (1982) argued that the aim of fathers is to work hard, set up a business, and then, pass them to their children. So, business comes before education. A similar approach towards girls by their parents is seen as Turkish Cypriot girls are given a short period of time for higher education and a career until their marriage (Bridgwood, 1986). However, Taylor (1988) argued that Turkish Cypriots highly value education and have aspirations for their children.

Turkish Cypriots work long hours which generally means working during the weekends. Mothers usually work at home while trying to look after their children and the family. As a result, they end up with limited time and energy to provide help with their children even they stay at home all day (Taylor, 1988).

A research carried out by DfES in 2002 shows that young people whose parents were from higher professional backgrounds were most likely to achieve 5+GCSEs A*-C (81% compared with 32% of those from routine occupational backgrounds) in the UK (DfES, 2002). From this point of view, there is no doubt that the immigration of people overwhelmingly affects the need for literacy education in a country settled; and so opportunities for literacy learning should be provided to new immigrants. However, "The role of parents in helping children (re)discover the principles of literacy is crucial" (Verhoeven, 1999, p. 215), which is mainly the parents' responsibility to help their children acquire literacy in their mother tongue as well as in the second language at home at early stage of learning.

In contrast, many Turkish-speaking parents are unfamiliar with the British education system. They therefore have little understanding of choosing schools, key stages, exclusions, and special needs. "Lack of English language also means that they are unable to keep track of their children's progress through school reports and are unable to adequately help or encourage their children with school work" (Map Hackney, 2000, p. 8). Poor English has been particularly identified as a problem for women; the Community Engagement Project, in Hackney, in 2005, found that 49% of the Turkish-/Kurdish-speaking women described their English as poor or average, compared with 26% of men (Turkish Speaking, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot Community Engagement Project, 2005).

In addition, it is argued in a report (Enneli, Modood, & Bradley, 2005) that many Turkish-speaking families cannot provide support for their children with homework tasks. This is because of difficulties with English and lack of understanding of the education system. This problem is enlarged by adding Muslim parents' low status in the society, limited ambition, and low income (Ansari, 2004). According to another research carried out by Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, and Ecob (1988), one of the factors on pupils' attainment was the ethnic background. Children from Turkish backgrounds were one of the lowest achievement groups in terms of reading attainment. They obtained lower scores in reading than those who were of English background families. This was same for maths attainment.

In terms of level of education, Kohl, Lengua, and McMahon (2000) found that the more educated the parents, the greater their involvement in their children's education. It meant that some parents lacked the relevant skills to get involved. The research carried out by Hill et al. (2005) showed that pupils from involved families with higher levels of parental education experience less behavioural problems; and parental

involvement from parents with lower educational levels resulted in increased adolescent educational and career aspirations but did not improve behaviour or achievement.

Feinstein and Sabates (2006) claimed that there is a relation between the duration of mothers' full-time education and their attitudes and behaviours towards their child; for example, mothers who carried on their education after the compulsory schooling period are likely to demonstrate positive educational attitudes and behaviours to their children.

Whilst the educational effect of post-compulsory education on mothers' behaviour towards their children in terms of educational attainment is highly beneficial, however, it does not mean that simply increasing the duration of education will bring positive changes in attitudes and behaviours, because this likely depends on the quality and nature of educational experience gained.

Parents' Socio-economic Status

The socio-economic status of parents has always been accepted to be a very important factor in the achievement of a learner. Hill et al. (2005) found out that the involvement by parents of higher socio-economic status was likely to create pupils modelling the positive achievement of their parents; and parents of lower socio-economic status were less likely to be involved in their children's education and it generally appeared that this resulted in pupils modelling their parents' lower achievement.

There is substantial evidence that student achievement is associated with parents' socio-economic status. Previous studies of educational attainment have demonstrated that socio-economic status is associated with achievement in secondary school and experiences in post-secondary education (Swell & Hauser, 1976). It is possible to argue that parents with high socio-economic status spend more time with their children on their homework and on learning related activities. There are variables in measuring socio-economic status, such as mother's education, father's education, family income, and father's profession.

Home Environment

It is clear that the family support is one of the factors in a child's achievement. In relation to this, home environment, which is often referred as the "curriculum of the home", has an influence on the development of cognitive, emotional, and attitudinal aspects of a child relevant to educational performance (Bloom, 1981). Homes, where educational values are shaped with positive attitudes, knowledge, and skills, may take a considerable place in helping children achieve at school (Aiken, 1976).

Although there are various methodologies to measure family environment, there is a range of dimensions which has been considered to be fundamental in the cognitive and academic developments of children: parental aspirations, home literacy, collaborative parent-child activities, and parental demand. White (1982) found that when these were combined with the family background factors, 53% of the difference in the achievement of students is recorded.

According to Hammer (2003), the home environment is as important as the school environment. Important factors include parental involvement in their children's education, how much time parents spend on reading to their children, how much television children are allowed to watch, etc.. Achievement not only depends on what goes on once students get into the classroom, but also depends on what happens to them before and after school.

Methodology

This research has been built on the foundation established by prior researches. A number of studies have

been examined and referenced in this research. It began with a questionnaire survey covering all the Turkish-speaking children groups namely Turkish-speaking Turks (from mainland Turkey and Cyprus) and Turkish-speaking Kurdish in the UK. Gilham (2000) stated that the use of questionnaires has a number of advantages over other data collecting strategies, including economy of time and money and collection of information from a lot of people very quickly. Thus, it provided with a basis to obtain various samples for in-depth interviewing.

This research mainly focused on using open-ended questions which allowed the respondents to write their answer in their own words providing an opportunity to express views that have not been considered by the researcher. Kumar (2014) argued that the advantages of the open-ended questions include: the invitation of honest personal comment; the gathering of deeper information not available through a closed approach; obtaining authentic voices in response; and they are useful when values are not known and how the respondents will respond is not assumed.

The aim of this research was to contact a cross-section of 50 parents including their school-age children. These parents were selected in the Turkish community. Interviews with the head teacher and the teachers in a Turkish mainstream school in London were performed. In a set of interviews conducted with these professionals, they voiced concerns about the Turkish pupils' low achievement. Both Turkish and English languages have been used during the interviews depending on the language skill and the preference of the parents.

Semi-structured interviews allowed depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to explore and expand the interviewee's responses that it provides room for negotiation, discussion, and expansion of the interviewee's responses. Bernard (1988) argued that the advantage of the semi-structured interview is that the interviewer is in control of the process of obtaining from the interviewee; and as Polit and Hunglar (1999) argued, the semi-structured method offers the researcher flexibility in gathering information from the participants. Thus, the interviews conducted have been conversational in naturalistic settings as the aim was to explain the participants' perceptions of their children's educational achievement without imposing any of the researcher's own view, therefore achieving greater reliability. It was determined what the parents understand under the term "parental involvement". Thus, the idea was to give an opportunity to the Turkish-speaking parents to express their views, concerns, or opinions as openly as possible through the semi-structured approach.

The sample was carefully selected, but it was not assumed that findings in this research would represent the overall Turkish-speaking pupils' parents. The form of non-probability sampling as the basis for selecting the sample was used, as Streubert and Carpenter (1999) pointed out that there is no need to randomly select individuals because the purpose of this research was not to manipulate or control the overall findings. Thus, purposive sampling as a form of non-probability sampling was used to select the parents.

Dane (1990) argued the advantage of purposive sampling is that it allows the researcher to deliberate on people or events, which have good foundation in what they believe, and which will be critical for the research. It would not be feasible to include a sufficiently large number of examples in this study without a non-probability sampling method.

Main Findings

An examination of the responses collected from the Turkish parents suggests the following findings.

Table 1 illustrates that about 60% of the parents have been in the UK for not a long period of time when

compared with other communities in the UK, such as West Indian and Caribbean communities. This is a disadvantage for the Turkish-speaking parents in terms of having knowledge about the British education system.

Table 1

Parents' Responses to the Question "How Long Have You Been in the UK?"

1-5 years (%)	6-10 years (%)	10+ years (%)
15	45	40

Table 2 illustrates the parents' responses given to the question about their level of English. None of the respondents rated their English level "Good" or above, but all parents rated their English level as either "Low" or "Very low". These findings support other research findings and the literature used in this study as among the Turkish-speaking parents, low levels of proficiency in English language was most frequently stated as the key factor to the involvement of parents in their children's attainment.

Table 2

Parents' Responses to the Question "How Do You Rate Your English?"

Proficient (%)	Very good (%)	Good (%)	Low (%)	Very low (%)
0	0	0	40	60

Table 3 shows the outcome of the parents' response to the question regarding their educational background. As shown in Table 3, 80% of the parents have no university level education and 60% of them have secondary school education. This result also supports previous findings as lack of academic ability as well as low level of education prevents the parents in helping their children, because they do not know how to help them, although they want to spend some time with their children.

Table 3

Parents' Responses to the Question "What Is Your Educational Background?"

University graduate (%)	High school/college graduate (%)	Secondary school (%)	No school (%)
20	20	60	0

Table 4 illustrates that the majority of parents had their schooling in Turkey so they do not understand the curriculum in the UK, which is completely different from Turkey.

Table 4

Parents' Responses to the Question "Where Did You Have Your Compulsory Schooling?"

Turkey (%)	UK (%)	Other (%)
93	0	7

Table 5 shows that 55% of the parents are happy with the level of education their children receive at the school.

Table 5

Parents' Responses to the Question "Are you Satisfied With the Level of Education Your Children Are Provided With?"

Yes (%)	No (%)
55	45

Table 6 shows that 53% of the parents are happy with the material their children are learning.

Table 6

Parents' Responses to the Question "Are You Happy With the Material Your Children Are Learning?"

Yes (%)	No (%)
53	47

Table 7 shows that almost 90% of the parents speak only Turkish at home.

Table 7

Parents' Responses to the Question "Which Language(s) Do You Speak at Home?"

Turkish (%)	English (%)	Both Turkish and English (%)
89	0	11

Table 8 illustrates that almost 90% of the parents monitor their children's out of school activities, although they do not know how to support them. This shows their interest in their children's attainment.

Table 8

Parents' Responses to the Question "Do You Monitor Your Child's Out of School Activities?"

Yes (%)	No (%)
89	11

Table 9 illustrates that 70% of the parents supervise their children's homework whereas 30% of the parents state that they lack of English and work long hours, so cannot find time, and believe that their children can take responsibilities so they do not need their support.

Table 9

Parents' Responses to the Question "Do You Supervise Your Child's Homework?"

Yes (%)	No, why? (%)
70	30

Table 10 shows that almost all the parents talk to their children to enhance their confidence.

Table 10

Parents' Responses to the Question "Do You Talk to Your Child to Enhance Their Self-esteem?"

Yes (%)	No (%)
93	7

Table 11 illustrates that all the parents visit their children's school. However, some parents stated that they sometimes visit or when they are called. There are also parents who regularly visit their children's school, every two weeks or every month.

Table 11

Parents' Responses to the Question "Do You Visit Your Child's School?"

Yes, how often (%)	No, why not? (%)
100	0

Table 12 shows that the main purpose of the school visit of the parents is to meet with the teachers. The rest of the parents visit either to take part in the school activities or to learn more about the teaching content.

Table 12

Parents' Responses to the Question "What Is the Purpose of Visiting Your Child's School?"

	% of responses
To meet with teachers to discuss their children's progress	54
To take part in their children's education through classroom participation	12
To learn more about curriculum and teaching other	12

Table 13 shows that the majority of parents have never thought to take the role as a governor in their children's school. Again, lack of English was shown as a reason by the parents as well as lack of knowledge on how the school is run.

Table 13

Parents' Responses to the Question "Have You Ever Thought to Become a Parent Governor in Your Child's School?"

Yes (%)	No (%)
17	83

Table 14 shows that for the majority of parents, the gender is not an issue. They are happy whatever their children decide about their future career and profession.

Table 14

Parents' Responses to the Question "Do You Give More Freedom to Your Son Than Your Daughter in Terms of What Career and Job to Choose?"

Yes, why? (%)	No (%)
35	65

Turkish, Turkish Kurdish, and Turkish Cypriot parents were asked to identify the factors that they believed had an influence on their children's achievement. In order to deal with the query, a key question was "To what extent do Turkish parents engage with their children's schools?". It was found that the parents interviewed stated that they could not support their children in their learning as much as they wanted. They stated some of the key factors preventing their involvement in their children's education. The main issue raised by the parents was that English was a barrier to the involvement in their children's learning:

Language is the problem for me. I do not know how to help my child at home. I can only encourage him to do his homework, that is it. When I go to the school to talk about the progress of my child, I use an interpreter, but it does not help in face-to-face communication. I am not provided with the information I look for especially about the education system in this country. There is also no Turkish staff working in the school so it is not possible to communicate in my mother tongue, Turkish. I really do not know how I can help my child who needs my support. (A Turkish parent)

Another parent explained her difficulties in helping her child:

I know I can not help my child in his homework, because I do not speak English. Although I am an educated person who studied in Turkey, and do try to get help from the school, I can not communicate with my child's teachers. The school does not support us, the parents. (A Turkish parent)

However, another participant commented that:

I and my wife regularly monitor our children. We both are well educated and fluent in English. We always attend the school days and communicate with the school and the teachers. If it is urgent, I can even communicate with the teachers

via e-mails. We help our children with their homework and encourage them to use the Internet for their study. We also set reading sessions with our children at home which really helps them in their progress. (A Turkish parent)

Teachers reported greater understanding and insight into the relevant factors of Turkish-speaking students' underachievement and how these factors can be eliminated for success. Teachers also reported confidence in their understanding and an increased awareness of parental factors in achievement, saying that the increased involvement of parents in their children's attainment in school is crucial.

Interviews with the Turkish teachers suggested that:

Lack of English is the main factor for Turkish parents in supporting their children at home. I am having regular meetings with them and this has always been raised as the main problem for them. I have also realised that most of the parents work very long hours so they can only see their children once a week. The father usually works in catering sector for all day or night and the mother has no power on their children at home. Parents, who lack of English, also reluctant to go to the school for getting information about their children's progress. These parents also lack of education. However, their expectations in terms of achievement are high. In contrast, the children's expectations are low because they believe they do not need education as their father working hard for them so their future is guaranteed. (A head teacher of a Turkish mainstream school)

There are various factors affecting achievement. The main barrier for the Turkish parents preventing them to involve in their children's learning is English. Although most Turkish parents are aware of this and make complaint about it, they spend their time watching Turkish TV channels all day. This does not help them! (A teacher of a Turkish mainstream school)

Conclusion

In this paper, the relationship between the role of parents and Turkish-speaking children's achievement has been examined. This was achieved through considering the parental factors within the educational experience.

The findings clearly indicate that Turkish-speaking pupils underachieve in British schools when compared with other minority ethnic groups. Whilst the Turkish community has a migration history spanning more than 70 years in the UK, it was mainly the lack of education and skills on the part of parents which affected their children's attainment in schools.

The absence of educational experience for many Turkish parents and lack of language support (including in their mother tongue) had a considerable impact on the students' learning outcome. Most parents could not provide any help to their children at home and the children were left without guidance on completing their homework. The parents neither knew the British education system nor could involve themselves in any school work. Thus, it was really hard to talk about the effective link between the parents and schools as they were not even able to check their children's school performance by contacting the schools.

Through interviews with the Turkish parents and the teachers from a Turkish mainstream school, areas that affected educational achievement of Turkish children in terms of parental factors have been identified. Turkish-speaking parents were asked to identify the factors affecting their involvement in their children's learning. The aim was to find an answer to "To what extent do Turkish parents engage with their children's schools?". The findings showed that many parents stated that they were unable to help or become involved in their children's learning, although they would have wished. The main problem appeared as the level of English language competence which prevents parents assisting in their children's learning. This could be attributed to lower levels of education of the parents, as most parents interviewed had low level of education. The findings suggested that there were also other factors, namely, lack of knowledge of the education system in the UK; lack

of knowledge of curriculum; communication problems between the parents and the teachers in school meetings; lack of participation of parents in school activities; long working hours; lack of bilingual materials; and reluctance of children in reporting their school experiences and needs to their parents.

Suggestions for Improvement

Based on the findings of this paper, the suggestions for improving the situation for Turkish-speaking pupils in the UK include the following:

1. A national survey should be carried out to find out how many Turkish-speaking pupils live in the UK, including their educational backgrounds and language skills;
2. All Turkish-speaking pupils' parents should be given appropriate literacy training considering their language proficiency in both languages. For training in Turkish, a project should be prepared in conjunction with the Turkish educational authorities in Turkey;
3. Pupils' diverse needs should be considered in preparing learning strategies;
4. The links should be strengthened between Turkish parents and the schools, and the parents should be encouraged to become involved in activities at schools;
5. The parents should regularly be provided with their students' learning progress by the schools;
6. Schools with Turkish-speaking pupils should employ more Turkish-speaking teachers and support staff.

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