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Mission Possible? Institutional Family-School-Community Partnership Practices and Parental Involvement in Hungarian Majority and Minority Schools in Three Central and Eastern European Countries

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Abstract: Decades of research suggest that higher levels of parental education are related to more active and effective parental involvement (PI) practices. At the same time, schools' policies and practices facilitate family-school-community partnerships (FSCP) to support students in attaining successful outcomes. However, it is unclear which school policies are effective in equitably involving parents with lower educational attainment. This study aims to examine the relationships between different types of FSCP practices of Hungarian majority and minority schools in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and create more equitable experiences for parents with lower educational attainment. We formulated the following hypotheses: H1. Higher levels of parental education relate to more active home-based and school-based parental involvement. H2. Parent educational attainment relates to parents' perceptions of FSCP practices. H3. Parents' perceptions of FSCP have a stronger relationship to PI than individual student and parent characteristics. The study included parents of Hungarian primary and middle school students in three CEE countries (N = 1002). Our findings suggest that parents with lower educational attainment perceive community development policies and special support as more significant compared to parents with higher educational attainment. Moreover, parents' perceptions of FSCP practices have a stronger relationship to PI than individual factors. To create a more equitable experience for families, it is proposed that demand-driven practices be developed in schools.

Keywords: parental involvement; school-facilitated parental involvement; family-school partnership; social inequalities



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1. Introduction

The importance of collaboration between education systems and families of students is receiving increasing attention worldwide, especially for socially disadvantaged families where academic achievement is closely related to parental status (Gibbs et al. 2021; Guo et al. 2018; Henderson and Mapp 2002; OECD 2023a; Pribesh et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2014). Because some groups of parents have fewer resources to promote their children's improved academic performance, parental involvement (PI) at home and at school is crucial and could help address these inequities. Closer cooperation between schools and families can help improve the outcomes of children of low-SES parents, addressing the serious problem of school failure and early dropout (Gutman and Midgley 2000; Keith et al. 1993; OECD 2020,

2023b; Wang et al. 2014). However, research also shows that many schools and teachers do not see the potential in engaging with parents, do not view the facilitation of family engagement as their role and hold negative perceptions of parents that are characterized by a lack of trust (Brown and Makridis 2024; Crozier and Davies 2007; Desforges and Abouchaar 2003; Epstein and Sanders 2002; Hrabéczy et al. 2023; Jeynes 2011; Pusztai et al. 2024a, 2024b; Schweizer et al. 2017; Széll 2018). This raises the question of which school-level family-school-community partnership (FSCP) policies can effectively support PI and build partnerships with parents in specific social contexts.

Research defines PI in various ways, including the activity of parents in schools (Morrison 1978); the offering of parental resources (Grolnick and Slowiaczek 1994); the investment of parents in their children's education (LaRocque et al. 2011); and an activity that parents undertake within the school boundaries in the interest of promoting children's academic success (Hill and Taylor 2004). Epstein and other scholars expanded the notion of PI to a multidimensional concept, in which school-based and home-based dimensions of involvement are both recognized (Epstein 1985; Epstein et al. 2011; Epstein 2018; Fan and Chen 2001; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997; Sui-Chu and Willms 1996).

While there is a broad consensus that PI in education can improve children's school success, the literature also documents the critical role of the socioeconomic status (SES) of parents and school practices in PI practices. Several findings suggest that families' higher SES relates to more active and effective PI, as these families have more available resources to effectively help students achieve their educational goals (Gibbs et al. 2021; Guo et al. 2018; Pribesh et al. 2020). Parents' SES is thus crucial in determining parents' involvement in their child's schooling (Benner et al. 2016; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997; Sui-Chu and Willms 1996). Epstein's FSCP model argues that proactive school support can reduce inequitable access to PI for lower-SES families by actively reaching out to and addressing barriers for "hard-to-reach" families. However, there is a lack of research evidence on which specific school practices are most conducive to PI in lower-SES families, particularly in the Central and Eastern European context.

Of note, large differences between schools in student composition and student performance measures exist in Hungary. The top decile of primary schools includes institutions in which more than 60% of parents hold a university degree, while the bottom quintile of schools include schools in which a majority of parents have completed a primary education. In the upper decile of secondary schools, the share of parents with a college degree increases to 70–75% (OECD 2010). The composition of the student population in schools can be explained partly by regional and settlement structures and partly by parental decisions stemming from the belief that school composition has an impact on students' performance. Changing the inequalities in student composition is, of course, not expected from schools, but schools do have the opportunity to address the consequences of such inequities.

In Hungary, only about a quarter of parents contact the teacher, slightly more than a quarter of teachers contact parents, and less than a tenth of parents participate in school boards, lagging significantly behind the OECD average (OECD 2020). Although parent-school contact weakened in many OECD countries during and after COVID, Hungary was still significantly below average in 2022 (OECD 2020, 2023b). Given the diversity of Hungarian society, different approaches to child-rearing, and various levels of teacher-parent cooperation, research aimed to improve public education must directly address the challenges associated with building school-family relationships.

The aim of this study is to explore the extent to which the SES of parents, the characteristics of students, and school-level FSCP relate to PI. Our research was conducted in a context where the SES of students in schools has a strong influence on their academic achievement and in schools with a large concentration of pupils from low-SES families. This

study explores how parents from different SES backgrounds perceive school partnership practices and how these perceptions relate to PI. Furthermore, we focus on the role of school policy in creating more equitable experiences for parents and students, regardless of background characteristics.

2. Literature Review

Student engagement and academic success are strongly related to PI in education (e.g., [Desforges and Abouchaar 2003](#); [Jeynes 2011](#)). We examine below the characteristics of the student, parents, and school that relate to PI.

2.1. Parental Involvement by Student Characteristics

Research shows that PI differs based on the student's gender. This difference in attention given to the schoolwork of male and female students is further compounded by cultural differences. In countries of the Global North, parents (and teachers) pay more attention to girls' education, which increases their academic engagement and, in turn, their achievement ([Lam et al. 2012](#)). Female students have significantly higher levels of PI compared to male students on various dimensions of engagement, including parent modeling, parent instruction, parent encouragement, and parent reinforcement ([Csák 2023](#); [Fényes and Csák 2024](#); [Gál 2023](#); [Marshall and Jackman 2015](#)). In the PISA data, there is no significant difference in school engagement based on student gender; however, parents of boys are more likely to communicate with their children's teachers than parents of girls ([Borgonovi and Montt 2012](#)). In addition, involvement according to student gender depends on the role that parents intend for them to play later in life ([Fulcher and Coyle 2011](#)).

Students' age is another critical factor that influences PI in education. Consistently, research has shown that parents' school-based involvement decreases with the child's age ([Bhargava and Witherspoon 2015](#); [Epstein 1985](#); [Epstein and Sanders 2002](#)). As students' educational journey progresses, particularly from primary to secondary school, the dynamics of PI change significantly. In early education, PI tends to be more direct and hands-on. Parents often actively engage in school activities, help with homework and communicate with teachers, which positively correlates with academic achievement ([Jeynes 2016, 2022](#)). [Jeynes' \(2022\)](#) meta-analysis highlights that PI tends to have a greater impact in primary school, where it can significantly improve student achievement. Additional research shows that parents' expectations and aspirations significantly influence the academic success of younger students ([Al-Taneiji 2008](#); [Sehee and Ho 2005](#)).

As students progress in school, PI becomes less direct and more focused on emotional support and encouragement rather than academic supervision ([Epstein and Sanders 2002](#); [Donkor et al. 2024](#); [Toren 2013](#)). According to [Toren \(2013\)](#) middle school parents can engage in discussions about learning strategies and planning for the future. As students progress through adolescence, they begin to seek independence and develop their own identity, leading to a decline in PI ([Thomas et al. 2019](#)). During adolescence, PI may indirectly influence academic achievement through the influence of other proximal student outcomes such as motivation, attitudes, and learning strategies ([Boonk et al. 2018](#)). Furthermore, secondary school students prefer parents' involvement in school over at home ([Al-Taneiji 2008](#)). While PI does not directly influence academic achievement in adolescence, it can contribute to the development of learning attributes—such as academic self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, self-regulatory strategies, and social self-efficacy—all of which support academic success.

2.2. Parental Involvement and Parental Characteristics

Parents' participation in their children's education is also related to a variety of parent-related factors. Parents' educational attainment is one of the most significant factors.

Parents with higher educational attainment have access to the knowledge and skills that help support their children's learning aspirations and achieve their educational goals (Gibbs et al. 2021; Guo et al. 2018; Pribesh et al. 2020). Mothers' education is even more crucial in this regard (Jaiswal 2018; Shumow 1998). According to Blackman and Mahon (2014), parents with more education tend to be more trusting of the school and are generally more satisfied with education, which emphasizes the importance of parental perceptions and trust in the school.

Family income is another critical factor influencing PI (Neuenschwander 2020). Based on the findings of Choi et al. (2014), higher income is associated with higher levels of PI, as families with more resources are able to devote more time and support to education. Often, low-SES and low-income parents face barriers to fully participating in their children's education, such as work commitments and lack of access to information (Chappel and Ratliffe 2021; Jafarov 2015). On the other hand, parents with higher educational attainment and better economic status indicators are more likely to be involved in their children's education (Benner et al. 2016; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997; Sui-Chu and Willms 1996). Due to the persistent links between family SES, PI, and student outcomes, schools play a particularly important role in creating more equitable experiences for lower-SES families.

2.3. *The Differences in Parental Involvement by School Characteristics*

School-related factors, such as school leadership, communication practices, school culture, and available resources, have a significant impact on how parents participate in their children's education. The Six Types of Engagement (Epstein et al. 1995)—including parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and partnering with the community—are all critical components of a holistic school-based approach to partnerships with families. In addition to creating welcoming and supportive environments, schools must foster a "culture of partnerships" to serve as a basis for goal-linked family and community involvement for the success of students in school (Epstein and Sheldon 2016; Epstein 2018).

Communication practices within schools play an important role in facilitating PI. Parental engagement is higher in schools that maintain open channels of communication with parents and provide regular information and feedback (Hornby 2011). To foster collaborative home-school relationships, Murray et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of teachers advising parents on how to support their children at home. Effective home-school communication, including telephone conversations and newsletters, significantly increases PI and positively influences literacy development among children (Dearing et al. 2006). In schools that place a high priority on clear and consistent communication, parents are more likely to be effectively involved.

An inclusive and welcoming school environment encourages active PI. González and Jackson (2013) discuss the need for schools to bridge the gap between parents and schools to promote PI, particularly in diverse communities. According to that study, schools with low socioeconomic status usually provide a greater proportion of services to parents and make greater efforts to involve them in the decision-making process. As students transition from primary to secondary education, the nature of PI changes, requiring schools to adapt their engagement strategies. In order for each school to achieve its goals, a bottom-up strategy should be developed based on the school's unique context and needs. An example of this would be the development of a written school strategy, the involvement of parents from different backgrounds, or parent education (Hornby and Witte 2010). A school that recognizes and addresses these cultural changes is likely to foster sustained PI. Finally, the availability of resources and support systems within the school has a significant impact on PI. Jeynes' (2012) meta-analysis demonstrated that school-initiated programs, such

as parent education workshops, can be effective in increasing PI, particularly in urban settings. Moreover, schools that offer structured opportunities for parent involvement, such as volunteer programs and support services, encourage greater PI (Marschall et al. 2012). Schools can empower parents to play an active role in their children's education by providing them with the necessary tools and knowledge.

2.4. Parental Involvement in CEE Countries

Our research was conducted in three countries, focusing on Hungarian-speaking families, regardless of whether they are part of the majority or minority population. The focus on Hungarian-speaking students across different education systems allows for a more consistent comparison of the influence of individual-level (pupil, family) and institutional characteristics on parental involvement, without the risk of translation distortions and misinterpretation. The eastern part of Hungary shares cross-border connections with Hungarian minority communities in Romania and Ukraine. The educational systems, as well as the political and economic environments, vary across these three countries. We briefly present the similarities and differences in Hungarian, Romanian, and Ukrainian literature regarding students, parents, and school characteristics. The literature on the countries studied indicates no significant differences in students' characteristics.

The preference of transmission of home culture and language was highlighted in research about parental characteristics (Belenyi and Flora 2022). A comparative study in South-East Europe highlights the crucial role of parental expectations in influencing school performance, particularly in Romania (Ivan and Cristei 2011). Additionally, differences emerge based on the parent's gender, with mothers' roles being more significant in the Romanian sample (Negru et al. 2010). The transmission of parental worldview and religiosity is also significant in child-rearing (Pusztai et al. 2023). Factors such as school size, location, and funding play a crucial role in influencing school-related PI. Differences between urban and rural schools have been highlighted in several studies (Damean 2011). Interpersonal relationships are key influencing factors in PI. Romanian research shows that the parent-teacher relationship is more significant than previously assumed based on the Hornby and Lafaele (2011) model (Cojocariu and Mareş 2014).

Research on Ukrainian schools from the pre-war period highlights that the most effective ways to involve parents include consistent communication between parents and teachers to discuss students' progress and ensure parents to understand the importance of supporting their children's education. Parents can also be involved in the classroom as volunteers and/or experts. Additionally, hosting seminars for parents can equip them with the necessary tools to support their children's learning at home (Zelenska and Balatsynova 2020). In regions with more than one school sector, the type of school maintainer also influences parental involvement. For instance, parents tend to be more involved in church-run schools (Pusztai et al. 2023; Pusztai et al. 2024a).

3. Theoretical Framework

Epstein highlights the pivotal role of schools in fostering parental involvement through factors such as a welcoming school climate, supportive attitudes of the school staff, and effective communication practices. She emphasizes that schools must create opportunities and structures that enable parents to engage meaningfully in their children's education (Epstein 1984, 1985, 2009, 2018). By combining Epstein's emphasis on school-initiated practices with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's focus on parental perceptions, this study investigates how school efforts are interpreted and acted upon by parents, shaping their engagement in educational activities. The authors first examine the personal motivations that influence parents' decisions, such as their sense of responsibility, their belief in their ability

to contribute to their children's educational success, and their perception of the importance of general school invitations for involvement. Second, they discuss decisions regarding the forms of support provided at home and in school. Here, they emphasize factors that influence these decisions, including the significance of specific invitations from the school, as well as parents' skills, knowledge, time, and energy. Third, the authors explore how parents decide on specific ways to support and guide their children as they progress through school. We check to learn if tempering/mediating factors have a stimulating or moderating effect on student academic achievement through PI. School activities that promote school participation are more successful when they tap into the multiple motivations of parents focused on academic achievement (Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2010). We see the importance of this model in highlighting that both general and specific school invitations provide parents with a strong incentive that influences their decisions and practices regarding involvement. Parents perceive these invitations through school practices, particularly when they are embedded within coherent structures implemented by the school.

4. The Current Study

The objective of this research is to examine the factors that can best facilitate parent-school partnerships in Hungarian majority and minority schools in the CEE context. Our research follows the model of large sample surveys because this method is suitable for exploring the extent to which student, parent, and school characteristics relate to PI (Fantuzzo et al. 2000; Ringenberg et al. 2005).

The extant literature suggests that higher-SES parents are able to engage in more active and effective PI. This research points to the critical need to identify effective FSCPs to create more equitable experiences for lower-SES families and their students. Epstein argues that the school policies that support FSCPs can reduce the inequitable relationship between low-SES and PI. However, it is still unclear which school policies are effective in involving low-SES parents in different cultural contexts. The current study aims to reveal the types of FSCP practices and their relationships to PI in Central and Eastern Europe.

This study poses the following research questions: (1) To what extent is PI associated with students' demographic and parental SES characteristics? (2) Do parents with different educational attainments perceive a school's partnership policy differently? (3) To what extent is the perception of the school's partnership practices associated with the likelihood of parents participating in more PI practices?

Drawing from the existing literature, we posit three hypotheses.

H1. *The strength of PI is influenced by student gender, student age, parent educational attainment, and parent financial status (Bacsikai et al. 2024; Bhargava and Witherspoon 2015; Boonk et al. 2018; Borgonovi and Montt 2012; Epstein and Sanders 2002; Epstein 1985; Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2005; Lam et al. 2012; Marshall and Jackman 2015; Thomas et al. 2019).*

H2. *Parents with higher educational attainment perceive the school's partnership practices more positively (Bacsikai et al. 2024; Crozier and Davies 2007).*

H3. *A more positive perception of the school's partnership practices increases the likelihood of parents participating in PI practices (Epstein 1984, 2009; Epstein and Sheldon 2016; González and Jackson 2013; Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2010; Hornby and Witte 2010; Pusztai et al. 2024a; Pusztai et al. 2024b).*

5. Materials and Methods

5.1. Research Design

The PARents from Three Countries (PARTS'22/23) survey followed a cross-sectional quantitative research design, with data collected through questionnaires among parents of upper primary and secondary school students in three Central European countries (N = 1002). The population included parents in Hungary (HU), Romania (RO), and Ukraine (UA). Quota sampling was carried out to ensure representativeness for the type of regions, the type of school (primary or secondary institution), and the school sector (public and private). The size and diversity of the sample allowed us to better generalize our findings to the lower-SES regions of the three investigated countries compared to previous studies.

5.2. Data Collection Methods

The surveys were primarily administered by interviewers using paper surveys. Participants responded to questions while the interviewers documented their responses. To increase the number of participants, we also provided an online option for participants to complete the survey on their mobile devices. For the online option, interviewers administered the survey via a phone conversation and documented the participant's responses. Interviewers were instructed to interview the child's primary caregiver who had the most information about the child's education and development. In the absence of a biological parent, this was a foster parent or guardian. Parents with multiple children were asked to complete the questionnaire for only one child.

5.3. Instruments and Variables

The questionnaire was adapted from the 18-item Family Involvement Questionnaire (Fantuzzo et al. 2000) and the 30-item Parent and School Survey (Ringenberg et al. 2005). We translated instruments and supplemented them with special consideration for the cultural context.

The final survey included 50 items measuring parental perceptions of the school's partnership practices (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.965$) and 64 items measuring parental attitudes (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.901$). The survey asked for additional demographic information including student characteristics, parent characteristics, school characteristics, and student academic outcomes. Student-related variables included gender (i.e., boy or girl) and school age group (i.e., primary or secondary). Parent-related variables included educational attainment (i.e., completed primary, secondary, or higher education) and family financial status. If parents had different levels of educational attainment, the category was determined by the parent with the highest level of educational attainment. Family financial status was a single variable with four categories (reverse-coded): 1. the family is saving money; 2. the family has sufficient money for a secure livelihood but does not save money; 3. the family faces minor financial problems; 4. the family faces persistent financial problems. Finally, we included a variable that indicated the location of families by categorizing residence in urban and rural areas.

5.4. Data Analysis

SPSS Statistics 25 was used for the analysis. We first conducted principal component analysis on the parent reported school-based and home-based PI items to transform the original variables into new uncorrelated variables. Parental involvement at home includes activities that parents do at home to support their children's learning, such as helping with homework, reading together, or fostering a positive attitude toward education. Parental involvement in school includes parents' participation in school-related activities, such as attending parent-teacher meetings, volunteering, or working in school community. We then

examined whether student and parent characteristics were related to the newly identified home-based and school-based PI variables. Next, we conducted a factor analysis to reduce the dimensions of school practices perceived by parents. Seven factors for perceptions of school practices were compared with parental SES to determine whether different groups of parents perceive school practices differently. Finally, we conducted a logistic regression to investigate how the odds of the dependent variables (i.e., home-based and school-based PI) relate to different groups of covariates (student, parent, and school characteristics). We dichotomized parental involvement variables based on the sample average (higher than or lower than the sample average) to focus on revealing clear outcomes that are strongly associated with parents being more or less involved in their children's education. We aimed to capture threshold effects because small differences in parental involvement might not significantly influence outcomes, but those above or below the average have distinct effects on children's educational success.

6. Results

6.1. Descriptive Statistics

Most of the respondents were Hungarians living in Hungary or Hungarians who are part of the majority (62.2%). The remaining respondents included Hungarians living in countries where Hungarians are a minority (25.3% in Romania and 12.5% in Ukraine). Among the responding parents, 85.3% were mothers, 13.1% were fathers, and 1.5% were other relatives or foster parents. Those with primary education accounted for 23.1%, those with secondary education accounted for 31%, and those with higher education accounted for 45.9%. The partners of the responding parents included 31.1% with a primary education, 36.7% with a secondary education, and 32.2% with a college education. A total of 44.9% of the children were identified as male, and 55.1% were identified as female. A total of 41.3% of the students attended upper primary school, 38.5% attended high school, 13.1% attended vocational school with baccalaureate, and 7.1% attended vocational school without baccalaureate. A total of 76% of children attended public institutions, and 24% attended church-run and private schools. Among both minority and majority students, 96% of those attending private schools attend a church school. Churches have a relatively stronger network of schools in the regions surveyed.

6.2. Spheres of Parental Involvement

The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) identified 14 items about parenting practices and home learning support to measure PI at home (eigenvalue = 67%) and 46 items about school-based practices to measure PI at school (eigenvalue = 58%). We investigated the association between student characteristics and the two types of PI identified in the PCA. PI at home showed a normal distribution, while PI at school showed a non-normal distribution. For school involvement, therefore, the Mann-Whitney test showed a significant difference only between school levels.

In Table 1, we present a comparison of means for different gender and student age groups, highlighting significant differences in both aspects of PI at home. Parents of female students and primary school age group show higher levels of PI at home. Similarly, parents of primary school students are more active in PI at school.

We next examined the relationship between key parental status indicators and PI. Parents with higher education and wealthier parents tended to be more active in home involvement, and parents with lower educational and less financial stability reported less active PI at home. Since school involvement was not normally distributed, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine whether the difference between parent groups was significant. We found that, for parental education, the difference between groups is significant

(Kruskal-Wallis $H = 12.744, p = 0.002$). The difference in school enrollment between parent groups based on financial status is also significant (Kruskal-Wallis $H = 10.735, p = 0.005$). In Table 2, we present a comparison of the averages for different parental status groups, highlighting the highest status in terms of PI at home in both respects, i.e., parents with college education and wealthiest parents have the highest school involvement.

Table 1. Correlation of student gender and school level with home-based and school-based PI.

Groups	Home-Based PI				School-Based PI			
	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Sample Size (n)	p-Value	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Sample Size (n)	p-Value
Female student	0.009	0.103	518		0.004	0.103	497	
Male student	−0.011	0.094	415	0.004	−0.004	0.095	408	NS
Primary	0.026	0.095	394	-	0.018	0.108	378	
Secondary	−0.019	0.099	420	0.000	−0.013	0.092	407	0.000

Table 2. Parental education and financial status associated with home-based and school-based PI.

Groups	Home-Based PI				School-Based PI			
	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Sample Size (n)	p-Value	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Sample Size (n)	p-Value
Parents with primary	−0.014	0.110	214	0.001	−0.016	0.106	204	
Parents with secondary	−0.005	0.097	340	0.001	−0.005	0.097	332	
Parents with higher education	0.015	0.094	374	0.001	0.015	0.097	362	0.002
Lowest	−0.029	0.114	53	0.021	−0.051	0.116	51	
Average	−0.004	0.098	484	0.021	−0.001	0.097	459	
Wealthiest	0.008	0.100	391	0.021	0.007	0.100	389	0.005

6.3. Variations in Parental Perceptions of School Practices (50 Items)

We conducted a factor analysis as a dimensionality reduction method. The factor analysis recommended a seven-factor solution, and five items were excluded because of lack sufficient association with any single factor.

(1) The first factor had loadings that included 17 variables. The content of this factor refers to the professional and rich formal communication practices with parents in the school. Parents are able to follow the progress of their students through regular, timely, and clear information sent by their school. Parents receive information from teachers about the children’s progress, the tasks for the school year, the school services for their development, and what parents need to do to support their children. Parent meetings are regular and informative, and the school actively tries to partner effectively with the parents. Parents are given opportunities to talk to the headteacher and teachers about their pedagogical approaches and their expectations for the school. Teachers ask parents about their children’s personalities, talents, and problems, and their ideas about further education and appreciate parents’ active involvement in their children’s learning.

(2) The second factor is called parental community building which includes 11 items. The school often invites parents to parent education programs, meetings with teachers and school support staff, information sessions, or student performances, sports events, and art events. The school organizes events specifically for parents (e.g., family day,

school fete, charity fair, ball, open day, and open class), informational presentations on education, and opportunities to volunteer at school. All the items included in this factor provide opportunities for parents to meet each other in a friendly atmosphere, share their experiences and build relationships and community.

(3) The third factor includes eight items that refer to the involvement of parents in decision-making. Five items were included: parents or their representatives may be involved in decisions about the school's policies (e.g., students' dress code); parents are consulted in the planning of school development (e.g., new training programs and building development); parents are included in the evaluation of teachers; parents are included in decisions about the scheduling of school year events (excursions, celebrations, and social occasions); and school programs are adapted to parents' workload and home responsibilities.

(4) The fourth factor includes five items that capture the work of school support professionals in supporting parenting and development of parenting skills. Parents are introduced to the educational assistant, school social worker, and school psychologist involved in their children's study group. Parents have the opportunity to meet with them and receive advice or feedback. Related to this factor is the role of the parent volunteer and private lessons from school staff.

(5) The fifth factor refers to the school's activities to encourage parental volunteering: the school's willingness to accept parental volunteering, the school's willingness to accept financial or material support from parents, and the school opportunities for parents to volunteer at school.

(6) The active operation of social media networks in schools is included in factor six. There is a stronger association with a well-functioning, class-level social media group, mailing list, newsletter, and a less strong association with the school-level organization of a social media group, mailing list, or newsletter. (The number of items in this factor is 2).

(7) The seventh factor includes a type of teacher advisory activity aimed at supporting parents in their responsibilities. It involves two items, a form of parental education, where the school provides guidance on how parents can foster their children's healthy physical and mental development at home.

We compared the seven new factors of school practices across varying parental education levels to see if different groups of parents perceive them differently. We assessed the normality of the data using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test yielded a low D statistic, while the Shapiro-Wilk test produced a high W statistic close to 1, both indicating significant deviations from normality ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that the data do not follow a normal distribution.

The Kruskal-Wallis test showed small and non-significant values ($H = 2.03\text{--}3.53$, $p > 0.05$) for formal communication, parental community development, and parental decision-making. These results suggest no significant differences based on parent educational attainment. However, for the remaining four factors, the Kruskal-Wallis test produced large and statistically significant results ($H = 10.3\text{--}33.2$, $p < 0.006$), indicating differences in how parents with different levels of education perceive contacts with support professionals, invitations for parental volunteering, school-organized social media networks, and parent education (see Table 3). The coefficients indicate which types of school initiatives are perceived as significant by parent groups with different educational level. The Kruskal-Wallis H expresses the degree of differences between the rank sums of the groups.

Table 3. Perceptions of school PI practices across different parental education groups.

	Regular, Mutual Communication	Parental Community Development	Parents in Decision-Making	Contact with Support Professionals	Parental Volunteering	Social Media Network	Parent Counselling
Parents with primary education	0.03	0.18	0.09	0.25	−0.17	−0.23	0.13
Parents with secondary education	0.01	−0.06	−0.01	0.03	−0.01	0.02	−0.04
Parents with higher education	−0.03	−0.03	−0.04	−0.16	0.14	0.10	−0.05
<i>p</i> value	-	-	-	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.006
Kruskal-Wallis H	2.037	3.584	3.383	33.226	16.295	27.298	10.291

6.4. Student, Parent, School Characteristics, and Parental Involvement

Finally, we examined how the three types of covariates (student, parent, and school characteristics) relate to PI at home and at school. We conducted a logistic regression to investigate how the odds of the dependent variables (home-based and school-based PI) are related to student, parent, and school characteristics.

To control for confounding variables, we used multivariate analysis. The dependent variable in the analysis was the achievement of more active PI than average, for which the dichotomized variables of home-based and school-based PI were included. The explanatory variables were the effect of the gender of the student being a female student (vs. a male student), the age group of the student in secondary school (as opposed to the age group of the student in upper primary school). Three of the parental status indicators were included in the analysis: the highest educational attainment of the parent (vs. neither parent having tertiary education), the wealthiest financial status (vs. being of average or poor financial status), and the urban type of settlement (vs. living in a village). School characteristics in this study were measured from the parents' perspective and included types of school activities undertaken to engage parents according to parental perceptions (Table 4).

PI at home is significantly related to both student gender and age group. Female students have close to 1.88 times higher odds of greater PI compared to male students, holding other variables constant. Secondary school students ($\text{Exp}(B) = 0.432$) are less likely to have higher PI compared to primary school students, holding other variables constant.

For parental characteristics, only parental education significantly relates to PI at home. Parents with the highest education levels are 1.513 times more likely to report PI at home compared to those with lower education levels. Perceived higher school activity of any type significantly increases the odds of involvement at home. Most notably, parents' home-based involvement is more than doubled when they perceive that the school organizes regular, professionally organized meetings with parents. Involving parents in decision making, using social media networks, and experiencing parent community-building activities significantly increase home-based involvement. Parents consulting a teacher or school support worker ($\text{Exp}(B) = 1.3$) similarly increases the odds of home-based PI. All experiences of school activities directed towards parents strengthen parents' home-based involvement.

For PI at school, the age group of the student was a significant factor. Being a secondary school student ($\text{Exp}(B) = 0.432$) is related to lower PI compared to primary school students, holding other variables constant. Among the indicators of parental SES, only parental education is significant in this context. However, it is notable that when student, parent, and school characteristics are considered simultaneously, parental education—usually the strongest indicator of parental SES—has a small relationship to school PI ($\text{Exp}(B) = 1.060$).

Table 4. Student, parental, and school factors influencing home-based and school-based parental involvement (ExpB).

Dependent Variables	Home-Based PI (ExpB)	School-Based PI (ExpB)
	(1 = Higher than the Sample Average, 0 = Lower than the Sample Average)	(1 = Higher than the Sample Average, 0 = Lower than the Sample Average)
Student characteristics		
Female students	1.878 ***	1.051
School level: secondary	0.432 **	0.516 **
Parent characteristics	0.000	0.006
Highest level of parental education	1.513 ***	1.060 ***
The wealthiest status of the family	1.112	1.834
Type of residence: urban	0.89	0.888
School practices		
Regular, mutual parent-school communication	2.05 ***	3.637 ***
Development of the parent community	1.349 ***	1.911 ***
Parents in decision-making	1.379 ***	1.602 ***
Contact with school social worker/ psychologist	1.317 ***	1.778 ***
Parental volunteering	1.259 ***	1.902 ***
Social media network	1.374 **	1.484 **
Teacher counselling for parents	1.217 *	1.217
−2 Log Likelihood	842.82	682.58

Note: The fit of the model is fairly good based on the −2 Log Likelihood value, with no significant p -value ($p > 0.05$) in either case according to the Hosmer-Lemeshow test, which also indicates that the model fits the observed data well. The Nagelkerke R^2 is medium for home-based PI, where the model explains about 26.9% of the variance of the dependent variable, and low for school-based PI, where the model explains about 5.1% of the variance of the dependent variable. However, this is acceptable, as our aim was to investigate the effect of selected variables and not to build a holistic model to explain the total variance. (p -values: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$).

Parents' experiences of school parenting practices also have a statistically significant relationship to PI at school. When the school communicates regularly and reciprocally with parents (Exp(B) = 3.637), parents are more likely to participate in PI at school. The second most influential school factor is when parents perceive the school as working to build a community of parents (Exp(B) = 1.911) or encourage parent volunteering (Exp(B) = 1.902). Parent contact with school support staff (Exp(B) = 1.778) and inviting parents to participate in various forms of decision-making (Exp(B) = 1.602) also significantly increase the likelihood of more active involvement by parents in the school. The organization of a network of parental contacts through digital channels (Exp(B) = 1.484) and teachers' advice to parents (Exp(B) = 1.217) also increase the likelihood of PI in school.

7. Discussion

The research aimed to identify differences in how parents perceived school FSCP practices and to explore how these practices might be more effective across groups of parents.

We first investigated the correlation between students' demographic characteristics and parental socioeconomic status (SES) with parental practices of involvement (PI). Consistent with the literature and our hypothesis, we found a gender difference only in PI at home, with more PI reported by parents of female students (Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2005; Lam et al. 2012; Marshall and Jackman 2015). Reports of school-based PI were the same for parents of male and female students, similar to the findings from PISA data, which show no substantial gender differences in parent-initiated activity (Borgonovi and Montt 2012). However, the lack of gender difference in school-based PI could also be explained by the fact that higher involvement of girls' parents could be offset by higher control of boys'

parents or critical action generated by fear of academic difficulties (Csák 2023; Fényes and Csák 2024; Gál 2023).

Also consistent with the extant literature, both home- and school-based PI are higher for parents of children in the primary school age group than in the secondary school age group. Our analysis helped to identify this same pattern for students in Central and Eastern Europe. These findings also suggest that schools' FSCP practices may be successful if they are sensitive to gender and age differences (Bhargava and Witherspoon 2015; Boonk et al. 2018; Epstein 1985; Epstein and Sanders 2002; Hornby and Witte 2010; Thomas et al. 2019).

Other analyses show that the education and financial situation of parents are decisive factors. The more formal education parents had and the better their financial situation, the higher the likelihood they participated in both school-based and home-based PI. This can be explained by access to more information and resources, higher confidence and self-efficacy, higher satisfaction with the school, greater engagement in the content of their child's schooling, and greater ability to provide effective support for their child to achieve their educational goals (Bacsikai et al. 2024; Choi et al. 2014; Gibbs et al. 2021; Guo et al. 2018; Jafarov 2015; Jaiswal 2018; Shumow 1998; Pribesh et al. 2020).

The hypothesis for our first research question was supported, demonstrating that the strength of parental involvement (PI) is significantly influenced by students' gender, age, parental education, and financial status (H1). Our findings enhance the existing literature, reinforcing the assertion that family socioeconomic status (SES) is a critical predictor of PI (Bacsikai et al. 2024; Choi et al. 2014).

In addition, we examined the role of school FSCP practices in PI. Specifically, we explored the factors that reflect the school's practices from the perspective of parents. The factor analysis revealed the following dimensions: (1) regular, mutual communication; (2) parental community development; (3) parents in decision-making; (4) contact with support professionals; (5) parental volunteering; (6) connecting through digital channels (social media network); (7) parent counseling. These factors showed a high degree of overlap with categories in the literature that capture dimensions of PI (Epstein and Sheldon 2016; Epstein 2018), providing further empirical evidence to support the validity of these categories as well as pointing to the important finding that PI shows a similar pattern across countries.

We then examined the extent to which parental perceptions of PI differ across levels of parental education. Our results indicated that not all dimensions differed across parents by their level of education. Regular, mutual communication, parental community development, and parental decision-making factors were the same across all parental educational levels. On the other hand, parental education was a significant differentiator for the other four factors. The largest difference between parental education groups was found for support staff and school-organized social media networks, but the direction of the relationship was unexpected: the work of school support staff was perceived as prominent by parents with low education, while the work of social media networks was perceived as prominent by parents with higher education. It may be that families with lower levels of educational attainment are more likely to contact school support staff with questions related to childcare and social support (Csók and Pusztai 2022; Pusztai et al. 2024a), and parents with higher levels of educational attainment have easier access to digital contact tools and the Internet (Chappel and Ratliffe 2021; Pusztai et al. 2024a).

There was a less pronounced, but still significant difference between inviting parents to volunteer and providing parenting advice. Inviting people to volunteer is perceived more positively by parents with higher educational attainment, while parenting advice was perceived better by parents with less formal education. Parents with lower educational attainment may want more concrete advice with parenting practices through increasing

access to information or learning about different sources of support (Bacsikai et al. 2024; Choi et al. 2014; Gibbs et al. 2021; Guo et al. 2018; Jafarov 2015; Jaiswal 2018; Pribesh et al. 2020; Shumow 1998).

An important finding was that parents with lower educational attainment also reported an outstanding experience in terms of parental community building. This result can be explained as indicating that community programs may be the most successful in schools that have difficulty reaching parents because of the cultural distance between school and family. These programs allow a broader range of parents to have an empowered role (e.g., cooking and decorating) and to meet teachers in a more informal atmosphere (Pusztai et al. 2024a; Kocsis et al. 2024).

The second hypothesis predicted that higher-educated parents perceive the school's partnership practices as more welcoming (H2). This hypothesis was not supported in the findings. Our results suggest that different needs arise based on the social background of parents and that schools must have a responsive FSCP policy to address these different needs. Reaching out to parents with lower educational attainment may be most effectively facilitated by school support staff, parent counseling, and parent community building. For parents with higher educational attainment, school-organized social media networks and invitations to voluntary activities can build important bridges.

In our final research question, we asked whether the perception of the school's partnership practices is associated with the likelihood of participating in PI practices.

Home-based and school-based PI were related to many of the same predictors. However, for the seven factors capturing parents' perceptions of FSCP practices, higher odds ratios were observed for predictors of school-based PI, suggesting that school practices may be more likely to influence PI at school.

The findings also underscore the importance of "teacher counseling for parents", which may impact PI even in the home setting. While a parent's educational level is a stronger predictor of home-based PI than school-based PI, the findings suggest that parental behavior can still be influenced by the school's partnership policies.

The third hypothesis of the research was supported: The perception of the school's partnership practices increases the chance of being a more involved parent (H3). The results suggest that parental perceptions of school FSCP practices are more strongly related to supporting home-based and school-based PI compared to student or parent factors. Table 2 (above) shows that the financial situation of parents is an important factor in the intensity of parental involvement (PI), when examined without considering other contextual factors. However, when controlling for other variables, this relationship becomes insignificant. Specifically, FSCP policies provided by the school and perceived by parents can override the impact of financial inequalities on PI. This highlights the importance of school-based initiatives: rather than applying a deficit-based framework onto parents, schools can take a more active role in supporting PI. The international literature unanimously emphasizes that the school is the actor that must take the initiative in establishing and deepening the family-school relationship, as it has the authority, scope, staff, infrastructure, and professional knowledge necessary to build an effective FSCP practices (Chappel and Ratliffe 2021; Desforges and Abouchaar 2003; Epstein 2009; González and Jackson 2013; Jeynes 2011; Killus and Paseka 2020).

The power of school policies based on the family-school-community partnership model (FSCP) (Epstein 1985) is demonstrated by the finding of this study that their impact extends beyond the school walls, as they have a greater impact on home-based PI than the individual characteristics of the student or the social characteristics of the parents. This strength of school factors overriding individual and family factors supports Epstein's

finding that the school policies that support FSCP can reduce the disadvantageous impact of low-SES families on PI.

8. Conclusions

This study aimed to identify which school policies could be successful in equitably engaging parents from diverse SES backgrounds. Among parents with lower levels of educational attainment, some policies were reported to be perceived more often than among highly educated parents, such as parent community development and contact with school support staff. Even after controlling for many other student, parent, and school characteristics, the parent SES variables remained a significant predictor of home based and school-based involvement of parents. However, the perception of school policies had a greater impact on PI than any individual student- and parent-related factors.

One of the most important findings of our research is the separation of parents' own activity from their perception of school practices. The seven dimensions identified by factor analysis overlap strongly with categories in the literature that capture dimensions of PI (Epstein and Sheldon 2016; Epstein 2018). We have thus provided further empirical evidence to support the validity of these categories and to show that their applicability may be cross-culturally relevant.

Furthermore, we found that different FSCP practices and policies may be differentially effective for different groups of parents. What may be an effective practice for parents with higher levels of education may be unnecessary or inaccessible to parents with lower levels of educational attainment.

Previous research did clarify which school policies are effective in involving lower-SES parents in different school cultures. This research revealed that different types of FSCP practices relate differently to different groups of parents, specifically in the investigated regions where low-SES parents are especially in need of help due to entrenched social inequalities.

This study also showed how active school interventions can contribute to reducing school inequalities, by actively supporting the PI of lower-SES families. We find that FSCP practices that address different parental needs and identities may be one potential antidote to the mechanisms that maintain social inequalities.

One limitation of this research is that it only looked at one side of the important actors of PI (school, family, community, etc.). However, it is important to note that parents are often the most difficult of these actors to reach and that this exploration of parental perceptions of FSCP practices has addressed a gap in the knowledge of the relationships between these actors. Further qualitative work would provide a more nuanced understanding of parental perceptions. Future research plans include interviewing several actors and investigating the impact of FSCP practices on student achievement. Non-probability sampling is also a research limitation. However, despite the difficulty in accessing the core population and the lack of parental registers, it was possible to give parents a voice in a research field where reaching parents is particularly challenging, not only for schools but also for researchers.

Based on these results, we recommend that schools take the initiative of organizing and implementing a multifaceted, demand-sensitive practice in order to encourage greater parental participation.

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