



## ***The participation of parents who belong to allochthonous language minorities in school-related activities***

*Leslie Neumann*

As has been repeatedly investigated and proven since the 1970s, the family environment has a particularly strong influence on the school career and school performance of children and adolescents.<sup>1</sup> An explanatory approach is the capital theory of the sociologist and social philosopher Pierre Bourdieu. He explains the influence of the family on school career and performance through different forms of capital that exist in a family. In addition to economic capital, he also lists cultural capital and social capital. Scarcity of these capitals in a family makes it more difficult for children and adolescents to participate in the education system and lowers the chance of educational success, even if there is formal equality of opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

The results of school performance surveys such as the PISA studies, show that pupils belonging to certain minorities have, on average, less success at school and in their school careers and are less successful than their schoolmates who do not belong to these minorities. Pupils who belong to allochthonous language minorities are among them.<sup>3</sup> They have worse chances of achieving the desired educational goal. Previous attempts at explaining why pupils who belong to allochthonous language minorities, on average, are less successful at school assigned the responsibility to their families. More recent explanatory approaches assume that structures within schools and institutional discrimination also play a role. It is probably an interplay of all these factors.<sup>4</sup> The reasons for educational disadvantage and the resulting performance deficits are much discussed and require further empirical-theoretical research.

Not only do these pupils show educational inequalities compared to their fellow pupils, but also their parents, with, on average, lower participation in school-related activities of all kinds.<sup>5</sup> The reasons for lower parental participation are manifold and include, for example, uncertainty in dealing with the German education system, expectations and ideas about one's own role and everyday life in the

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<sup>1</sup>cf. Baumert/Schümer (2001:326), Fürstenau/ Hawighorst (2008: 170)

<sup>2</sup>cf. Baumert/Schümer (2001:329)

<sup>3</sup>cf. OECD (2018: 97)

<sup>4</sup>cf. Boos-Nüniger/ Karakaşoğlu (2004: 89)

<sup>5</sup>Participation in school-related activities describes all forms of parental participation in activities related to the everyday school life of their children. School-related activities include help with homework, visits and activities in the school building/ school environment, participation in parent-teacher conferences/ consultation hours/ school celebrations, involvement in committees/ projects/ programs, etc.



educational institution of their children that are not applicable. Furthermore, language barriers and the feeling of moving on the fringes of the school community and not being on an equal footing with teachers are further reasons for lower participation of parents who belong to allochthonous language minorities in school-related activities.

The educational disadvantage and educational inequality of pupils from allochthonous language minorities is particularly high in the German education system.<sup>6</sup> They show particularly large performance deficits in international comparisons.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, they are less successful in the transition phase from general education to vocational education than those pupils who do not belong to an allochthonous language minority in Germany.

Parents from allochthonous language minorities often express high educational aspirations<sup>8</sup> and are willing to invest in their children's education, since success at school provides the basis for socioeconomic advancement in their children's later lives.<sup>9</sup> Yet teachers describe it as a challenge to mobilise parents to become more involved in school-related activities<sup>10</sup> such as school events, associations or projects. Pupils from allochthonous language minorities and their school community can benefit from the willingness of parents to invest in their children's education, if school and parents work together cooperatively. Greater involvement of parents from allochthonous language minorities in school-related activities not only supports their children's learning, but can also contribute to promoting cultural diversity, intercultural communication and linguistic diversity in the school community and school environment. Cooperation between school actors and parents from allochthonous language minorities can make it possible to develop and use a comprehensive school language policy that includes everyone.

The fact that participation of parents and family environment has a decisive influence on the school career of pupils is a shared opinion and has been proven by several scientific studies. It is well-known that children and adolescents from allochthonous language minorities have worse chances in the German education system and their parents, on average, tend to adopt a passive attitude, which is why there are various practical approaches for mobilising parents so that they participate more in school-related activities. These are approaches that are implemented in the form of projects and programmes. However, studies that reflect the voices of parents on this topic have so far only been carried out in a small number. If parents have high educational aspirations, but low levels of

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<sup>6</sup>cf. Stanat (2003:243)

<sup>7</sup>cf. Geißler (2014: 299)

<sup>8</sup>cf. Demirtaş (2014: 89)

<sup>9</sup>cf. Hawighorst (2009: 55), Demirtaş (2014: 51)

<sup>10</sup>cf. Jenzer (2001: 81)



participation in school-related activities, it is interesting to find out what, in the view of these parents, is conducive or detrimental to participating and becoming involved. In qualitative interviews I ask parents from allochthonous language minorities about their own participation in school-related activities and their experiences, ideas, wishes and needs concerning this topic. This research work is part of the project *EOL - Learning environments where modern languages flourish* and will be written as an accompanying research work and master thesis. The following research question was formulated at the beginning of my research:

*How can the participation of parents from allochthonous language minorities in school-related activities be increased?*

The motivation for asking this question is to discover the parents' perspectives and to find out what, in their opinion, promotes or hinders their participation in school-related activities. The questions asked in the interviews encourage the interviewees to generate response texts in which they indicate what they consider to be conducive/ obstructive to their participation in school-related activities. They describe their participation in school-related activities, their perception of their own participation and their relationship with all actors in the school environment, and how they assess the impact of parental participation in school-related activities in general. The interviews are semi-structured interviews. The selection of the interviewees is based on two criteria. On the one hand, the interviewees must be parents of at least one school-age child attending school in Germany, and on the other they must speak a family language that corresponds to an allochthonous language in Germany.

The interviews are structured by previously defined and tested guiding questions. A characteristic feature of the semi-structured interview is that the questions are open, no answer categories are specified, the questions asked can be supplemented by control questions and maintenance questions and can be adapted accordingly to the interview situation and the interviewee. The oral interviews are supplemented by a written questionnaire. The written questionnaire is completed by the interviewees themselves before the oral interview and collects personal data. The collected data is anonymized, and each interviewee is given a pseudonym. Before collecting the data, the interviewees are informed about their voluntary participation in the interview and sign a declaration of consent. The data from the oral part of the interview are recorded with a recording device. The resulting speech recording is then transcribed in the form of a minimal transcript according to GAT 2 (Conversational Analytical Transcription System)<sup>11</sup> and evaluated with a qualitative summary content

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<sup>11</sup>cf. Selting et al. (2009)



analysis according to P. Mayring<sup>12</sup>. An inductive developed category system displays the results through which the research question is answered.

In a pilot, initial results were obtained which provide information on how parental participation is promoted or impeded. The assumption that parents from allochthonous language minorities have high educational aspirations and expectations and that their low participation does not arise from disinterest or disregard for education was confirmed in the pilot survey. The desire for greater participation in school-related activities has been expressed several times and parental participation in school-related activities and in the free time of children and adolescents is seen as having a positive effect on school careers and academic success. Reasons for rather lower participation are not a lack of interest or a disregard for education, but a lack of energy resources.<sup>13</sup> Language barriers, uncertainty and inappropriate ideas about school processes and roles are also cited as obstacles to more active participation of parents in school activities and the school environment.

The use of various analogue and digital media is mentioned several times and is described as beneficial in order to be involved in school-related activities and be informed. Offers that address the thematic interests and needs of parents continue to be mentioned as conducive to participation in school-related activities.

The first results of the pilot make it clear that parents can name what they perceive as conducive and obstructive to greater participation in school-related activities. In the study following the pilot, further data are collected and evaluated using the same methods. The results can serve as impulses for the development of further programmes and projects. Pilot projects in which the obtained results are taken into account and best practice is applied would also be conceivable. In developing projects and programmes to mobilise parents from allochthonous language minorities to participate more in school-related activities and in the school community, their opportunities, needs and desires should be considered in order to achieve the desired effect of creating a cooperation between parents and school from which pupils and the whole school community can benefit.

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<sup>12</sup>cf. Mayring (2015)

<sup>13</sup>For example, time as an energy resource (cf. Schubert/ Knecht 2015: 12)



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