

## ACTIVE AND PASSIVE FORMS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT<sup>a</sup>

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### Abstract

There are many determinants of parental involvement. Parental involvement in children's education can take a number of forms, both within the home and in school, suggesting that parental involvement is a very complex activity.

The aim of this paper is to provide information about parental involvement in their children's learning activities and schoolwork, as well as to provide information about a possible correlation between active and passive forms of parental involvement in Serbia.

The method of this study is analytical and descriptive. Data collection for the survey was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2011/12. This study is based on the data collected from 1,028 parents of 586 children aged 6.5-10.5, who attended two state elementary schools in Belgrade, Serbia.

The results show a high level of parental involvement and correlation between active and passive forms of involvement. Parents report a high level of involvement in children's education. Most parents report the passive form of involvement (encouraging children to study and to do homework), rather than the active form (provide help with the homework).

The results may suggest that parental involvement is a general construct and that parents who are interested in their child's education are involved both actively and passively. This can also suggest that children's academic achievement in Serbia depends both on active and passive parental involvement and that a good measure of both can yield good results.

**Key words:** involvement, parents, education, elementary school

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## АКТИВНИ И ПАСИВНИ ОБЛИЦИ РОДИТЕЉСКОГ АНГАЖОВАЊА У ДЕЧЈЕМ УЧЕЊУ

### Апстракт

Родитељско ангажовање може имати бројне облике, како у оквиру куће, тако и у школи. Постоје многе одреднице родитељског ангажовања, што упућује на то да је то сложена активност.

Основни циљ истраживања био је да пружи информације о учешћу родитеља у дечијем учењу и школским обавезама, као и да пружи информације о могућој повезаности између активног и пасивног облика учешћа родитеља у учењу њихове деце у Србији.

Основна метода овог истраживања је аналитичко-дескриптивна. Прикупљање података за истраживање је обављено у току школске 2011/12 године, у току првог полугодишта. Узорак је чинило је 1028 родитеља и 586 деце основно школског узраста од 6,5–10,5 година, из две државне основне школе у Београду, Република Србија.

Резултати показују висок степен укључености родитеља у учењу деце, било да је реч о пасивном или активном облику ангажовања, као и постојање корелације између активног и пасивног облика ангажовања. Родитељи, су, ипак, склонији пасивним облицима ангажовања у учењу деце (подстичу децу да уче и да раде домаће задатке), док је активно ангажовање родитеља (пружање помоћи око домаћих задатака), иако значајно заступљено, у поређењу са пасивним облицима ангажовања заступљено је у мањој мери.

Добијени резултати могу сугерисати да је родитељско ангажовање генерални конструкт, тешко дељив на активне и пасивне облике, и да су родитељи, који су заинтересовани за детово образовање подједнако ангажовани и пасивно и активно. Добијени резултати, такође, могу сугерисати да успех ученика у школи подједнако зависи од обе форме ангажовања родитеља.

**Кључне речи:** ангажовање, родитељи, учење, основна школа

### INTRODUCTION

In today society, there are many reasons why children cope with increasing need for, and parents with various increasing demand for, involvement in their education.

“The presence of more parents in the work force, the fast pace of modern society as a whole, and the declining role of the family have all been reasons that some social scientists have pointed to, to explain an apparent decline in parental involvement in education (Jeynes, 2006, 2010; Mapp et al., 2008). Educators also realize that children in urban areas may be influenced by these realities as much or more than any group in the country (Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012; Lightfoot, 2007; Mapp et al., 2008)” (Jeynes, 2012, p. 707).

There are many determinants of parental involvement. Demographical factors, such as the level of education (Fantuzzo et al., 2000, Farooq et al., 2011, Vera et al., 2012), low income (Croizer, 1999), and single

parents (Jeynes, 2005), seem to be very important for parental involvement. In addition to these factors, a parent's belief in their own competence to achieve a desired parenting outcome (Downer & Mendez, 2005) seems to be a predictive factor of parental involvement.

Parental involvement in their children's education can take a number of forms, both within the home and at school (Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007). Epstein (2001) has defined six different types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. However, Jeynes (2012) states that subsequent research (Jeynes, 2005, 2007, 2010) indicated that Epstein's classification is probably too simplistic. Comer (1995) defined school-based involvement, such as parent-teacher conferences, volunteering and being present in the school, participation in school governance, and home-based involvement, such as parental reinforcement of learning at home. Some authors (Cotton & Wikelund, 2006, Wanke, 2008) differentiate between two types of parental involvement: active and passive.

Wanke (2008, p. 7) defined active involvement as "being involved with children in ways that include face-to-face interactions such as tutoring, working on homework with children, and reading with children", and passive involvement as "being involved with children in inactive ways such as providing a proper environment, providing school supplies for the child, and making sure the child attends school".

Cotton & Wikelund (2006) pointed out that researchers found that the more active forms of parental involvement produce greater achievement benefits than the more passive ones. However, considerably greater achievement benefits are noted when parental involvement is active – when parents work with their children at home.

As Vera et al. (2012) observed, parents' involvement changes as their children move through the school system. Obviously it changes with time and different education policies. Hill & Tyson (2009) also found that the impact on children's achievement tends to vary. These are some of the reasons why it is very important to study parental involvement continuously.

#### *Aim of the Study*

The aim of this study is to provide information about parental involvement in their children's learning activities and schoolwork, as well as to provide information about a possible correlation between active and passive forms of parental involvement in Serbia. Here "parental involvement" refers to the many ways of helping children attain a satisfactory level of academic standards, which can be observed when parents assist with the homework, motivate and encourage their children, or assist them with learning.

Providing information about parental involvement in children's learning and schoolwork has important pedagogical implications. First of all it can answer the question whether education can be continued at home. Specifically, it can reveal how it is possible for parents to be involved in their children's learning both at home and in school. Second, investigation of parental involvement, especially the forms of parental involvement (active or passive), can provide important information about the necessity of creating parental involvement programs.

“In a recent study, Ramirez (2010) identified six major areas of focus for comprehensive school improvement where changes are needed if education is to improve significantly for children of traditionally underserved communities. They are curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, roles and responsibilities, aligning school resources to support school improvement plans, and school-home-community collaboration. He argues that while much research and some positive results have been achieved in the first five components throughout the last four decades, the keys to a meaningful understanding of what is needed to create and sustain successful partnerships between schools, communities, and families has not been sufficiently examined or improved in practice at a noticeable pace” (Jasis, Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012, p. 67).

#### *Research Questions and Hypotheses*

The analyses of our study addressed the following questions: (1) how parents report their involvement and (2) how parent-reports of passive involvement correlate with their reports of active involvement.

We hypothesized that there is a strong correlation between active and passive forms of parental involvement. Specifically, we hypothesized that parents who are passively involved will be actively involved as well, and conversely, parents who are not passively involved will also not be actively involved. This means that parental involvement is a general construct and that every classification only simplifies it, without the possibility of explaining this complex construct. Support of our hypothesis is found in Waanders, Mendez, & Downer (1997), who suggest that, despite representing conceptually distinct dimensions of parental involvement, all variables are part of the same general construct of parental involvement.

#### *METHODS*

*Sample.* The sample includes 1,028 parents of 586 children aged 6.5-10.5, who attend two state elementary schools in Belgrade, Serbia. Most children (344 or 58.70%) had their school success classified in the “excellent” category, followed by “very good” (85 or 14.50%), and “good” (6 or 1.02%). A total of 151 (25.76%) children attend first grade. As mentioned, these children do not have numeric marks, only descriptive.

Primarily, we intended for all parents to be included in the study (1495) but 467 (31.23%) parents refused to participate in the research. The main reasons for refusal were: (1) dissatisfaction with the present organization of schoolwork; (2) frequent surveys of parents and children; and (3) dissatisfaction with the present education system in the Republic of Serbia. Given that participation in this study was voluntary and confidential, all those parents who did not want to participate in the study were not included in the sample.

The final sample includes 586 (57%) mothers and 442 (43%) fathers.

More parents completed secondary education (57.68%), than higher education (23.54%), but there were also parents with elementary education only (2.27%). Eighty-nine percent of the participants were married, while 9.14% were divorced and 1.75% were single-parents. Parents with very low incomes comprised 50.11% and those with satisfactory incomes comprised 49.8%. We conducted the field work in 2012.

*The survey.* We designed the survey used in the study, taking into consideration other studies on parental involvement (e.g. Epstein & Douber, 2001; Epstein & Sounders, 2002).

The survey consisted of 30 items. Parental involvement was assessed using data from parents' self-reports. Each respondent was asked if they were a parent or a guardian. The survey used a five-point Likert scale for 12 questions. The answers included: I strongly disagree; I tend to disagree; I don't know; I tend to agree; and I strongly agree.

In this paper we presented only the results that pertain to parental involvement in their children's schoolwork and learning. This part of the survey consists of nine questions, five of which used a five-point Likert scale and four of which were open-ended. Here we will present only the answers to the questions in which parents rate their agreement with each item along a 5-point Likert scale.

*Definition of Terms.* We considered two forms of parental involvement: active and passive. Active involvement involves direct work with children, such as tutoring, and direct work with children at home (providing help with the homework and with studying). Passive involvement involves all types of interest in children's schoolwork without direct work with children so as to help them with their learning issues (verbally encouraging the child to study; cooperating with the school (e.g. parents' school visits); making sure the child attends school; and showing interest in the child's school tasks). Accordingly, we can treat active involvement as direct work with children and passive involvement as indirect work. This approach to exploring parental involvement is very close to Wanke's approach (2008), mentioned above, and very similar to Epstein and Sanders (2002) and Coner's (1995) school-based involvement and home-based involvement. In addition, in distinguishing between active and passive forms of involvement, we strongly relied on parental understanding

and interpretation of active and passive parental involvement in education in Serbia.

*Analysis of the data.* For data analysis we used SPSS 17.0 for Windows (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). We used methods of descriptive statistics (Mean Std. Deviation, Ranking, and Frequencies) and the method of statistical tests – Bivariate Correlation (2-tailed Pearson Correlation).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Table 1. Cross-tables of mothers' involvement in their children's schoolwork*

	Interested in child's schoolwork		Cooperates with school		Provides help with homework		Provides help with studying		Encourages child to study and to do homework	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No answer	31	5.3	25	4.3	23	3.9	25	4.3	33	5.6
Strongly disagree	2	.3	9	1.5	6	1.0	13	2.2	3	.5
Tend to disagree	3	.5	13	2.2	4	.7	26	4.4	8	1.4
Doesn't know	13	2.2	26	4.4	8	1.4	19	3.2	4	.7
Tend to agree	138	23.5	157	26.8	74	12.6	127	21.7	97	16.6
Strongly agree	399	68.1	356	60.8	471	80.4	376	64.2	441	75.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Descriptive Statistic										
Minimum	0		0		0		0		0	
Maximum	5		5		5		5		5	
Mean	4.43		4.30		4.59		4.28		4.48	
SD	1.192		1.214		1.105		1.287		1.239	

The majority of the mothers selected 'strongly agree' for the statements "I provide help with homework" (80.4%, Mean 4.59) and "I encourage my child to study and to do homework" (75.3%, Mean 4.48). Mothers also reported a high level of strong agreement with the statement "I am interested in my child's schoolwork" (68.1%, Mean 4.43); "I provide help with studying" (64.2%, Mean 4.28) and "I cooperate with the school" (60.8%, Mean 4.30). It is very important to note that there is very high standard deviation in all measured variables. It means that, even though most mothers are interested in their children's education at the highest level, there are also mothers who report partial involvement in their children's education (Table 1). The results of our study are very

similar to Shin's study (Shin, 2009), in which mothers were much less engaged in school contact than in other types of parental involvement (e.g. parental monitoring and parent-child engagement in social activities). This result is very similar to the result of our study concerning cooperation with the school. Serbian mothers are also less engaged in school contact than in other types of parental involvement.

Although the majority of the mothers reported they provide help with the homework, it is important to notice that Hill & Tyson (2009) found that help with the homework was negatively related to success, whereas other types of involvement at home were significantly and positively related to success. They also pointed out that helping with the homework is the most controversial type of home-based involvement and that help with the homework may be elicited by poor school performance. This is the fact that we must consider when evaluating this form of parental involvement.

*Table 2. Correlation between active and passive forms of mother's involvement*

	Provides help with homework	Provides help with studying
Interested in schoolwork	.790**	.658**
Cooperates with school	.687**	.600**
Encourages child to study and to do homework	.685**	.589**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

There is a correlation at the 0.01 level between active and passive forms of mothers' involvement in their children's education. It means that mothers who are passively involved are also actively involved (Table 2).

The majority of the fathers (65.6%) reported agreement with the statement "I encourage my child to study and to do homework". Fewer fathers (48.2%) reported agreement with the statements "I provide help with homework" and "I cooperate with the school" (40%). The fewest fathers (35.1%) reported agreement with the statement "I am interested in my child's schoolwork". Generally, fathers are much closer to partial agreement with all statements (all means between 4.20 and 3.67), but with a high value of standard deviation (Table 3).

The mothers were more likely to report that they strongly agree with the statements than the fathers. These results are very close to the results obtained by Simić-Vukomanović et al. (2012). They found in a sample of 9,785 Serbian students that over 95% of children state that their mothers are involved in their learning at home. According to these authors, these results are not surprising, although in Serbia it is significant that the child-mother relationship plays an important role in children's academic success. Eccles & Harold (1996) found that mothers were more

involved in their children's intellectual and school-related development than fathers. In contrast, fathers were more involved in their children's athletic development. Even though the questions in our questionnaire only pertained to school-related development, this can be one of the explanations for our results.

*Table 3. Cross-tables of the fathers' involvement in their children's schoolwork*

	Interested in child's schoolwork		Cooperates with school		Provides help with homework		Provides help with studying		Encourages child to study and to do homework	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No answer	24	5.4	22	5.0	20	4.5	19	4.3	34	7.7
Strongly disagree	17	3.8	38	8.6	17	3.8	25	5.7	8	1.8
Tend to disagree	46	10.4	37	8.4	31	7.0	58	13.1	13	2.9
Doesn't know	40	9.0	46	10.4	27	6.1	39	8.8	14	3.2
Tend to agree	160	36.2	122	27.6	134	30.3	134	30.3	83	18.8
Strongly agree	155	35.1	177	40.0	213	48.2	167	37.8	290	65.6
Total	442	100.0	442	100.0	442	100.0	442	100.0	442	100.0
Descriptive Statistic										
Minimum	0		0		0		0		0	
Maximum	5		5		5		5		5	
Mean	3.72		3.67		3.98		3.69		4.20	
SD	1.414		1.519		1.378		1.447		1.471	

Finally, the majority of parents strongly agree with all statements as follows: encourage the child to study and to do homework (passive form of involvement) (68.19%); provide help with the homework (active form of involvement) (66.54%); interested in the child's schoolwork (53.89%) (passive form of involvement); provide help with studying (active form of involvement) (52.82%); cooperate with the school (passive form of involvement) (51.85%).

The results of our study are very similar to Troy's (2003), where 65.9% of the parents believed that encouraging their children to receive good grades is essential, 29.5% believed it is important, and 4.5% believed it somewhat important.



*Table 4. Correlation between active and passive forms of father's involvement*

	Provides help with homework	Provides help with studying
Interested in schoolwork	.830**	.680**
Cooperates with school	.621**	.545**
Encourages child to study and to do homework	.437**	.370**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

There is a correlation at the 0.01 level between active and passive form of fathers' involvement in their children's education. It means that fathers who are passively involved are also actively involved (Table 2).

Generally, Serbian parents in our sample tend to encourage their children to study and do homework and to provide help with the homework, rather than cooperate with the school. At this moment we cannot provide a clear reason why this is so, as this requires further research. One possible reason is a lack of free time and a need to spend time outside of work in children's motivation to learn and concrete support to children's learning. Ariza (2010) found that experiences with the teachers and other education professionals can set the stage for whether home-school communication and volunteering will be initiated or continued. This is partly supported by research conducted in ten southeast European countries (including Serbia), whose results demonstrate that:

"There are two important factors which clearly influence parental involvement and attitudes: feelings of competence and recruitment efforts made by schools. While feelings of competence are significantly correlated with a certain level of education and overall socioeconomic status, competence itself can also be acquired through other ways, such as experience or availability of time. Additionally, recruitment also seems to be critical in making parents become involved more, and it is also possible to conceive of a model in which sustained mobilization leads to involvement, which, in turn, may lead to increased feelings of competence" (Radu, 2011, p. 113).

On the other hand, the cause may lie in the education system in Serbia, but given that we have not explored this line of inquiry, everything stated here is mere assumption.

#### *CONCLUSIONS AND THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY*

The aim of this research was to provide information about parental involvement in children's learning and schoolwork, as well as to provide information about a possible correlation between active and passive forms of involvement.

Parents reported a high level of involvement in their children's education. More parents reported the passive form of involvement (encouraging children to study and to do homework), than the active form (providing help with the homework).

There are some differences between involvement of mothers and involvement of fathers. Mothers seemed to report a higher level of involvement than fathers. Likewise, most mothers reported involvement in providing help with the homework (active form of involvement) while most fathers reported encouraging children to study and to do homework (passive form of involvement).

There is strong evidence of correlation between active and passive forms of involvement. It means that the parents who report passive involvement are also actively involved. Statistics confirm this correlation in mothers' and fathers' involvement, as well. We found the high level of correlation between active and passive forms of parental involvement to be an important result of this study. The importance is all the more greater since we found the same high correlation between these two forms of parental involvement in both the mothers' and the fathers' answers. Such results may suggest that parental involvement is a general construct and that parents who are interested in their children's education are at the same time involved both actively and passively. This might also suggest that a child's academic success in Serbia depends on both active and passive parental involvement and that a good measure of both can yield good results. This statement is supported by very high academic success of the students whose parents were in our sample. Furthermore, this statement can be supported by the result found in Cotton and Wiklund's (2005) review of studies on parental involvement, where the authors pointed out that active parental involvement is more beneficial than passive involvement, but that passive forms of involvement are better than no involvement at all.

Finally, parents must find the answer to the question of how much and how they have to help their children with studying and teachers must find the answer to the question of whether education can be continued at home. According to the results of this study, parents are ready to continue their children's education at home, especially by providing help with the homework. The question remains if they are able to do it properly. This means that it is not enough just to be ready to help children with studying but that it is also necessary to know how to help them. As seen in the previous section, some researchers (Hill & Tyson, 2009) showed that parental involvement, which includes special knowledge and direct work with children (e.g. helping with the homework), may not be associated with success. On the contrary, it can increase the pressure on both the parents and the children. The results of this research show that parents are somehow aware of this, so there are more parents who are ready to encourage

their children to study and do homework than those who actively help them. Finally, the results of this research can be used as a reminder that parents are involved in their children education, but that it is necessary to provide quality help and support for it. One way is to develop a National Parental Involvement Program.

One limitation of this study is that the sample included parents from only two elementary schools in Belgrade, Serbia. Although there are 166 schools in Belgrade, the results of this study can be considered as results of a pilot study. In addition, the sample only included parents of first- through fourth-grade students. We thought that data collected from parents of students enrolled in the first half of Serbian elementary education would be the most reliable, because the lower grades might provide more opportunities for parents to become involved in their children's education. It is important to note that 68.77% of all the parents in two schools participated in this study, so the results can be considered valid for these two schools, but we must remain cautious when interpreting them. There is a possibility that all of the parents might be more or less involved in their children's education, since we do not have any data from 31.23% of the parents. Another limitation of this study is that the survey used to collect data was developed by us and therefore has no reports of reliability or validity. One more limitation might be a misinterpretation of the terminology that we presented, especially the terminology considering active and passive forms of involvement. This is partly due to the differences between the education system in Serbia and in other countries against which we compared the theoretical frameworks and data results.

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## АКТИВНИ И ПАСИВНИ ОБЛИЦИ РОДИТЕЉСКОГ АНГАЖОВАЊА У ДЕЧЈЕМ УЧЕЊУ

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### Резиме

Рад анализира различите теоријске приступе проблему ризичног понашања младих. Аутори констатују да је неуспех већине досадашњих програма превенције, заснованих на стереотипној претпоставци да су адолесценти ирационални и непромишљени, условио нова концептуална и практична разматрања тог питања. У супротности са таквом позицијом, еволуциона биологија и социјална неуронаука се према социјалном понашању младих одређује на суптилнији начин, апострофирајући чињеницу да су адолесценти обично свесни ризика и потенцијално штетних последица својих поступака, али му ипак прибегавају и због тога не брину превише.

Адолесценција је период који карактеришу различите понашајне промене које обликују младу особу све до момента када она улази у свет одраслих, зрелих људи. Ову животну фазу одликују чести конфликти са родитељима, борба за статус у друштву, тенденција за привлачење партнера, а све то углавном на начин који подразумева неки вид ризика. Очито је да, чак и тако буран период у сазревању младих има неку еволуциону предност, јер је остао сачуван до данас. Иако ризик са собом носи потенцијално штетне последице, он уједно пружа могућност за бројне бенефите које адолесценти далеко више вреднују од самог ризика.

Ризичном понашању младих доприноси несклад у сазревању различитих делова мозга. У раду се посебно истиче касније сазревање префронталног кортекса, који представља извршни мозак јер је одговоран за процесе логичког мишљења, планирања и одлучивања, у односу на лимбички систем који је највећим делом одговоран за емоције. Хормоналне промене, које карактеришу пубертет, такође доприносе ризичном понашању младих. Посебно треба истаћи промене које се односе на излучивање полних хормона. По правилу мушки полни хормони су одговорни за агресивно понашање, док женски полни хормони имају супротан ефекат. Међутим, код људи веома важну улогу игра и окружење, односно искуство које у великој мери може да модификује ове видове понашања.

Са аспекта еволуционе биологије, главни циљ је репродукција, односно преношење гена на потомство, како би се продужила врста. Стратегије за остварење овог циља су различите и зависе од социјално-економских услова у којима особа одраста. Уколико су периоди детињства и адолесценције испуњени несигурностима, сва је прилика да ће особа пре ступити у сексуалне односе, биће склонија проблемима у понашању и чешће ће преузимати ризик, како би испунила циљ о репродукцији. Међутим, ако су услови живота бољи и угоднији, доминантно ће се примењивати спорије, мање ризичне животне стратегије.

Имајући на уму изнете карактеристике у раду обрађених приступа, као суштинске социјалнопедагошке импликације означене су: 1) превентивне интервенције морају бити усклађене са емоционалним и мотивационим тенденцијама младих; 2) програми превенције ризичног понашања адолесцената морају бити обележени јачим координисањем академског, социјалног и емоционалног учења; 3) неопходно је померити фокус на свеобухватне интервенције које ће промовисати позитиван развој младих, а не само спречавати негативне исходе.