

## **Introduction and Background**

Student life, school life, and family life are closely related and jointly contribute to a successful education. The lack of one of them will adversely impact children's growth. In a general sense, children whose parents and teachers have well nurtured will learn to love and respect people from their hearts. The report from The OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 (Volume III) has emphasized what School Life Means for Students' Lives. This volume focused on students' physical and mental health and the role of teachers and parents in shaping school climate and social life. It also examined student health and how these relate to the school climate (OECD, 2019). My critical evaluation will focus on chapter 10 in PISA 2018 Volume III, Parental Involvement in school activities. The study intended to analyze the association between parental involvement in children's education and variables related to students' reading performance. Secondly, to compare the data of parental involvement in Korea and Italy. Finally, to call for parental engagement in children's school-related activities to improve their children's academic attainment.

## **Study Methods**

As an international large-scale education database, PISA has the authority to analyze, explain, develop, and evaluate adolescent global competence. PISA is also a tool that many countries and economies can use to adjust their education policies. The OECD adopts strict quality assurance mechanisms in design, translation, sampling, and data collection to balance assessment materials culturally and linguistically. In 2018, participants were students aged 15 to 16 from 79 countries and economies. Data collected by PISA 2018 volume III include a broad range, such as students' life satisfaction, the student's self-efficacy, students' expectations for their future, as well as their parent's and teachers' participation are all taken into consideration. The study of Parental Involvement in school activities focused on three aspects: communicating with teachers, volunteering in school-related activities, and participating in school governance (Cohen et al., 2009). PISA used a parent questionnaire which is distributed to eligible parents in 17 countries and economies, as a method to collect information on parents' school involvement. Parents are asked to use "Yes" or "No" or "Not supported by school" to answer whether they have participated in 10 school-related activities during the last academic year. The data analysis method adopted in this study analyzes the 2018 PISA database, corresponding to SPSS and Excel files, to process the data (OECD, 2019).

## **Critical Discussion**

The role of parents in facilitating a child's learning process can be enormous. Parental involvement in school life can foster home-school bonds and provide a suitable learning environment for students. Various empirical studies have shown that there exist an association between parental involvement and children's improved academic performance. The theoretical framework offered by Epstein claimed that the main reason families, schools, and communities should work as partners is to help all adolescents succeed in school and later in their life (Epstein, 2010). Meta-analyses of previous studies carried out by Masabo et al. have demonstrated that student academic achievement can be improved if teachers, parents, students, and the community work together to encourage students (Masabo, 2017). PISA had assessed parental involvement for over a decade, dating back to 2006, when the parents' questionnaire was first introduced. Over the years, questionnaires have been revised to be more specific and played an essential role. In PISA 2018, more detailed sides of parent involvement were added, including school questionnaires filled out by principals and questionnaires designed for students and teachers (Reparaz & Sotés-Elizalde, 2019). The results of this study have greatly helped to improve education and promoted schools to meet parents'

expectations better.

Findings from the study revealed that whether parents can actively be involved in discussing their child's progress with a teacher on their own initiative is an essential factor. The differences between countries and economies are stark. In 2018, About 41 % of students' parents discussed their child's progress with a teacher on their own initiative, and 57 % did so on the initiative of teachers. Nevertheless, 17 % of parents participated in local school government, and only 12 % volunteered for physical or extracurricular activities (OECD, 2019). The table showed that the Philippines has the highest parental Involvement, with over 66% in all school-related activities. The participation rate of Uruguay was the lowest, with less than 35% of school-related activities. According to the distributed parent questionnaire, the scheduled parents' meeting was the most involved in all the school activities in which parents participated, while the volunteers for physical or extracurricular activities were the least involved. Trends in Parental Involvement in school activities have explained that parents in some countries tend to take the initiative to discuss students' progress with teachers, for example, in Albania, Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang (China), Greece, the Philippines, and Viet Nam. It also found that parents talk about their children's progress was more common in schools with socioeconomic advantages than with disadvantages. Equally, parents in urban schools were more active in contacting teachers than those in rural schools. However, the report pointed out this does not prove that rural parents do not care about their children. On the contrary, it can express parents' trust in the school and teachers. Moreover, according to the parents' questionnaire, the main reason that hindered parents from participating in school activities was time-related, including the need to work (34%) and the inconvenience of meeting times (33%) (OECD, 2019).

In addition, findings also suggested an association between parental involvement in school activities and their children's reading performance. However, contrary to several social studies, the report found that the correlation was weak even after accounting for the socioeconomic status of students and schools. The principals reported that for every 10 percentage point increase in the number of parents actively discussing their child's progress, their reading scores would fall by 0.4 percentage points. The article also discussed parents' preference for schools. Data information has greatly helped schools and education systems improve to meet family expectations. 92 percent of parents considered a safe school environment necessary. An active and pleasant school climate was deemed to be important by 89 percent, and academic performance at school was also valued by 81 percent. It is noteworthy that parents of higher social status pay more attention to the school's reputation. PISA data also showed that in most education systems, parents of students with the highest reading scores seem to be the most satisfied with the quality of their schools (OECD, 2019). In the study, bias occurs when collecting the data since the number of schools involved was too small, and the study was too narrow. For instance, if the study failed to design some rural schools, the results were skewed to lack validity and unreliable.

### **Evaluation of Parental Involvement in schools in Korea and Italy**

My evaluation purpose is to compare and contrast the data for Korea and Italy. They were chosen because of their stark differences in PISA results, with one representing Asia and one representing Europe. At some point, locally specific education policies and contexts make data comparable and accessible. Korean education is distinctive with its high requirements for academic performance. Academic success is often a source of pride for many Korean families. Montessori widely influences Italian education, mainly focusing on family education and parental involvement in-home and school-based activities.

### *Parental Involvement in the Korea context*

In the 2018 ranking of parental involvement in school-related activities, Korea ranked 41st out of 76 countries and economies. Among Korean parents who participated in the parent questionnaire, 42% of them are willing to take the initiative to communicate with teachers about their child's progress. 46% of parents are relatively passive and only discuss their child's progress on the initiative of one of their child's teachers. 33% of parents are involved in their local school government and only 12% volunteer in physical or extracurricular activities (OECD, 2019). In 2015, parents who discussed their child's progress on their own initiative increased by nearly 2 percentage points compared with PISA 2018 data. Equal partnerships between parents and teachers have long been proposed, and some Korean studies have shown that the need for parental involvement has already existed as a necessity (Lee, 2015).

When discussing a child's progress by school characteristics, data showed a positive difference between Korean parents' participation in school-related activities regarding advantages and disadvantages. Also, there was no significant difference between public and private schools when parents took the initiative to discuss their children's progress with teachers. On the contrary, there existed a positive difference when the teacher was the initiative. It is noteworthy that the PISA comparison between city and rural schools in Korea showed missing value, which indicated that The PISA test does not apply to Korea in this section based on its unique national condition. Evidence has proved that to promote educational equity better and balance educational resources, Korean teachers must move between urban and rural areas to fulfill their obligations (Li, 2021). It can be the reason why this part of the PISA results is not valuable. Thus, explanations relate to local education policies are strongly recommended. Regarding school selection criteria, Korean parents care most about a safe school environment, accounting for up to 95%, followed by an active and pleasant school climate and a good school reputation, which are more than 90% of the parents choose.

### *Parental Involvement in Italy context*

Based on the ranking of parental involvement in school-related activities in 2018, Italy ranked 22nd out of 79 countries and economies. 59 percent of parents in Italy discussed their child's progress with a teacher on their own initiative. 49 percent of parents discussed their child's progress on the initiative of one of their child's teachers. 34 percent of parents are involved in their local school government, and only 8 percent of them volunteered in physical or extracurricular activities. Compared with data provided by PISA 2015, parents who discuss their child's progress on their own initiative have decreased by around 5 percentage points. According to the table discussing child's progress by school characteristics, there is a positive difference between city and rural schools and private and public schools where teachers take the initiative. Figures of criteria for choosing a school pointed out that 88 percent of Italian parents rated school safety as their top priority: an active and pleasant school climate and a good school reputation also taken up a high percentage (OECD, 2019). But the remarkable thing is that there were no data available related to "the school offers exchange programs with schools in other countries." It also proved the limitations of PISA, failing to measure all the educational conditions of a country fairly and impartially in a global approach. Therefore, it is suggested to collect relevant data from other places to investigate, such as the number of schools with foreign exchange programs and the number of students participating in them.

### **Conclusion**

The most noteworthy thing about the parent involvement data calculated by PISA is that the average of the Italy score is higher than the average of Korean. It emphasized that Italy parents talk to teachers about their children's progress on their own initiative much more than Korean parents and even higher than the OECD average as well. The results obtained from the report also mean that the two countries have a variety of parental Involvement, and each country carries out activities according to its own national situation. As the primary mythology of this study, the parent questionnaire is of great value, and the opinions of parents and principals are the catalyst for school improvement (Sebastian et al., 2016). However, there are still deviations in the PISA test since it cannot fairly reflect the actual education situation of a region or country. There are still many uncontrollable variations behind the data. For instance, low parental involvement in Korea may also mean more trust of parents in government and schools. Besides, the current study only considers school-based parental involvement. Future PISA research should investigate parental participation based on family activities to make the results more reliable.

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