Triggering parental involvement for parents of different language backgrounds: the role of types of partnership activities and preschool characteristics

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Home and educational institutions are children’s most important external influences and a positive partnership between the two can positively affect children’s cognitive and non-cognitive development. Quality of family–preschool partnership (FPP) can depend on preschool and family characteristics. For Germany, studies show that immigrant parents perceive a lack of positive FPP. The present study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do parents and teachers in Germany rate FPP? (2) Do ratings of FPP differ between parents who do or do not speak German at home? (3) Is there a relation between the structural quality of the centre and ratings of FPP for teachers and parents? Results reflect positive ratings of FPP (1). Mean comparisons confirmed differences between parent groups (2). Multilevel regression analyses indicate that percentage of children who do not speak German at home is positively associated with parents’ ratings of FPP, but negatively with teachers’ satisfaction about FPP (3).

Keywords: family–preschool partnerships; non-native language parents; immigrants; preschool teachers; parental involvement

1. Triggering parental involvement for parents of different language backgrounds: The role of types of partnership activities and preschool characteristics

In most European countries participation rates of children as young as three years of age in early education and institutional care settings have risen in the last decades. In Germany, 98% of all children aged three or above attend early education and care (ECEC) (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2014). Half of the children spend seven hours or more per day in daycare (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2014), thus spending many hours interacting with their formal caretakers and peers. From the early beginnings of institutionalised care, the role and relevance of parental involvement and parent partnership have been an issue of (political and practical) debates (Cottle & Alexander, 2014). Historically, such debates have often focussed

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on deficits of the parents, and are hence referred to as a ‘compensatory approach’ (Cottle & Alexander, 2014). Nowadays it is undisputed that in early childhood, parents are the primary caretakers and first educators of their children, and have hence the most formative influence on their child’s development (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2006). As a consequence, parents’ expert status with regard to their own child’s development is acknowledged. At the policy level, this is reflected in the call for a cooperative parent–practitioner partnership at eye level. However, recent qualitative research has disclosed ambivalent relationships between parents and preschool teachers (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Cottle & Alexander, 2014). From the perspective of the latter, Cottle and Alexander speak of a ‘mismatch between rhetoric, ideology, and practice’ (p. 649) and that the mismatch might be even wider for lower income and ethnic minority parents. Considering the empirical findings that parental involvement and positive family–preschool partnerships (FFP) contribute to the academic success of children, these results are troublesome.

Against the background of the more recent emphasis on FFP in Germany, empirical evidence is still scarce (Friedrich, 2011; Neumann, 2012). To formulate our research questions, we hence draw on international research. The aim of the present paper is (1) to investigate preschool teachers’ and parents’ ratings of FPP with a special focus on language minority parents in a German sample. The second aim is to study the relationship of FPP with family and preschool characteristics. In the following, we will first conceptualise FPP from a scientific and practical perspective. Second, we discuss differential effects, with a focus on family and preschool characteristics before coming to our own research questions, and analyses. In each section, we provide information on the specific German context.

2. Conceptualisations of parental involvement and FPP

2.1. Scientific conceptualisations

Although intuitively parental involvement seems easily definable, there has not been a consistent operationalisation in past research (Cottle & Alexander, 2014, see Fan & Chen, 2001, for a meta-analysis). This ‘chaotic state’ (Fan & Chen, 2001, p. 3) is likely to have been caused by the multidimensional and multifaceted nature of the construct itself (see Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001, for brief overviews on different conceptualisations). One of the earliest typologies of parental involvement comes from Epstein (1987), in which she describes different types of parental involvement (e.g. school-to-home communication and parental involvement at school). Based on her research she highlights the importance of developing fruitful partnerships between the educational and the family setting, for example, through volunteering and communicating (Epstein, 1995). In a similar vein, Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) identify three dimensions of parent involvement measures: behaviour, intellectual/cognitive, and personal. Importantly, these three measures were only moderately correlated and showed differential associations with various parental background variables. In addition to different types or activities of involvement (the ‘how’ or ‘what’), other conceptualisations have included parents’ motives for involvement (the ‘why’). Despite different conceptualisations, two things become obvious from the scientific literature: First, to investigate parental involvement it is necessary to include different types of activities. In the present paper, we will therefore
concentrate on different forms of involvement. However, we concentrate on those activities that take place in the preschool centre. Examples for preschool-based activities are classroom volunteering, open houses, parent council, teacher–parent conferences, or individual communication about the child as well as the celebration of events and festivities. Second, parental involvement is not uni-directional, but always takes place between two dynamic systems (i.e. the family and the school; Fantuzzo et al., 2013). To accommodate for this dynamic relationship, we will often refer to the term FPP in the present paper when talking about parental involvement, collaboration, or different types of partnership activities.

2.2. **FPP practices**

The conceptual heterogeneity in the scientific literature is reflected in heterogeneity of FPP conceptualisations in practice and at the policy level. It is not surprising that most of the research on FPP has been conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries or the United States since in both contexts a long tradition in trying to engage parents in the education of their child exists. In the United States, for example, parental involvement has been an important component of the most famous early childhood education programmes since the 1960s (e.g. Head Start mandates regular participation of the parents, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007). In the UK, similar initiatives have also focussed on the family in a holistic way (e.g. Sure Start Children Centres, Melhuish & Belsky, 2010; see Cottle & Alexander (2014), for an overview and critical practitioners’ perspective). Since the study presented here was conducted in Germany, we will give a brief overview on parental involvement policies for ECEC in Germany.

Contrary to the Anglo-Saxon countries, outreach to parents and FPP has been traditionally less stressed in ECEC in Germany (Friedrich, 2011), although more efforts have been made over the last years.¹ In Germany, no national ECEC curriculum exists, but curricular plans have been issued in all of the 16 federal states. These plans serve as orientation frameworks for the ECEC settings, but still give the individual preschool centres autonomy in how to prioritise and implement educational practices. Nowadays, the educational plans of all federal states describe the need for building up an educational partnership (‘Bildungs- und Erziehungspartnership’) as a task of preschool teachers and define respective standards (see Viernickel and Schwarz (2009) for an overview). Yet, what constitutes such an educational partnership still varies from federal state to federal state. While some standards are only shared by two federal states (e.g. offering German courses to parents with different language backgrounds) others are supported by 15 federal states (e.g. exchanging information with the parents on a regular basis). In the present paper, we focus on those FPP activities for which Viernickel and Schwarz (2009) found a consensus between federal states (standards that are shared by at least 75% of all federal states), namely exchanging information regularly, having individual parent–teacher meetings once a year to discuss the development of the child, seeking an educational partnership with parents, enabling parents to participate in decision-making processes, and engaging interested parents in project work and yearly planning. In practice, however, most of the applied formats seem to be unilateral ways of informing parents (e.g. newsboards, shorter or longer teacher–parent talks and conferences, Viernickel, Nentwig-Gesse-mann, Nicolai, Schwarz, & Zenker, 2013). Active parent involvement is only usual in planning and conducting festivities and not at all common regarding everyday
activities, conceptualising or programming, thematic work, or participation in decision-making.

Due to societal and demographic changes and due to changing child-rearing practices the number and the proportion of children with an immigration background in German ECEC settings are rising (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2014; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014). However, with regard to intercultural FPP, integrating topics of heritage culture or needs of families with immigration backgrounds is not yet common practice. Only one-fourth of all educational plans include the standard of offering translations of important documents or providing translators (Viernickel & Schwarz, 2009). Focussing on the aspects of intercultural competence of the teachers, cooperation with local agents, and offering multiple types of involvement activities for parents, Lokhande (2014) concludes that less than 30% of German ECEC settings meet the requirements for considering cultural diversity in their pedagogical work.

3. Investigating parental involvement and FPP

Several studies have demonstrated potential positive effects of parent involvement on children’s development in the last decade (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Jeynes, 2005; McWayne, 2004; OECD, 2006; Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2011). A positive relation between the two contexts helps to determine academic success (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Positive gains could be shown in the cognitive, language, and socio-emotional domain (Castro et al., 2004; Hindman & Morrison, 2011). Preschool and kindergarten children of parents who are more involved in their educational institutions exhibit greater social skills (McWayne, 2004) and higher achievement in language and school competencies (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, Cox, & Bradley, 2003).

While there is little doubt about the potential positive effects of parental involvement on educational outcomes, open questions remain as to how and what types of involvement work and for whom (e.g. differential effects of different parent groups). Characteristics of the preschool as well as of the families themselves might play a role in how important involvement is rated and how engaged parents are. International research shows that not all preschool settings foster family involvement and FPP equally well and little is known about how these relations differ for parents of different ethnic or socio-economic backgrounds (McWayne, 2004). Thus far, there are inconsistent results as to whether family or preschool characteristics are stronger predictors of parental involvement in early education (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Hindman & Morrison, 2011). Yet, answering these questions is important for understanding how involvement can be triggered or how it can best be influenced (Castro et al., 2004).

3.1. Differential effects of FPP: family characteristics

Previous international research on family characteristics and FPP has mainly focused on minority background and social-economic status. While minority background has previously been related to lower parental involvement, research with samples of families with low socio-economic status only (e.g. Head Start families, Hindman, Miller, Froyen, & Skibbe, 2012) could not confirm these results. In his meta-analysis, Jeynes (2005) could show that the positive relation between parental involvement and student achievement holds for minority students just as for non-minority students. That is, children from various ethnic backgrounds benefit equally when their parents are
actively involved in their education. This result is promising. However, it remains unclear whether all parents are equally involved or if systematic differences exist between different groups of parents. Just as ‘patterns of parental [...] engagement differ from country to country’ (OECD, 2006, p. 148) they could also differ within countries for ethnically and culturally heterogeneous groups of parents. Do differences refer to the quantity (i.e. the amount of time invested in FPP) or rather to the quality of involvement, that is to the types of activities that parents engage in? Although different types of activities are usually offered, some might be more prevalent in some educational settings than in others. Against this background, the question has been raised whether ‘recommended strategies for parental involvement fit with the life rhythms and demand of non-White and poor families’ (Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006, p. 6). The authors call identifying which family involvement practices work for which groups of parents as one of the major challenges of present research (Weiss et al., 2006).

In a study with African-American Head Start parents, Howard (1992, cited in Castro et al., 2004) came to the conclusion that participating parents preferred to join classroom activities or attend field trips over formal meetings and decision-making activities, the latter being traditionally more middle-class-oriented activities. Whether similar results can be found in the German context with different ethnic or language groups is an empirical question. A great difference certainly is that most minority groups have an immigrant background (defined by place of birth of parents or the person herself) and often do not speak German at home.

In Germany, traditional types of parental involvement activities are joining the parent council and helping out in individual events (e.g. summer barbecues). Becoming actively engaged in the daily routines and the pedagogical work of the ECEC is often neither intended nor welcomed. Keeping in mind the findings of Howard (1992, cited in Castro et al., 2004), the question whether such formal types of partnership activities are favoured more by German (speaking) parents still needs to be investigated empirically. First evidence suggests that immigrant parents are underrepresented in parent councils and committees (Sacher, 2012).

On average, children with immigrant backgrounds in Germany start preschool later than their native peers and there is evidence that a perceived lack of willingness for positive FPP serves as a barrier for immigrant parent’s decision to enrol their children in preschool (Lokhande, 2013). In a recent national study, over half of the participating Turkish (62.2% agreement) and Russian (53.3% agreement) migrant mothers said that they would give their 2-year-old children to institutionalised care if the collaboration between parents and preschool teachers were better compared to only 16.9% of the German mothers (Tietze et al., 2013). At the same time, especially children who do not speak German at home enter schools with lower language and literacy skills than their German-speaking peers (Becker, Klein, & Biedinger, 2013; Weinert, Ebert, Lockl, & Kuger, 2012). Hence, positive FPP might be especially important for the former, possibly yielding compensatory developmental effects.

3.2. Differential effects of FPP: preschool characteristics

Some characteristics of the preschool have been linked to FPP. High classroom quality, for example, has been identified to foster parent involvement (Castro et al., 2004; Ghazvini & Readdick, 1994). However, the strength of association varies for different types of partnership activities. Ghazvini and Readdick (1994) found positive relations of
classroom quality with regard to the frequency of different ways of communication (e.g. going to conferences, attending field trips, seeking counselling), but not with the rated importance of communication. In a sample of Head Start classrooms, Castro and colleagues found classroom quality to be the strongest predictor of parent involvement (Castro et al., 2004). Classrooms with higher quality had larger numbers of parents volunteering than classrooms with lower quality. In their analyses, the authors controlled for teacher education, experience with Head Start, and teachers report of parent involvement as well as their perception of the involvement. Results from multivariate analyses showed that increases in classroom quality, as measured with the ECERS-R, resulted in an increase in number of parents who volunteered (Castro et al., 2004, p. 426). Yet, there was no difference in total hours of volunteer times between classrooms of different quality. Neither Ghazvini and Readdick (1994) nor Castro et al. (2004) included other characteristics of the ECEC than classroom quality.

While the frequency and intensity of FPP could very well be a part of an overall high-quality approach in ECEC and thus go along with higher classroom quality, it remains unclear how other aspects of setting context such as teacher–child ratio, age of children, or ethnic composition relate to parents involvement and parents’ perceived importance of FPP.

Focussing on the German context, the literature base is even more meagre. In Germany, the ECEC system follows standardised rules when it comes to teacher education and wages. At present, very little variation can be found on these indicators. Recently numerous study programmes at universities and colleges have been developed. However, the graduates of these programmes have not been fed into the ECEC system. More variation can be found on other aforementioned variables, such as teacher–child ratio (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014) or ethnic composition. For the latter, it has been shown that in Germany families with immigration backgrounds more often live in highly segregated areas (Biedinger, Becker, & Rohling, 2007) and that the process quality is lower in classrooms with a higher proportion of children with an immigration background (Kuger & Kluczniok, 2008). The rate of children with a non-German mother tongue in the classroom is associated with a stronger perception of perceived challenges for FPPs (Neumann, 2012; Textor, 2006). However, it remains unclear whether this is a context or an individual effect. Because the ethnic composition describes a contextual condition, and is – statistically speaking – located at the centre level, we treat it as a preschool characteristic and aspect of structural quality.

4. Research questions

Coming back to the question posed earlier about how to realise positive FPP for parents with different language backgrounds, the aim of the present study is to investigate precursors of parental involvement in a diverse sample in Germany. Contrary to Anglo-Saxon countries, efforts to integrate parents into German ECEC have only recently been strengthened. Our study is thus explorative in nature. With these considerations in mind, we focus on ratings of FPP and parents’ wish to become engaged in different partnership activities as well as preschool teachers’ perceptions of FPP. Yet, how important parents rate their involvement and the FPP and how willing they are to invest time in it are crucial for actual behaviour (i.e. their future involvement).

The present study uses a multi-method design (questionnaires, interviews, observation) to address the following research questions: (1) How do parents and teachers in Germany rate the FPP? (2) Do ratings of FPP differ between parents with German
and non-German language backgrounds? (3) Is there a relation between structural aspects of the centre and classroom quality and ratings of FPP for teachers and parents?

5. Method

This present research uses data from the BiKS 3–10 longitudinal study which was established to investigate the cognitive and social development of children aged 3–10 years taking into account influences of the home and (pre)school learning environments (Schmidt, Schmitt, & Smidt, 2009; Von Maurice et al., 2007).

5.1. Sample

For the analyses, we used data from 547 children and their parents. All children were recruited through the preschools (one classroom per setting) and the respective classroom teacher was asked to participate in the study as well (one teacher per setting). Settings were recruited in rural, urban, and metropolitan regions in two German federal states (Bavaria and Hesse). If several eligible classrooms were available in a setting, a random draw determined which classroom was asked for participation. In all, 97 settings and teachers participated.

After the auspices of the centre, the setting head and the classroom teacher(s) consented to participate and all children in the classroom who were scheduled to start primary school in 2008 were included in the study (Kurz, Kratzmann, & von Maurice, 2007). Preschool is voluntary in Germany, and most pre-schoolers start at the age of three years. Most children attend mixed-aged classes with children from three to six years of age. The parents were asked to participate in family interviews and to fill out questionnaires.

5.2. Procedure and instruments

We used different sources for the various instruments. Table 1 summarises the outcome and predictor variables used in our study and from which source they were derived.

5.2.1. Parents and children

The three outcome measures were assessed through parent questionnaires. Parents were first asked to rate (a) the importance of five different partnership activities on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (unimportant) to 4 (important) and (b) how much they wished to become involved in these activities. Responses for parents’ wish for involvement were given on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (would not like to) to 4 (would like to).

An additional scale of 10 items assessed parents’ need for attunement. On a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (unimportant) to 4 (important), parents were asked to rate the importance of different aspects of partnership with the preschool. These aspects included the importance to participate in decision-making processes, in knowing the centres’ educational principles, to learn from each other, and to attune behaviour towards the child. In contrast to the importance of different partnership activities, the need for attunement does not refer to tangible activities but to a more general philosophy of partnership and parents’ need for consonance.

Interviews were used to assess family and child characteristics. Family characteristics included main language spoken at home (German vs. another language) and
Table 1. Study variables’ description and instrument source.

| Study variable | # of items | Alpha | Description | Instrument source |
|----------------|------------|-------|-------------|-------------------|
| **Outcome variables: parents** | | | | |
| Importance of FPP | 5 | 0.63 | Importance of different partnership activities (i.e. exchanging information about the child, exchanging general information, being part of the parents’ council, joining extracurricular activities (e.g. field trips), and participating in the pedagogical work) | Parent questionnaire |
| Wish for involvement in FPP | 5 | 0.63 | Wish to get involved in the different partnership activities (i.e. exchanging information about the child, exchanging general information, being part of the parents’ council, joining extracurricular activities (e.g. field trips), and participating in the pedagogical work) | Parent questionnaire |
| Need for attunement | 10 | 0.73 | Parents’ need to attune to and cooperate with the teachers and the ECEC, for example, their wish for cooperation based on partnership between teacher and child, knowing the educational principles, participation in educational decisions of the centre | |
| **Outcome variables: preschool teachers** | | | | |
| Importance of FPP | 11 | 0.67 | Importance of different communication strategies and partnership activities with parents, such as newsletters, ‘at-the-door’-talks with parents, shared activities with the families | Teacher questionnaire |
| Satisfaction with FPP | 1 | – | ‘How satisfied are you with the partnership with the families?’ | Teacher questionnaire |
| Age and gender of child | | | Individual age (in months) and gender of the child | Parent interview |
| Language spoken at home | | | Main language spoken at home by the family (coded as German vs. other language) | Parent interview |
| Socio-economic status | | | Measured with the HISEI (Ganzeboom et al., 1992) | Parent interview |
| Classroom characteristics: | | | | |
| Mean age of children | | | Mean age of the children in the group (group level variable) | Teacher questionnaire |
| Teacher–child ratio | | | Number of children of a group divided by teacher hours | Teacher questionnaire |
| Percentage of children not speaking German at home | | | Percentage of children in the group who do not speak German as their native language at home (number of children in the group/number of non-native language children *100) | Teacher questionnaire |
| Process quality | | | Assessed with the KES-R (German adaption of the ECERS-R) | Observation |
socio-economic status (HISEI, Ganzeboom, De Graaf, Treimann, & De Leeuw, 1992). The average HISEI for the participating families was 53, ranging from 34 to 57. Families with an immigration background are for the purpose of this study defined as families that speak at home a language other than German for the majority of time. This definition of ‘immigration background’ has been widely used in German research because it subsumed all those families and children with limited capability to converse in the language of instruction and thus language disadvantages. Other definitions of immigration background, for example applying citizenship or generation of immigration, have been tested in the BiKS sample but proved to be less predictive in educational research or in the case of citizenship define a subsample that differs by less than 5%. In the following, we will refer to parents who do speak German at home as ‘German-speaking parents’ and to those who do not speak German at home as ‘non-German-speaking parents’. However, this does not imply that non-German-speaking parents in our sample do not speak German at all. Based on this definition, 19% of all participating families were non-German speaking. About half (48%) of the children were girls, and children were on average 44 months of age (range between 34 and 57 months).

5.2.2. **Preschool teachers**

We used questionnaires to assess preschool teachers’ satisfaction with FPP (one item, response given on 4-point scale ranging from 1 (unsatisfied) to 4 (satisfied)) and teachers’ perceived importance of FPP. The latter was measured for 10 different types of partnership activities. Responses were given on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 4 (important)).

5.2.3. **Classroom characteristics**

We assessed different structural characteristics of the classroom, that is, mean age of children in the classroom, teacher–child ratio, and percentage of children who do not speak German at home. On average, the mean age of children in the classroom was 54.72 months. The teacher–child ratio was 1:14 and 21% of the children did not speak German at home (range from 0% to 100%).

The process quality of the preschools was assessed with the Kindergarten-Einschätzskala (KES-R) (Tietze, Schuster, Grenner, & Roßbach, 2005), which is a German adaption of the widely used Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R, Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998). As the ECERS-R, the 43 items comprising KES-R assess global aspects of educational quality at the preschool class level which are grouped into seven subscales: space and furnishings (e.g. indoor space, furniture for relaxation, space for gross motor activities), personal care routines (e.g. meals/snacks, toileting/diapering, health practices), language and reasoning (e.g. books and pictures, encouraging children to communicate, informal use of language), activities (e.g. fine motor activities, art, dramatic play), interaction (e.g. general supervision of children, staff–child interactions, interaction among children), programme structure (e.g. schedule, free play, group time), and parents and staff (e.g. provisions for parents, staff interaction and cooperation, supervision and evaluation of staff). Process quality was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = inadequate quality, 3 = minimal quality, 5 = good quality, 7 = excellent quality) after 3–4 hours of observation during a typical morning in preschool by well-trained student staff.
that has proven at least 80% of interrater agreement. For the present study, we used the total score of the KES-R, which represents the mean of process quality across all items.

5.2.4. Data analysis
In a first step, descriptive analyses and correlations were conducted on data from parent and teacher questionnaires to determine how parents and teachers in Germany rate the FPP (research question 1). As indicators of parents’ ratings of FPP, we used (a) importance of different partnership activities, (b) wish for involvement in different partnership activities, and (c) parents’ need for attunement. For teachers, we used importance of and satisfaction with FPP. Next, mean comparisons were used to test whether ratings of FPP differ between German-speaking and non-German-speaking parents (research question 2). We performed mean comparisons on the scale as well as on the item-level basis to determine whether German-speaking and non-German-speaking parents differ in the activities they rate as important or want to participate in. For difference tests on item-level basis we used Bonferroni correction to control the false discovery rate when conducting multiple tests (Shaffer, 1995). For significant differences on the scale level, Cohen’s $d$ (Cohen, 1988) with thresholds for small ($d = 0.20$), medium ($d = 0.50$), and large ($d = 0.80$) effects is reported as an indicator for the effect size. Analyses for research question 1 were performed in SPSS; missing data were excluded listwise.

In addition, we conducted regression analyses to test research question 2, controlling for the socio-economic background of the parents. Regression analyses were performed in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2006) using full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation. FIML estimation uses the complete observed information matrix in order to compute the standard errors for the parameter estimates.

Finally, further regression analyses were employed to investigate whether there is a relation between the structural and process quality of the centres and the ratings of FPP for parents and teachers (research question 3). In all regression analyses for the parents, we controlled for the nested structure of the data (multilevel analyses). Because only one teacher per preschool was included in the study, we used multiple regression models for analyses of teacher ratings. All regression and multilevel analyses were run in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2006) using FIML.

6. Results

6.1. How do parents and teachers in Germany perceive FPP?
Parents and preschool teachers alike rated FPP as very important. Parents also reported a high wish to engage in partnership activities and a strong need for attunement. Satisfaction with the partnership was only assessed for preschool teachers: overall, teachers reported very high satisfaction. All descriptive results are shown in Table 2.

Parents’ ratings of importance of FPP were positively correlated with their intention to engage in partnership ($r = 0.65, p < 0.001$) and their need for attunement ($r = 0.49, p < 0.001$). The need for attunement and intention to engage in partnership were also correlated but to a lower degree ($r = 0.35, p < 0.001$).
6.2. Differences in ratings of FPP between German-speaking and non-German-speaking parents

6.2.1. Mean comparisons on overall scales

Results from mean comparisons are shown in Table 2. Mean comparisons between German-speaking and non-German-speaking parents showed significant differences on two of the three ratings of FPP, namely the rated importance of FPP and parents’ need for attunement. Non-German-speaking parents agreed more on both scales than their German-speaking counterparts; the effect sizes in terms of Cohen’s classification were verging on moderate. No significant difference was found for parents’ wish for involvement in different partnership activities.

In the next step, we tested whether these differences remain stable after controlling for socio-economic background. Although, socio-economic background emerged as a significant predictor for perceived importance of FPP, results from regression analyses showed that language spoken at home still remained significant (HISEI: $\beta = -0.10, p < 0.05$; immigrant background: $\beta = 0.15, p < 0.01$). Parents who had lower socio-economic background and did not speak German at home rated FPP as more important. Language spoken at home also remained a significant predictor for parents’ need for attunement (HISEI: $\beta = -0.15, p < 0.01$; immigrant background: $\beta = 0.15, p < 0.01$). Again, socio-economic background was negatively associated with the outcome.

6.2.2. Mean comparisons on single-item Basis

Regarding parents’ perceived importance of FPP activities, we found differences for the two parent groups for some of the activities but not for others. Parents who do not speak German at home rated shared extra-curricular activities (such as field trips or festivities) as more important than their German-speaking counterparts ($M_{\text{non-native}} = 3.39$ (SD$_{\text{non-native}} = 0.69$) and $M_{\text{native}} = 3.03$ (SD$_{\text{native}} = 0.80$); $t(430) = -3.41; p < 0.001$). They also rated engagement in pedagogical work as more important than their native peers ($M_{\text{non-native}} = 3.08$ (SD$_{\text{non-native}} = 0.92$) and $M_{\text{native}} = 2.68$ (SD$_{\text{native}} = 0.84$); $t(427) = -3.44; p < 0.001$).

Regarding parents’ intention to engage in FPP activities we found no significant differences for the two parent groups for any of the activities.

For parents’ need for attunement, differences on two of the indicators remained significant after Bonferroni correction: Parents who did not speak German at home agreed more with the following items: (a) ‘Parents needs should be taken into account.’ ($M_{\text{non-native}} = 3.48$ (SD$_{\text{non-native}} = 0.69$) and $M_{\text{native}} = 3.17$ (SD$_{\text{native}} = 0.70$); $t(424) = -3.25; p < 0.001$) and (b) ‘Parents should be involved in certain decisions of the centre.’ ($M_{\text{non-native}} = 3.45$ (SD$_{\text{non-native}} = 0.74$) and $M_{\text{native}} = 3.18$ (SD$_{\text{native}} = 0.68$); $t(422) = -2.89; p < 0.005$).

6.3. Relations between the structural and process quality of the centre and ratings of FPP

6.3.1. Parents’ ratings of FPP

Using regression analyses with Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2006), we tested whether structural quality and process quality predicted (1) parents’ ratings of FPP (i.e. importance of FPP activities, intention to engage in FPP activities, and need for attunement) and (2) ECEC teachers’ ratings of FPP (i.e. importance of and satisfaction
Table 2. Descriptive statistics for parents’ and teachers’ ratings of FPP and mean comparisons for German-speaking and non-German-speaking parents.

|                      | Full sample | Non-German-speaking parents | German-speaking parents |
|----------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
|                      | α  | M     | SD  | α  | M     | SD  | α  | M     | SD  |
| Importance of cooperation<sup>a</sup> | 0.63 | 3.23  | 0.46 | 0.47 | 3.39  | 0.40 | 0.65 | 3.20  | 0.46 |
|                      |    |       |     | t(430) = −3.04*  |                               |
| Wish for engagement<sup>a</sup>   | 0.63 | 3.16  | 0.52 | 0.60 | 3.20  | 0.54 | 0.63 | 3.14  | 0.52 |
|                      |    |       |     | t(429) = −0.89, ns |                               |
| Need for attunement<sup>a</sup>  | 0.73 | 3.32  | 0.38 | 0.65 | 3.45  | 0.33 | 0.74 | 3.29  | 0.39 |
|                      |    |       |     | t(426) = −3.06*  |                               |
| ECEC teachers         |    |       |     | d = 0.44         |                               |
| Importance of cooperation<sup>a</sup> | 0.67 | 3.41  | 0.33 | 0.65 | 3.45  | 0.33 | 0.74 | 3.29  | 0.39 |
| Satisfaction with cooperation<sup>a</sup> | –   | 3.29  | 0.59 | 0.65 | 3.45  | 0.33 | 0.74 | 3.29  | 0.39 |

Note: N<sub>(full sample)</sub> = 547, N<sub>(non-native German)</sub> = 104, N<sub>(native German)</sub> = 428.
<sup>a</sup>Four-point Likert scale from 1 to 4, α = Cronbach’s Alpha, M = mean, SD = standard deviation, d = Cohen’s d.

*<sup>p</sup> < 0.05.
with FPP). For parents, we took the multilevel structure of the data into account by including a grouping variable (preschool group). On the first level, we entered child variables (i.e. age of child, language spoken at home, socio-economic status, and gender). On the second level, we entered classroom characteristics (i.e. percentage of children not speaking German at home, mean age of children, teacher–child ratio, and classroom quality). The socio-economic status of the families was not assessed at the level of the classroom and was therefore included only at the level of the individual family (level 1). Because not all children of one group were included in the study, we were not able to derive mean socio-economic background of the group by aggregating the individual means.

For all three outcomes, intra-class correlations were low, indicating that there is more variation within a classroom than between (ICC = 0.04 for importance of FPP, wish to become involved in FPP, and need for attunement alike). Yet, adjusting for multilevel structure is important to avoid biased estimates of the standard errors, and hence spuriously significant effects (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). In addition, we also conducted simple regression models without taking the multilevel structures into account. Result patterns for both types of analyses were identical. Hence, in the following we only report results of our multilevel models.

Results for (1) parents’ ratings are listed in Table 3. When controlling for level 1 indicators, only the percentage of children not speaking German at home in the preschool group emerged as a significant structural characteristic for parent-rated importance of and their intention to become involved in FPP. For both outcomes the relation was positive. None of the other indicators of structural and process quality was significant. Interestingly, individual language background was not a significant predictor for parent-rated importance of and their intention to become involved in FPP. That is, in groups with many children who do not speak German at home, parents place more emphasis on FPP regardless of their individual language background. Percentage of children not speaking German at home explained around 95% (importance of FPP) and 82% (wish for involvement), respectively, of the remaining level 2 variance. However, it needs to be stressed that the level 2 variance was very low (2%).

For parents’ need for attunement the results were different. None of the level 2 indicators of preschool quality predicted parents’ evaluation; neither structural aspects nor process quality. Instead, language spoken at home, socio-economic status, and gender emerged as significant predictors.

6.3.2. Preschool teachers’ ratings of FPP
Results for (2) preschool teachers are shown in Table 4. They showed a significant effect of percentage of children not speaking German at home in the preschool group on teachers’ satisfaction with FPP. However, contrary to parents’ ratings, the relationship was negative. The more children who do not speak German at home in the group, the less satisfied the teachers reported to be with the FPP. Again, none of the other aspects of preschool quality predicted teachers’ satisfaction. No significant results were found for teacher-rated importance of FPP.

6.4. Summary of results
In sum, results highlight the importance of FPP for parents and teachers on the one hand and for parents of a different language background (speaking German or another
Table 3. Results for multilevel regression models with aspects of structural and process quality as predictors and different parent-rated indicators of FPP as outcome variables.

|                        | Importance of FPP | Wish for involvement | Need for attunement |
|------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|                        | B     | SE     | β     | B     | SE     | β     | B     | SE     | β     |
| **Child level**        |       |        |       |       |        |       |       |        |       |
| Individual age         | 0.003 | 0.005  | 0.035 | 0.006 | 0.005  | 0.055 | −0.002| 0.004  | −0.021 |
| Language background (1 = not speaking German at home) | 0.104 | 0.062  | 0.092 | −0.023| 0.077  | −0.018| 0.102 | 0.053  | **0.107** |
| Socio-economic status  | −0.003| **0.01** | **−0.099** | 0.000 | 0.002  | 0.014 | −0.004| 0.001  | −0.150** |
| Gender (1 = male)      | 0.055 | 0.044  | 0.061 | **0.112**| 0.047  | **0.110**| 0.075 | 0.036  | **0.100** |
| **Classroom level:**   |       |        |       |       |        |       |       |        |       |
| Percentage of children not speaking German at home | **0.003**| **0.001** | **0.953*** | 0.004 | **0.001** | **0.821*** | 0.002 | 0.001  | 0.916  |
| Mean age of children   | 0.026 | 0.048  | 0.117 | 0.002 | 0.068  | 0.005 | −0.001| 0.037  | −0.008 |
| Teacher–child ratio    | 0.002 | 0.006  | 0.134 | 0.006 | 0.007  | 0.242 | 0.002 | 0.004  | 0.226  |
| Process quality (KES)  | 0.020 | 0.036  | 0.169 | −0.021| 0.040  | −0.129| −0.009| 0.025  | −0.143 |

Note: Coefficients in bold are significant at the $p < 0.01$ (**) or $p < 0.05$ (*) level.
language at home) on the other hand. Overall, teachers were very satisfied with the FPP, and parents reported a high wish to become involved in different activities. The results also indicate that non-German-speaking parents rate FPP as more important and have a stronger need for attunement than German-speaking parents. Mean comparisons with different activities suggest that both parent groups might prefer different forms of involvement and that non-German-speaking parents rated participation in joined activities (e.g. field trips or pedagogical work) as more important than German-speaking parents.

Results from regression analyses suggest that the percentage of children who do not speak German at home was positively associated with parents’ rated importance of and intention to become involved in FPP, but was unrelated to parents’ need for attunement. The relationship of teacher satisfaction with FPP was negative. None of the other aspects of structural and process quality had an influence on parents’ or teachers’ ratings of FPP.

### 7. Discussion

Children’s early years are crucial for their development. Performance as early as in preschool can predict later performance in school (e.g. Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1993). At the same time, there is already great variation between children’s skills and knowledge upon entering school (Weinert et al., 2012). Even at this early age, socio-economic background, language, and immigration background of children serve as strong predictors for children’s skills in Germany (e.g. Anders et al., 2012; Ebert, Lockl, Anders, Kluczniok, & Roßbach, 2013; Weinert & Ebert, 2013; Weinert, Ebert, & Dubowy, 2010). International evaluations of preschool programmes have shown that the most effective ones seem to work not only with the children, but also with parents (cp. OECD, 2006). Thus, fostering positive FPP might serve as a vehicle to engage parents in the education of their children, create positive learning climates, and ultimately improve children’s outcomes.

Empirical research regarding preschool teachers’ and parents’ views on preschool education is rare in Germany. However, it seems to be common knowledge that collaboration with parents and families that immigrated to Germany is much more difficult.
and stressful than collaborating with parents and families born in Germany (Neumann, 2012; Textor, 2006). There is some evidence that parents with an immigrant background place more responsibility for their child’s school readiness on the teacher than parents without an immigrant background. They are also often less familiar with the German school system (e.g. school preparation, transitions, tracked school system), and therefore have more difficulties providing their child with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in school (Textor, 2006). This is especially the case when parents speak little or no German. Unlike other countries that place a strong emphasis on school-readiness in the early years, German ECEC has traditionally focused on social pedagogy and social-emotional development of the children (OECD, 2006). Inherent in such a social pedagogical approach is that it places more responsibility on the parents. Hence, engaging in FPP might be especially important for immigrant and non-German-speaking parents to learn about the German educational system and to formulate realistic expectations.

7.1. Discussion of findings

Our results document that preschool teachers as well as parents appreciate the value of FPP. On average, descriptive results for the different types of involvement confirmed previous findings that parents prefer forms of activity that are more directly linked to their own children (e.g. exchanging thoughts about the child, cp. O’Donnell, Kirkner, & Meyer-Adams, 2008). Yet, results also suggest that non-German-speaking parents might value active engagement more than native language parents and preschool teachers. The established relationships are maintained when controlling for socio-economic background and – interestingly – families with high socio-economic background place, in fact, less importance on FPP and report a lower need for attunement. These findings document once more that one needs to distinguish carefully between socio-economic and language background when adjusting educational programmes to parents’ needs. Furthermore, the results reveal the importance to differentiate between individual characteristics of children and families on the one hand and classroom characteristics on the other.

At the same time, when taking into account the perspective of the preschool teachers, the findings indicated that teachers’ satisfaction with FPP is negatively related to the percentage of non-native language children in the group. Several reasons are plausible for the lower satisfaction of the preschool teachers. Most of the preschool teachers in this study do not have a foreign language background; so lower satisfaction might reflect uncertainty when dealing with different expectations of non-native German language parents with respect to involvement styles compared to German-speaking parents (Textor, 2006). Furthermore, other research has shown that the realised pedagogical quality is significantly lower in groups with higher proportions of children with immigration background (Kuger & Klucznik, 2008; Tietze et al., 2013). These results underline that preschool teachers in Germany might still need support to deal adequately with diversity in their classrooms (Rosken, 2009). Some preschool teachers in Germany might be overburdened when dealing with diverse groups of children. The lower satisfaction with FPP in groups with more children who do not speak German at home might reflect this feeling of excessive demand in the sense of a ‘halo’ effect. Parents with an immigration or different language background might encounter preschools with different views, beliefs, and expectations (Textor, 2006). Besides different expectations, other aspects clearly influence the efforts to be made
for achieving good FPP, one important aspect certainly being the language background. In our study, we have focussed on language spoken at home. We have not focussed on immigrant children, and hence do not know how cultural diversity – besides language diversity – influences teachers’ perception of FPP. More studies are necessary to explain which processes are relevant in this context. Future studies should follow up on research on which competences teachers need to establish positive and effective relationships with parents of all cultural and language backgrounds (for Germany, see Friedrich, 2011).

7.2. Role of teachers

Teachers play an active role in encouraging parents to get involved in the education of their children and the home–preschool partnership (OECD, 2006; Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2011). It is both part of their duty and their competence to approach parents professionally (OECD, 2006). Additionally, it is essential that preschool teachers have comprehensive knowledge about the expectations and wishes of parents regarding the education of their child (Kalicki, 2010). Internationally, professional associations have stressed the importance of preparing early childhood professionals to establish positive FPP (Baum & McMurray, 2004). Promising in this context are results from a survey conducted by Zygmunt-Fillwalk (2001). She surveyed 60 preschool and elementary school teachers’ practices regarding family involvement. One-third of the surveyed teachers had taken a family involvement course during their education, whereas the other two-thirds had not. All of the early childhood education teachers who participated in the survey had taken the course (50% of all candidates enrolled in it). The author interprets this finding as resulting from the more developmental and relational approach taken in early childhood education. As opposed to elementary education, early childhood education understands children ‘within the context of the families and the communities in which they are growing and learning’ (Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2011). Nonetheless, teachers and teacher educators alike have complained that policy guidelines for teacher preparation focus too little on family involvement (Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2011). While in the last decades, teacher training programmes have started to include courses on family involvement, they are not always mandatory. In Germany, policy efforts to strengthen FPP as one important duty of preschool centres can be observed currently. The curricular frameworks of all federal states which have been implemented since 2007 stress the encouragement of outreach to families. Furthermore, national as well as federal initiatives have been launched to support preschool centres from that perspective.

7.3. Role of structural aspects

Effort has also been put into improving structural aspects to enhance family outreach. Our results suggest that characteristics of general structural quality of the classroom do not relate to parents’ or preschool teachers’ ratings of FPP. However, specific structural support, such as extra staff for working with families, might be effective. For Germany, the question remains how parental involvement can be triggered. Promising are results by Jeynes (2005) which show that programmes purposefully involving parents also have positive effects of children’s achievement. Such programmes require parent participation as part of daily school routine. Hence, participation is not necessarily always voluntary. For future interventions it would be promising to see that participation does not have to be internally driven in order to exert an effect on children’s outcomes. Other
research shows that satisfaction with the preschool can also lead to higher involvement (Castro et al., 2004).

There is a need to further investigate individual and shared contributions to parent–staff collaboration in different subsamples (McWayne, 2004). Hence, future research should also intensify research on how family characteristics relate to FPP. In addition to socio-economic background, studies should include educational beliefs. Preliminary analyses from our data suggest that educational beliefs might be much stronger predictors for involvement, mediating the relationship between language background and ratings evaluations of FPP (Authors et al., conference publication, removed for blind review).

7.4. Limitations and implications
Like any other study, this study has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Some limitations are methodological in nature. The first relates to the selectivity of the sample. The BiKS study sampled children in preschools in Bavaria and Hesse according to their expected school enrolment date. The sampling procedure was developed to allow the study to observe children’s development between age 3 and age 5 while they move through preschool. As an effect, all children included in the study were enrolled in preschool at age 3. Statistics show that immigrant parents are overrepresented among those parents who enrol their children into preschool later than age 3 (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2014). So, some of our results might be affected by selectivity in a sense that only non-native German language parents are involved whose children participate in ECEC comparatively early. Furthermore, the power of our statistical tests may have been limited by only moderate reliabilities of the used scales as has been revealed by the consistency measures. A further limitation occurs with regard to the influence of level 2 predictors as compared to level 1 predictors. We learnt that although the variance of parents’ expectations with regard to FPP was very low, it is important to distinguish the individual language background of the parents and the proportion of children not speaking German at home in the classroom as predictors. On the other hand, socio-economic background of the family could only be included as a predictor at level 1. Thus, we cannot draw conclusions with regard to differences between socio-economic status as a characteristic of the individual family and the mean socio-economic status in the classroom. The used measure of preschool quality had a broad scope. Future research is needed to investigate the association of the specific quality of FPP with the views of parents and preschool teachers on FPP. While this study provided important evidence on what parents and preschool teachers think about FPP, future studies should consider the observed activities to be able to develop evidence-based best practice. More comprehensive measures of FPP would be the base to investigate the association with children’s development. As we have discussed, research on FPP in Germany is still in its beginnings, and standardised scales that assess FPP as a multidimensional construct have not yet been developed and validated – unlike for the Anglo-American context (e.g. the Family Involvement Questionnaire, Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000).

However, the study provided important evidence of specific expectations of specific groups of parents. It also revealed how often stated biases do not hold when empirically tested. The lower satisfaction of preschool teachers with FPP when working with non-native German language parents calls for more efforts to prepare preschool teachers for this important part of their work.
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Notes
1. A different model in Germany, which strongly encourages FPP, is parent-initiated daycare centres (so called ‘Elterninitiativen’ or ‘Kinderläden’) similar to British playgroups. However, these centres constitute an exemption and a quite different approach since parents are clients and employers of the preschool teachers at the same time (Kalicki, 2010). In the following paper, we only look at daycare centres in which parents are clients only.
2. BiKS stands for ‘Bildungsprozesse, Kompetenzentwicklung und Selektionsentscheidungen im Vorschul- und Schulalter’ (educational processes, competence development and selection decisions in preschool- and school age).
3. Please note that children in preschools in Germany are often cared for in age-heterogeneous classrooms, sometimes serving children from 0 till 6 years. For the BiKS study not all children of each classroom were sampled, but only children of certain ages. This explains why the mean age of BiKS children is lower than the mean age of children in the classrooms.

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