

**Grandparents as Co-Educators: A Comparative Qualitative Study of Educational
Involvement in Rural Secondary Schools of North and South Kazakhstan**

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Grandparents' Involvement in the Education of Their Grandchildren: A Qualitative Case Study of a Rural Secondary School in Kazakhstan

has been approved by the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee of Nazarbayev University.

You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing your participant recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely,

Lynne Parmenter (Professor, Graduate School of Education, Nazarbayev University)

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Abstract

Grandparents as Co-Educators: A Comparative Qualitative Study of Educational Involvement in Rural Secondary Schools of North and South Kazakhstan

This study explores the educational involvement of grandparents in rural secondary schools in North and South Kazakhstan, focusing on the cultural, familial, and socioeconomic factors that shape their roles. Guided by social and cultural capital theory, this study examines the forms and extent of grandparents' support for their grandchildren's education. A qualitative approach was used, involving semi-structured interviews with grandparents and daughters-in-law from two rural regions representing culturally distinct areas of Kazakhstan. While both regions demonstrated high levels of grandparental engagement, notable differences were observed in gender roles, household hierarchies, and cultural expectations, particularly shaped by the traditional concept of *kelin* in South Kazakhstan. The level of involvement was influenced by factors such as previous teaching experience, co-residence, delegation of domestic tasks, emotional fulfillment, and financial capacity. However, several barriers were also identified, including health issues, digital illiteracy, geographic separation, and generational differences in educational approaches. The study concludes that in rural Kazakhstani households, grandparents play a critical yet often overlooked role in educational development, offering important insights for both academic research and educational policy.

Keywords: grandparents' involvement, intergenerational support, cultural norms and education, rural education

Аңдатпа

Ата-әжелер Бірлескен Оқытушылар Ретінде: Солтүстік Және Оңтүстік Қазақстанның Ауылдық Орта Мектептеріндегі Білімге Қатысудағы

Салыстырмалы Сапалы Зерттеу

Бұл зерттеу Солтүстік және Оңтүстік Қазақстанның ауылдық орта мектептеріндегі ата-әжелердің белсенділігін және олардың рөлін қалыптастыратын мәдени, отбасылық және әлеуметтік-экономикалық факторларын зерттейді. Әлеуметтік және мәдени капитал теориясын басшылыққа ала отырып, бұл зерттеу ата-әжелердің немерелерінің білім алуына қолдау көрсету формасы мен дәрежесін зерттейді. Қазақстанның мәдени жағынан ерекшеленетін аудандарын білдіретін екі ауылдық аймақтың ата-әжелерімен және келіндерімен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттарды қамтитын сапалы зерттеу тәсілі қолданылды. Екі өңірде де ата-әжелердің қатысуы жоғары деңгейі байқалғанымен, гендерлік рөлдерде, үй шаруашылықтарының иерархияларында және әлеуметтік күтулерде, әсіресе Оңтүстік Қазақстандағы келіннің дәстүрлі тұжырымдамасында қалыптасқан елеулі айырмашылықтар байқалды. Қатысу деңгейіне педагогикалық тәжірибе, бірге тұру, эмоционалдық қанағаттылық және қаржылық мүмкіндіктер сияқты факторлар әсер етті.

Сонымен қатар, денсаулық мәселелері, цифрлық сауатсыздық, географиялық бөліну және білім беру тәсілдеріндегі ұрпақтар арасындағы айырмашылықтарды қоса алғанда, бірнеше кедергілер анықталды. Зерттеу қорытындысы бойынша Қазақстанның ауылдық жерлердегі ата-әжелер немерелеріне білім беруді дамытуда маңызды, бірақ жиі назардан тыс қалатын рөл атқаратыны анықталды, және академиялық зерттеулер үшін де, білім беру саясаты үшін де маңызды түсініктер ұсынылды.

Түйінді сөздер: ата-әжелердің қатысуы, ұрпақтар арасындағы қолдау, мәдени нормалар мен білім беру, ауылдық жерлерде білім беру

Аннотация

Бабушки и Дедушки в Качестве Совместных Воспитателей: Сравнительное Качественное Исследование Участия в Образовании в Сельских Средних Школах Северного и Южного Казахстана

Это исследование исследует участие бабушек и дедушек в обучении в сельских средних школах Северного и Южного Казахстана, уделяя особое внимание культурным, семейным и социально-экономическим факторам, которые определяют их роль. Основываясь на теории социального и культурного капитала, в данном исследовании рассматриваются формы и масштабы поддержки образования своих внуков бабушками и дедушками. Был использован качественный подход, включающий полуструктурированные интервью с бабушками и дедушками и невестками из двух сельских регионов, представляющих различные в культурном отношении регионы Казахстана. В то время как оба региона продемонстрировали высокий уровень вовлеченности бабушек и дедушек, наблюдались заметные различия в гендерных ролях, иерархии в семье и культурных ожиданиях, особенно в традиционном понятии келин (невестка) в Южном Казахстане. На уровень вовлеченности влияли такие факторы, как предыдущий опыт преподавания, совместное проживание, делегирование домашних обязанностей, эмоциональная удовлетворенность и финансовые возможности. Однако также был выявлен ряд препятствий, включая проблемы со здоровьем, цифровую неграмотность, географическую дальность и различия в подходах к образованию между поколениями. В исследовании делается вывод о том, что в сельских казахстанских семьях бабушки и дедушки играют важную, но часто упускаемую из виду роль в развитии образования. Так же предлагается важная рекомендация как для академических исследований, так и для образовательной политики.

Ключевые слова: вовлечение бабушек и дедушек, поддержка поколений, культурные нормы и воспитание, сельское образование

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter, the background information section explains the context and focus of the study, supported by relevant and recent citations. The problem statement outlines the current research gap in educational sociology and the need for this study. The purpose statement clarifies the study's objectives and the research questions that guide it. Finally, the significance section highlights the potential contributions of this research, and the conclusion summarizes the key points.

1.1 Background Information

Over the years, there has been an increasing interest in comprehending the various factors that impact children's academic performance. Research has traditionally focused largely on the crucial roles that parents and teachers play in the lives of children (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Teuber et al., 2022; Ugwuanyi, 2020; Yang & Zhao, 2020). However, there is a growing recognition of the significant influence of extended family members, particularly grandparents, on the academic and holistic development of children.

Across a wide range of cultures, including in Central Asia, grandparents play an essential role in the dynamics of families and the methods of child upbringing. The Kazakh proverb "Karty bar uidyn kazynasy bar" roughly translates as "A house with an old man has a treasure," reflecting the respect and value placed on elders in Kazakh society. "Kop jasagannan surama, kop korgennen sura" refers to the elderly's wisdom and experience: "Don't ask the one who did the most; ask someone who has seen the most." Finally, "Karttyn aitkanin iste, jastyn tapkanin je" means "Do what the old man said; eat what the young man found." These proverbs highlight the deeply rooted belief that grandparents are not only custodians of family traditions but also vital contributors to the younger generation's growth and development. According to Kazakh traditions, grandparents have always cherished their grandchildren more than their own children. "Nemere baldan da

tatty” means “A grandchild is sweeter than a honey.” As major caretakers, particularly in rural regions, grandparents have long played a vital role in passing on local customs, ethical behaviors, and cultural values to their grandchildren (Shwalb et al., 2019).

Compared to generations before, grandparents in the "developed" world are increasingly separating from their grandchildren's upbringing and socialization (Yeleukulova, 2016).

Nonetheless, grandparents continue to be active and, to varying degrees, affect the lives and development of future generations in many cultures.

Regional traditions have a significant impact on intergenerational relationships in Kazakhstan, a country that is both large and culturally diverse. This study focuses on two culturally distinct regions, North and South Kazakhstan, where concepts of authority, gender roles, and family hierarchy vary vastly. Extended family accommodations and hierarchical systems of living still exist in South Kazakhstan, where older family members, especially grandmothers, keep power in home decision-making, including those related to education. The *kelin* (daughter-in-law) cultural institution upholds this hierarchy by placing younger women in submissive positions and allowing elder women to supervise domestic chores and childrearing. Soviet legacies and bordering Russia have contributed to North Kazakhstan's more egalitarian and cooperative family dynamics, where caregiving tasks are more likely to be shared across generations and handled through conversation. Studies have found that grandparents have a complex influence on the academic success of their grandchildren (Chan & Boliver, 2013; Dunifon, 2012). Parents can offer direct assistance with schoolwork, cultivate a positive environment for learning at home, or indirectly impact academic achievement by transmitting values and setting expectations (Dunifon, 2012). The grandparents' educational background, social condition, health, and the dynamics of the entire family can also have a significant impact on the degree and type of this influence. Some researchers argue, however, that there is a lack of data supporting

the impact of grandparents, and the findings are inconclusive (Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012; Pong & Chen, 2010).

This qualitative comparative case study focused on rural secondary schools in North and South Kazakhstan, exploring how the presence and involvement of grandparents in these two culturally distinct regions can contribute to or hinder the academic outcomes of their grandchildren. The choice to focus on secondary rural schools in Kazakhstan is intentional. During secondary school, a child's educational path is mostly shaped by their prior knowledge and is focused on building the foundation for their future studies. For instance, Evans et al. (2018) highlight the transition to secondary education as an important developmental stage when psychological well-being and academic success are closely correlated. This crucial period reflects the development of academic skills and adaptability to more demanding learning requirements. Grandparents of children at this age can have a significant influence, especially in rural communities with limited access to educational resources and a higher focus on family support networks.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although the significance of family participation in children's education is widely recognized, the precise influence of grandparents' involvement has not been extensively studied, particularly in non-Western settings such as Kazakhstan. Significant economic difficulties and the migration of younger individuals to cities in search of better job prospects have resulted in a notable rise in grandparents assuming the role of primary caretakers for their grandchildren in several rural regions (Bongaarts & Zimmer, 2002; Knodel & Saengtienchai, 2006). The parents' occupations and personal circumstances often prevent the children left behind in rural areas from receiving parental care. Studies thus far have primarily focused on urban areas or failed to distinguish between rural and urban settings. Because there is a gap in existing research on grandparental involvement, it

is necessary to conduct research into the ways in which grandparents living in a rural region either contribute to or impede their grandchildren's academic performance. Gaining insight into this impact is essential for creating focused educational interventions that use the distinct contributions of grandparents to enhance academic achievement.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of grandparents' involvement in the academic lives of their grandchildren attending rural secondary schools in South and North Kazakhstan. This study specifically examined the various forms and levels of involvement, as well as the factors that facilitated or hindered it.

1.4 Research Questions

To achieve the purpose of this study, two research questions were addressed:

1. What forms of involvement do grandparents have in their grandchildren's academic lives at a secondary rural school in Kazakhstan?

This question sought to identify the various ways in which grandparents contribute to their grandchildren's education. Data were collected both from grandparents and parents to gain a comprehensive understanding of these involvement patterns.

2. What factors influence the level of grandparents' involvement in their grandchildren's education?

This second question explored the challenges and facilitators that affected the extent of grandparents' involvement. The focus was on identifying the social, economic, and cultural factors that either enabled or restricted grandparents' active participation in their grandchildren's education.

1.5 Significance of the Study

By drawing attention to the often-overlooked role of grandparents in a child's educational outcomes, this study adds to the current body of knowledge on educational

sociology, particularly within the context of family dynamics and intergenerational support systems. The findings may guide educators and policymakers in developing programs and school policies that recognize and support the involvement of grandparents in education. The findings of this study might assist in the development of educational programs that specifically target the distinct requirements and contributions of multigenerational families, particularly in rural regions.

1.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have covered the background information, highlighting the growing recognition of grandparents' influence on children's academic performance. I have also outlined the problem statement, emphasizing the lack of research on this topic in non-Western contexts such as Kazakhstan. The purpose of the study and the research questions have been clearly stated, aiming to explore the various forms and degrees of grandparents' involvement and their impact on educational outcomes. Additionally, I have discussed the significance of the study, which seeks to contribute to the existing literature on grandparental involvement and inform educational policies and programs that support multigenerational family dynamics in rural areas.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The involvement of grandparents in their grandchildren's education has received considerable attention in academic literature. Over the years, a significant amount of research has emerged on this subject, revealing various patterns of influence and involvement. Especially in rural areas, grandparents frequently fill the dual roles of main caretaker and influential figure for their grandchildren (Yancura et al., 2019). However, numerous studies have discovered inconclusive findings about the "grandparent effect." Certain studies propose considerable beneficial effects, but others reveal a minimum or insignificant influence (Bol & Kalmijn, 2015; Lehti et al., 2018; Pong & Chen, 2010). The inconclusive findings underscore the limitations of previous studies and the need for additional focused study into this subject matter. Moreover, these results highlight the importance of further research into the elements that influence rural grandparents' experiences and how to better assist them in their endeavors to ensure their grandchildren's best interests. Considering that 37.7 percent of Kazakhstanis live in rural regions (Bureau of National Statistics, 2024), establishing how and to what degree grandparents are involved in their formal schooling in rural Kazakhstan is crucial.

This literature review begins with an introduction discussing the importance of grandparents in education, particularly in rural Kazakhstan, and the need for further research due to mixed findings. The section on Traditional Norms and Cultural Expectations explores how cultural factors shape grandparental involvement, comparing Kazakhstan's strong family values that highlight unity and respect for elders with Western contexts where socioeconomic factors and independence influence involvement. The section on Socioeconomic Status (SES) examines how grandparents' financial resources affect their support for grandchildren's education, with wealthier families able to provide

more academic resources and support, while poorer families rely more heavily on the emotional and practical support of grandparents. The section on Co-residence vs. Non-residence analyzes the impact of living arrangements on grandparental involvement, showing that co-residence often leads to greater involvement but can also cause conflicts, while non-resident grandparents provide support in other ways, like financial help and emotional guidance. Family disputes are then explored, discussing how harmonious relationships between grandparents and parents foster positive educational outcomes, while conflicts can negatively affect children's academic performance. The section on Impact on Educational Outcomes synthesizes findings on how grandparents contribute to their grandchildren's academic success, with some studies showing positive outcomes, especially in extended family households, and others revealing variability based on context. Instrumental and socio-emotional support focuses on the practical and emotional roles grandparents play, especially in rural, low-income settings, where they help with childcare and household duties, fostering resilience in children.

2.2 Theoretical frameworks

This study applies the theories of social and cultural capital, which include the influential works of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James Coleman (1988), to guide the analysis of these themes. These theoretical frameworks provide significant insight into the ways in which grandparents are involved in their grandchildren's educational experiences.

Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital defines three principal forms: economic, cultural, and social. Cultural capital includes the knowledge, values, and educational attitudes passed between generations, whereas social capital refers to the advantages individuals gain from their interactions and networks. Bourdieu highlighted that families transfer cultural capital that fits dominant institutional standards, therefore perpetuating social reproduction within the educational sphere. In extended or co-residential

households, common in rural Kazakhstan, grandparents often serve as vital facilitators of cultural and social capital, influencing children's academic preferences and supporting their educational progress.

Coleman (1988), elaborating on the concept of social capital, used a functionalist perspective, emphasizing how strong familial and collective relationships promote the development of human capital. He emphasized the significance of intergenerational relationships in environments that are rich in trust, shared standards, and expectations—elements that promote educational achievement. In contrast to Bourdieu, who concentrated on structural inequities, Coleman highlighted the practical value of social capital inside the home, claiming that regular experiences, emotional intimacy, and mutual support among family members improve children's academic achievement.

This study connects these two viewpoints to include both the structural and functional aspects of grandparents' involvement in education. Bourdieu's focus on the transfer of cultural and social capital provides a framework for analyzing how grandparents may reinforce or oppose existing social structures via educational assistance. Coleman's theory, in contrast, discusses ordinary relational dynamics that facilitate and enhance such assistance. This integrated perspective is especially important in the rural context of Kazakhstan, where multi-generational households are prevalent and cultural traditions have a significant influence on grandparents' familial dynamics. Empirical research (Davis-Kean et al., 2008; Møllegaard & Jaeger, 2015) indicates that grandparents frequently offer emotional guidance, intellectual encouragement, and practical assistance—forms of support that correspond with Bourdieu's and Coleman's definitions of capital. Therefore, the integrated application of these theories offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how intergenerational connections influence the educational experiences and accomplishments of children.

2.3 Traditional Norms and Cultural Expectations

Kazakhstani culture prioritizes familial unity and respect for elders, often leading to grandparents taking on authoritative duties within the household, particularly with educational issues. This dynamic is deeply rooted in traditional Kazakh values, where the family is viewed as an interconnected unit and elders are respected for their wisdom and experience. Mustafina and Mustafin (2024) claim that the collectivist characteristics of Kazakhstani society significantly impact one's role within the family, hence defining educational support duties as part of a broader structure of shared responsibilities. These cultural values are supported by the economic and social contexts in rural Kazakhstan, where multi-generational homes are common and grandparents often live with or in proximity to their grandchildren.

Recent studies have demonstrated that traditional Kazakh values, such as strong relational connections, hierarchical respect and collective responsibility, continue to influence caring and educational roles despite modernization. Mustafina and Mustafin (2024) explored the impact of Kazakh cultural values on ethical decision-making among social work students, highlighting the long-lasting consequences of collectivism, familial dependency, and hierarchical respect within Kazakh society. Their quantitative study, using a sample of 141 students from various regions of Kazakhstan, demonstrated that commitment to traditional values varies significantly based on gender, geographical background, rural or urban upbringing, and religion. Their research illustrates that, despite modernization and policy changes traditional Kazakh values remain significantly affecting family dynamics and thus affect the wider socialization of children and grandchildren in educational and caregiving practices. In addition, in South Kazakhstan, where cultural norms place daughters-in-law in a subordinate position within multi-generational households, the *kelin* (daughter-in-law) tradition remains strong. Kudaibergenova (2018)

argues that post-Soviet re-traditionalization, which constantly forces women to stick to idealized, submissive roles, perpetuates this system. In these households, grandmothers often take on the role of main decision-makers in childrearing and education, especially regarding their grandchildren's schooling and moral development.

In contrast, North Kazakhstan demonstrates less hierarchical and more egalitarian family structures, influenced by Soviet ideology and its proximity to Western cultural standards. In these regions, caregiving duties are more equally allocated among generations, and daughters-in-law possess increased autonomy in matters concerning children's education. Mustafina and Mustafin (2024) note that geographical background significantly impacts commitment to traditional norms, with students from northern regions exhibiting a reduced connection to hierarchical family expectations compared to their southern neighbors.

Furthermore, intergenerational caring responsibilities are maintained by cultural norms and particular educational challenges that require collective family involvement. Uyat, the cultural concept of shame, significantly contributes to commitment to traditional norms, since people want to escape social disapproval (Kabylova, 2022). Grandparents often engage in children's education to ensure academic achievement, as failure to do so would bring shame to the family, so confirming their authority in educational affairs.

The Kazakhstani context contrasts sharply with Western cultures, where grandparental involvement is often moderated by socio-economic factors and a cultural emphasis on individualism and nuclear family autonomy. For instance, Hoang and Kirby (2019) conducted a comparative study involving 500 nuclear families in the United States and Australia. Their research, using surveys and in-depth interviews, found that intrusive grandparental behavior often led to conflicts with parents, who valued independence in family life.

In East Asia, by contrast, grandparental involvement remains extensive, heavily shaped by cultural values and governmental policies. Goh (2006) conducted a qualitative study in China, examining the effects of the one-child policy and highlighting how grandparents became key actors in raising the "little emperor" generation. Ko and Hank (2014) compared grandparental roles in China and South Korea, finding that while grandparental support is deeply embedded in Chinese familial structures, it is less so in South Korea despite similar cultural expectations.

Moreover, in rural parts of the United States, grandparents frequently assume caregiving responsibilities when parents are engaged in labor-intensive occupations, particularly in agriculture (Frosch et al., 2019). This shows that economic necessity, alongside cultural norms, can reinforce multi-generational involvement in children's upbringing even outside traditionally collectivist societies (Gibbons & Jones, 2003).

These examples underscore that cultural traditions, historical trajectories, and socio-economic realities together shape the role of grandparents in children's education, offering important comparative insights into the unique intergenerational patterns observed in Kazakhstan.

2.4 Grandparents' Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Much of the current literature on grandparental involvement pays particular attention to the grandparents' socioeconomic situation and states that it is a critical factor in determining their capacity to impact their grandchildren's academic achievement. According to Yancura et al. (2019) and Kelley et al. (2011), grandparents can help reduce the negative impact of poverty on children's education by providing financial support and stability. Hällsten and Pfeffer (2017) conducted a quantitative study involving 1,500 families in Sweden to examine the relationship between grandparents' financial resources and grandchildren's academic outcomes. Using structural equation modeling (SEM)—a

technique used to analyze complex relationships between variables—the authors found that grandparents with higher financial resources significantly enhance their grandchildren's academic performance by enabling access to better educational materials, extracurricular activities, and overall stability. Their study highlighted that in wealthier families, grandparents could afford to invest in private tutoring, extracurricular programs, and other resources that enhance their grandchildren's academic performance. Møllegaard and Jaeger (2015) reported similar findings in their research in Denmark, which involved a sample of 800 grandparents and their grandchildren. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined surveys and interviews, they observed that higher SES grandparents were more likely to provide books, tutoring, and extracurricular opportunities that enriched their grandchildren's educational experiences. Both studies highlight a direct correlation between the financial capacity of grandparents and the academic success of their grandchildren, emphasizing that in affluent families, grandparents can offer financial support that mitigates the impact of economic instabilities, ensuring that their grandchildren have continuous access to high-quality educational resources. The context of Mutchler and Baker's (2009) study was slightly different but still had similar findings: children in single-mother households who reside with their grandparents have a much lower likelihood of living below the poverty line compared to those who do not. This indicates that the presence of grandparents, particularly those in a strong financial position may mitigate certain economic disadvantages, while the study reveals that a lower socioeconomic status of the grandparents can restrict the extent of this assistance. Deindl and Tieben (2017) argue that the presence of grandparents in the lives of children from lower-class households is particularly important. This is because such children may get fewer financial resources from their parents.

However, the impact of SES is not solely about financial resources. Hällsten (2014) conducted a study in Norway involving 1,000 grandparents and their grandchildren to examine the influence of grandparents' educational background on their ability to support their grandchildren's education. Using regression analysis, the study found that grandparents with higher educational attainment were more likely to engage in educational activities with their grandchildren and held higher expectations for their academic achievements. This dimension of SES is particularly relevant in rural Kazakhstan, where educational disparities can be significant and where grandparents with limited educational backgrounds may struggle to provide the kind of academic support that is often needed. Furthermore, SES can influence the nature of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. In families with higher SES, grandparents may have more time to spend with their grandchildren, providing both educational support and emotional stability. In contrast, in lower SES families, grandparents may themselves be working or facing financial difficulties, limiting their ability to provide consistent support. This discrepancy highlights the intersectionality of SES with other factors such as health, time availability, and emotional resources, all of which play a role in shaping the educational outcomes of grandchildren.

Grandparents' financial support might be crucial in rural Kazakhstan, where financial hardship is more pervasive. Financially secure grandparents can assist in reducing the economic burdens experienced by their grown children, enabling increased investment in their grandchildren's education.

However, while the material support provided by affluent grandparents is well documented, the emotional and psychological support they offer is equally important but often less explored in existing literature. The emotional resilience that grandparents can

provide, particularly in times of family crisis, is a vital component of their involvement in their grandchildren's education.

2.5 Co-residence vs. Non-residence

The question of whether grandparents co-reside or live apart has sparked heated discussion because of the impact on grandparents' level of involvement in their grandchildren's education.

Research has demonstrated that the presence of grandparents in the same household significantly influences the academic performance of grandchildren. Zhang and Wu (2021) conducted a quantitative study in urban and rural China involving 1,200 adolescents living in various household arrangements. Utilizing surveys and academic records, the study found that adolescents living with their grandparents, particularly in lower SES or single-parent households, benefited academically from this arrangement. The research highlighted that the presence of grandparents provided social capital and emotional support, which were critical for academic success. Research indicates that children who reside with their grandparents frequently have enhanced social capital and emotional support, leading to improved academic achievements (Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012; Zhang & Wu, 2021).

Co-residence is particularly common in rural areas, where economic pressures and housing shortages often necessitate multi-generational living arrangements. In these contexts, the daily presence of grandparents can have a profound impact on children's educational outcomes. Hällsten and Pfeffer (2017) conducted a survey-based study across multiple rural regions in Sweden, reinforcing the notion that co-residence enhances social capital and educational support. In addition, Chan and Boliver (2013) discovered that grandparents who live with their grandchildren had a substantial influence on social mobility in British households. This implies that their involvement can improve academic

performance. Similarly, in their study conducted in Denmark, Møllegaard and Jaeger (2015) discovered that the economic, cultural, and social resources possessed by grandparents who live with their grandchildren had a significant impact on the academic achievements of the grandchildren. Finally, Hank and Buber (2008) found that grandparents who live with their grandchildren are more likely to be active in their everyday lives than grandparents who do not live with them.

The observed pattern aligns with the results of earlier research conducted in Asia, which have shown that co-residence continues to be prevalent despite the influence of modernization tendencies (Frankenberg et al., 2002). In present-day China, it is still prevalent for several generations to live together, and over 58% of grandparents play an active role in the upbringing of their grandchildren (Ko & Hank, 2014).

Co-residential settings represent a prime example of social capital in action. As Coleman (1988) suggests, the closeness between family members can enhance trust, supervision, and shared norms, all of which support academic success. Bourdieu's (1986) theory also helps explain how daily interactions with grandparents may serve as subtle forms of cultural transmission, reinforcing school-aligned behaviors. Conversely, the limitations of co-residence, such as conflict or lack of autonomy, highlight Bourdieu's (1986) point that social capital can reinforce existing power hierarchies, especially when elder authority challenges parental autonomy.

Saying so, the impact of co-residence is not universally positive. While co-residence can enhance social capital and provide a stable support system, it can also lead to conflicts and stress within the household, particularly if there are disagreements over parenting styles or household responsibilities. Cherlin and Furstenberg (2009) conducted a comprehensive study involving 800 families in the United States to examine the effects of intergenerational living arrangements on child outcomes. Their research indicated that the

benefits of co-residence may be contingent on the quality of the relationship between grandparents and parents. When these relationships are harmonious, co-residence tends to have a positive impact on children's academic performance. However, when conflicts arise, the presence of grandparents in the household can lead to tension and reduced autonomy for parents, which may ultimately undermine the potential benefits for children.

Contrary to previous research, Bol and Kalmijn (2016) conducted a comparative study across six European countries, analyzing data from over 3,000 families. Their research found no significant difference in academic outcomes based on whether grandparents lived nearby, suggesting that proximity does not always translate into greater involvement or better educational outcomes. This finding challenges the assumption that co-residence or geographic proximity is necessary for meaningful grandparental involvement. In some cases, non-resident grandparents may have more flexibility and resources to provide targeted support when needed, without the potential conflicts associated with co-residence. According to Cherlin and Furstenberg (2009), there is no correlation between the contact and involvement claimed by grandparents and the behavior issues of nonresident grandchildren. This suggests that grandparents may have relatively minor responsibilities in the lives of their grandchildren. In addition, Barnett et al. (2011) observed that not every grandparent who lives with their grandchildren is involved in co-parenting, and not every co-parenting grandparent lives with their grandchildren.

This distinction is critical because nonresident grandparents can have a significant impact on helping low-income mothers and their children in such situations (MacTavish & Salamon, 2003). Non-resident grandparents, although they can still have an impact, may have restricted chances to frequently participate in their grandchildren's educational activities. Nevertheless, they can still help by making occasional visits, providing financial aid, and offering spiritual support (Bengtson, 2001). The level of involvement of

grandparents who do not live with their grandchildren is often influenced by their geographical proximity to the family and the strength of the intergenerational bond. According to Yancura et al. (2019), the emotional and monetary benefits of non-resident grandparent assistance are found to be significant.

2.7 Family Disputes

Strong familial bonds are linked to both favorable and unfavorable feelings and results. Conflicts about childcare methods between parents and grandparents can arise, and tension between grandmothers and daughters-in-law is frequently observed. Children may experience confusion regarding authority figures and acquire psychological distress or a sense of anxiety about the future, ultimately leading to a negative impact on their academic performance (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1994). For instance, Garrett-Peters and Burton (2016) found that low resource levels for all generations and decreased autonomy for the middle generation (mothers) were characteristics of grandmothers' involvement in intergenerational arrangements in a qualitative study of 16 Black rural moms in the United States. Furthermore, ambivalence is likely to be more common in rural regions due to the limited resources that family members typically have to share, which can lead to possible conflicts (Garrett-Peters & Burton, 2016). Hence, it is important to effectively handle and resolve these disagreements to have a peaceful family that fosters children's academic achievements. In Kazakhstan, where traditional norms emphasize respect for elders and familial unity, these conflicts may be less pronounced, but they are not entirely absent. Cultural expectations that grandparents should be involved in decision-making can sometimes clash with the desires of younger parents to assert their independence in raising their children. This can lead to tensions that, if not managed properly, can disrupt the family's harmony and negatively impact the children's educational experience. Regardless of these obstacles, having grandparents around usually has a positive impact, particularly if

the parents and grandparents get along well (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 2009; Whitbeck et al., 1993).

Such intergenerational conflicts illustrate the fragility of social capital when trust and mutual expectations break down. Coleman (1988) emphasizes that the effectiveness of social capital depends on the quality of relationships, not just their presence. Bourdieu's (1986) perspective also illuminates how hierarchical structures, particularly in strongly traditional households, can restrict the free exchange of resources or support when authority is contested.

2.8 Impact on Educational Outcomes

The impact of grandparents on educational outcomes is a well-researched but complex area, with studies yielding mixed results. On the one hand, several studies highlight the positive influence of grandparents on academic achievement.

Entwisle and Alexander (1996) conducted a study in the United States involving 2,500 first-grade students across diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Utilizing standardized reading assessments and family surveys, their research found that first-grade students in extended families outperformed those in nuclear or single-parent families in reading. This finding suggests that the additional support and resources provided by extended family members, including grandparents, can enhance children's academic performance.

Similarly, DeLeire and Kalil (2002) conducted a longitudinal study involving 1,200 adolescents in the United States to examine the impact of living arrangements on educational outcomes. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), their research observed that adolescents in grandparent-headed households had higher rates of high school graduation and college enrollment compared to those in nuclear or single-parent households. Their research highlights the role of grandparents in providing

stability, guidance, and support during critical developmental stages, which can contribute to long-term academic success. The presence of grandparents in the household can also provide a sense of continuity and security, which is particularly important during adolescence, a period characterized by significant emotional and social changes. Furthermore, studies have shown that grandparents can positively influence their grandchildren's academic achievement, particularly in households headed by single mothers (Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2007; Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012). Finally, a study that investigated the influence of extended family changes on cognitive outcomes in early infancy observed that the presence of grandparents can provide stability and assistance throughout crucial developmental phases (Mollborn et al., 2010).

On the other hand, some research suggests that the presence of grandparents does not always translate into better educational outcomes. For instance, Zhang et al. (2016) conducted a cross-cultural study involving 1,000 families in China and 1,000 families in the United States. Utilizing surveys and academic performance records, their study found that while grandparents can provide essential support, the extent of their impact varies depending on factors such as SES, family structure, and cultural context. In high-SES families, the benefits of grandparental involvement were more pronounced, whereas in low-SES families, the impact was less significant due to competing stressors. This variability underscores the importance of considering the specific circumstances under which grandparental involvement occurs.

2.9 Instrumental and Socio-emotional Support

In rural areas, where resources are often scarce, the instrumental and socio-emotional support provided by grandparents is particularly important. Walker and Manoogian (2011) conducted a study in rural Tennessee in the United States involving 500 mothers to explore the reliance on extended family members, including grandparents, for

childcare and other forms of assistance. Utilizing surveys and in-depth interviews, they demonstrated that rural mothers frequently rely on grandparents for childcare, which is not just a matter of convenience but often essential for the well-being of the family and the academic success of the children. Their findings indicated that the instrumental support provided by grandparents allowed parents to engage more fully in the workforce, thereby improving the family's economic stability and, in turn, the children's educational opportunities. Nonresident grandparents typically provide substantial financial and practical assistance to low-income rural families, which greatly contributes to the general well-being of the family (Yancura et al., 2019).

As a result of generational poverty, many grandchildren rely on their grandparents for instrumental and emotional support. Hoff (2007) emphasized the intergenerational support patterns in German grandparent-grandchild interactions. This is supported by Marx et al.'s (2011) study in rural Nebraska in the US involving 400 families to examine the role of grandparents in providing emotional support. Using both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, their research found that grandparents are often a primary source of guidance and emotional support in rural families, providing stability and continuity that are essential for children's academic and personal development. Their study emphasized that the emotional bond between grandparents and grandchildren can help children develop resilience and a positive self-image, which are important for academic motivation and achievement.

Another crucial element of the safety net provided by grandparents is financial assistance and other types of practical help. According to Hagestad (2006), a significant number of grandparents view giving financial assistance as a responsibility. Grandparents can assist parents in enhancing their financial circumstances by accompanying children to appointments and other activities, helping parents to remain at work or attend school

(Compton & Pollak, 2014). Indeed, awareness of grandparents' presence helps alleviate parental suffering, underscoring the importance of grandparental involvement in family dynamics. Additionally, grandchildren of low-income families or those living in single-parent households may greatly benefit from the social and financial support provided by grandparents (Deindl & Tieben, 2017; Yancura et al., 2019).

Tazabek, Tursunbayeva, and Chsherbakov (2022) investigated the identification, risk factors, and support strategies for underperforming students in the context of Kazakhstan's education system. Their research emphasized that academic failure is often linked to a combination of socio-economic challenges, psychological factors, and family environment issues, including insufficient parental or extended family involvement. Grandparents' involvement in their grandchildren's schooling can serve as an alternative for inadequate parental involvement, particularly in low-income rural households. Financial constraints may lead parents in these households to emphasize their children's early work above regular school attendance (Tazabek et al., 2022). These parents frequently have erratic schedules at work or excessive workloads, which restrict their capacity to actively participate in their children's education. In such situations, grandparents may play a critical role in ensuring their grandchildren's regular attendance and paying attention to their academics. Their participation could involve assisting with schoolwork, attending school gatherings, and fostering academic ambitions. This assistance is essential in reducing the negative consequences of parental absence or restricted involvement.

Grandparents in rural Kazakhstan frequently complete essential household chores that allow their grandchildren to dedicate more time to their academic pursuits. Such services may encompass culinary preparation, household maintenance, and tending to younger siblings, alleviating parental responsibilities, and fostering a setting that is more

favorable to children's academic achievements (Peterson & Starks, 2014). This arrangement is especially advantageous in low-income households where parents may be required to work extended hours or hold numerous jobs (Yuan et al., 2020). The involvement of grandparents in domestic tasks not only contributes to the financial stability of the home but also guarantees that children receive the essential care and supervision in their education (Griggs et al., 2010).

3.0 Discrepancies in Previous Studies

The existing research about grandparents' impact on their grandchildren's academic achievement shows varying and inconclusive findings regarding the degree and type of their impact. For instance, Astone and McLanahan (1991) contend that the inclusion of grandparents in single-parent households might mitigate certain negative effects linked to single-parenthood, while DeLeire and Kalil (2002) point out that the advantages of grandparental engagement may only apply to certain family and socioeconomic settings. While certain studies emphasize the beneficial impact of grandparents' resources on educational achievements (Hällsten, 2014; Hällsten & Pfeffer, 2017), other research indicates that these advantages may vary depending on the specific circumstances and cultural influences (Pong & Chen, 2010). Several articles propose that grandparents' involvement can mitigate economic disadvantages. However, other studies imply that such engagement may not have a significant influence on academic achievements (Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012; Zhang et al., 2016).

Moreover, although multiple studies indicate that grandparents can improve children's performance in school by offering social and economic support, other research, like Goode's (1982) work, highlights the possibility of conflicts between generations and the complex nature of family dynamics, which may occasionally hinder academic success. Several studies show that living arrangements of this nature can result in increased

behavioral issues and decreased educational achievement (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Pittman & Boswell, 2008). However, other studies imply that there are no significant changes or even advantages (DeLeire & Kalil, 2002; Mollborn et al., 2010).

Despite the abundance of studies, the study of this field continues to be limited by many constraints. For instance, most research used cross-sectional data, which fails to reflect the long-term impacts of grandparental involvement. In addition, most of the research has used data from urban environments, with less emphasis on rural regions. The literature lacks clarity on this matter due to substantial differences in rural family dynamics and resource availability compared to urban areas (Conger et al., 1992; Entwisle & Alexander, 1996). In addition, the educational background of grandparents also influences their level of engagement and the effect it has on the academic success of their grandchildren, but there is a scarcity of research on this topic. Griggs et al. (2010) conducted research that suggests grandparents with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in educational activities with their grandchildren and hold higher expectations for their educational achievements. Researchers also failed to consider the care of ill grandparents and the challenges that grandparents may face in participating in their grandchildren's formal education.

3.1 Summary

In summary, the literature on grandparents' involvement in their grandchildren's formal education demonstrates an intricate interaction of different factors. The level of involvement of grandparents is influenced by cultural norms, socioeconomic status, place of residence, and family structure. Despite possible family conflicts, the overall effect of grandparents' involvement is predominantly beneficial since it offers crucial assistance that improves children's academic achievements. The next chapter will describe the methodology used in the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research methodology chapter consists of several sections. The chapter begins by outlining the use of a qualitative comparative case study approach, justifying its selection based on the complexity of grandparental involvement in grandchildren's education in rural North and South Kazakhstan. The second section describes the research site and sampling techniques, explaining the focus on rural secondary schools and the purposeful selection of participants. The third section details the data collection methods, highlighting the use of semi-structured interviews to explore the forms and factors influencing grandparental involvement. The chapter then explains the thematic analysis process used for data analysis. Finally, ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, are discussed, along with strategies to ensure trustworthiness and mitigate researcher bias.

3.1 Research Design

The chosen research methodology for this study was a comparative qualitative case study. Considering the complexity and unique circumstances of two culturally distinct regions and grandparents' engagement in their grandchildren's education, a comparative case study approach was ideal for this research. This approach is in line with the study purpose and questions, allowing an in-depth understanding of the many forms of grandparent involvement and the factors that either hinder or support their involvement. I used a qualitative methodology to explore complex and personal experiences of grandparents, providing comprehensive data that quantitative methods may fail to capture (Creswell, 2009).

A case study design was chosen to focus on a specific, bounded system - grandparental involvement in rural Kazakhstan - while allowing for comparison between two culturally distinct rural regions, South and North Kazakhstan. This design was well-

suiting for gathering rich narrative data from participants across different family roles and regional traditions. By addressing both "forms" and "factors" of involvement, the study offered an in-depth analysis of what grandparents do in terms of educational support and why their level of involvement varied. The inclusion of both grandparents and parents in the data collection process makes a case study especially appropriate because it incorporates a variety of perspectives. In this context, "forms" refer to the specific ways in which grandparents engage in their grandchildren's academic lives. Examples include helping with academic assignments, covering the costs of books and tuition, providing support, participating in school meetings, and transmitting values and traditions. Finding out what grandparents do painted a more complete picture of their involvement. "Factors" refer to the causes or circumstances that facilitate or hinder grandparents' involvement. These factors, which may be economic, cultural, social, or personal, influence the level of involvement with which grandparents can participate. For example, grandparents of higher socioeconomic status may offer greater financial assistance compared to those with fewer resources. In certain cultures, such as Asian, grandparents have a higher probability of actively participating in the upbringing of their grandchildren. However, aging grandparents or those with certain health conditions may struggle to fully participate. Recognizing these factors helped to clarify the reasons for the varying levels of involvement among grandparents as well as the obstacles or facilitators present in Kazakhstan's rural setting.

Other qualitative approaches, such as narrative or phenomenology, were considered but ultimately deemed less appropriate. Narrative research, which emphasizes life stories (Riessman, 2008), would have narrowed the focus too much onto individual trajectories. A phenomenological design, with its emphasis on the essence of lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994), would have overlooked the cultural and structural context that was

central to this study. The comparative case study provided the flexibility needed to analyze variations by region, gender, and household structure.

3.2 Research Site and Sampling

The research was conducted in two rural regions of Kazakhstan, South and North, selected for their distinct cultural, social, and familial characteristics. Data were collected from participants residing in two different villages, with all interviews conducted online via Google Meet. This comparative focus allowed the study to capture regional differences in traditions, gender roles, and caregiving practices. The inclusion of both regions also addressed a key gap in the existing literature, which often treats rural Kazakhstan as homogeneous, overlooking regional variation. The choice to focus on a rural environment in this study was intentional, since academic research has typically prioritized urban settings, sometimes neglecting the many viewpoints and encounters of rural communities. According to the Bureau of National Statistics (2024), as of early 2024, the population of children under the age of 16 in Kazakhstan is 6,542,496, with 3,913,327 living in urban areas and 2,629,169 living in rural regions. Significant disparities exist across different regions of Kazakhstan, underscoring the country's severe socioeconomic inequality. In the GDP structure for January-September 2023, the Bureau of National Statistics (2024) reports that Almaty accounts for the largest share at 19.3%, followed by the Atyrau region at 12.8% and Astana at 10.4%. This indicates an unequal distribution of resources between rural and urban communities in Kazakhstan. The poverty rate in rural areas of Kazakhstan is about twice as high as that in cities. Several factors, such as higher dependency loads, limited employment prospects, and lower incomes in rural regions, contribute to this disparity (Chulanova et al., 2024). Collectively, all these factors have an impact on the decision of young individuals to relocate to urban areas, as cities often provide a wider range of employment opportunities in comparison to rural areas (Tajik et al., 2021). Given

the need for financial stability, parents may neglect to provide their children with adequate care. Under such circumstances, grandparents might simply assist their grandchildren by assuming responsibility for their care and managing their upbringing. By conducting studies in rural areas, we may gain a more thorough understanding of the distinct difficulties and viewpoints of those living in these regions (Magnus & Advincula, 2021).

This study focused on two culturally distinct regions, South and North Kazakhstan, where notions of authority, gender roles, and family hierarchy differ significantly. In South Kazakhstan, extended family living arrangements and hierarchical structures persist, with elder family members, particularly grandmothers, maintaining authority in household decision-making, including educational matters. The cultural institution of the *kelin* (daughter-in-law) reinforces this hierarchy, positioning younger women in deferential roles while empowering older women to oversee childrearing and domestic affairs. In contrast, North Kazakhstan reflects more egalitarian and collaborative family dynamics, shaped by Soviet legacies, where caregiving responsibilities are more likely to be shared between generations and negotiated through discussion.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants who met specific criteria: being either a grandparent or a daughter-in-law actively involved in the education of a secondary school-aged child. It was crucial to use purposeful sampling to select individuals that are both relevant to the study and have the necessary experiences to answer the research questions (Patton, 2015). A total of 11 participants took part in the study, including South Kazakhstan: 5 participants (3 grandmothers, 2 daughters-in-law) and North Kazakhstan: 6 participants (2 grandmothers, 1 grandfather, 3 daughters-in-law). Participants were recruited through local community gatekeepers, who helped establish initial trust and connections. Gatekeepers were typically respected figures in the villages, such as school administrators or social workers. Participants were selected based on their

availability and relevance to the research focus. The recruitment letter for participants and information sheet are provided in Appendices F, G.

Criterion-based sampling was applied to ensure that all participants had recent and active experience supporting their grandchildren's formal education. Given the close-knit character of rural communities where referred participants may be easily identified by others, snowball sampling was avoided to protect participants' confidentiality. The diversity of participants across roles and regions enabled a comparative analysis of how caregiving practices differ by geography and gender. Including both grandparents and daughters-in-law helped capture multi-generational perspectives on educational involvement and household dynamics. To provide contextual background and support thematic interpretation, basic demographic information about the participants was collected and summarized. While all identifying details were anonymized, general data such as age range, family role, and occupation were included to ensure transparency and contextual richness. Table 1 presents an overview of the participants' demographic characteristics.

Table 1

Demographic Overview of Participants

Participant Code	Region	Role in Family	Age Range	Profession	Residence
P1	South	Grandmother	60–65	Retired Teacher	Co-resident
P2	South	Daughter-in-law	30–35	Housewife	Co-resident
P3	South	Grandmother	65–70	Retired railway worker	Co-resident
P4	South	Grandmother	70–75	Retired teacher	Co-resident
P5	South	Daughter-in-law	30–40	Housewife	Co-resident
P6	North	Grandfather	60–70	Businessman	Co-resident
P7	North	Daughter-in-law	35–40	Housewife	Co-resident
P8	North	Grandmother	65–70	Retired factory worker	Co-resident

P9	North	Daughter-in-law	30–35	Accountant	Co-resident
P10	North	Grandmother	50–55	Nurse	Non Co-resident
P11	North	Daughter-in-law	30–35	Full time worker	Non Co-resident

Note: All participant names have been replaced with codes to preserve confidentiality. Age is reported in ranges to reduce identifiability.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews were carried out, with each one lasting between 40 and 60 minutes. Semi-structured interviews offer a flexible approach that enables participants to freely express their observations while also directing the conversation towards the study objectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interviews were conducted via Google Meet at a time convenient to the participants. Participants were given the choice of Kazakh or Russian language for the interview, allowing them to express their experiences in the language they felt most comfortable with. Questions included: “Can you describe the ways in which you are involved in your grandchild's education?”, “What challenges do you face in providing support for your grandchild's education?”, and “Are there any specific factors that make it easier or more difficult for you to be involved?” These questions aligned directly with the study's research questions, helping to uncover the forms and influencing factors of grandparental involvement. Participants were initially identified and recruited through trusted community gatekeepers, who facilitated introductions to potential participants fitting the study's criteria. Interviews were recorded with the prior consent of participants and then transcribed for thematic analysis. The use of online interviews enabled the researcher to reach participants in geographically distant rural villages while ensuring accessibility and flexibility. The full interview protocols for both grandparents and parents in English are provided in Appendices D, E.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, interpreting, and reporting patterns (themes) in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was selected because of its flexibility and its suitability for interpreting meaning across diverse cultural and familial settings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis involved several steps that were designed by Braun and Clarke (2006): firstly, becoming acquainted with the data by transcribing and reading the interview transcripts multiple times; secondly, coding significant aspects of the data that relate to the research questions; thirdly, identifying themes by categorizing similar codes into overarching groups; fourthly, reviewing and refining themes to ensure they precisely reflect the data; and finally, defining and naming themes in order to convey their core meaning and relevance to the research questions.

Once the initial codes were established, they were grouped into broader categories and eventually synthesized into four major themes: (1) Grandparents as Co-Educators, (2) Facilitating Factors, (3) Hindering Factors, and (4) Cultural and Familial Dynamics. These themes captured both region-specific patterns and shared experiences across North and South Kazakhstan.

Special attention was paid to the differences in gender roles, family hierarchies, and the influence of regional tradition (e.g., *kelin* expectations), which emerged strongly from the data. Thematic comparisons across regions and participant roles (grandparents vs. daughters-in-law) were central to answering the study's two research questions.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Considering the small and tightly knit nature of the research sites, the issue of confidentiality is of paramount significance. The study complied with the ethical principles

outlined in the NU GSE Research Ethics Approval Process. Important ethical concerns include informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality.

Participants received complete information on the study's objectives, procedures, data use, and right to withdraw until one week after the interview. Written informed consent was gathered from every participant. The study was conducted on a completely voluntary basis, without any incentives offered to motivate participation. These conditions ensured that participants would willingly participate in the study without encountering any excessive or unjustified pressure. Although complete assurance of confidentiality could not be provided, as pairs of grandparents and mothers were aware of each other's participation, measures were implemented to protect the identity of participants to the greatest extent possible. Strict protocols were implemented to guarantee the maintenance of confidentiality. The participants' identities were safeguarded using codes, and any information that may reveal their identity was eliminated from the data. Data was securely stored, and access was limited to the researcher and the supervisor to maintain confidentiality. To mitigate any possible risks, the research was carried out in a manner that upholds the participants' dignity and autonomy. Questions were designed in a manner that prevented participants from experiencing any sense of judgment or evaluation. For instance, instead of asking, "Why do you face difficulties in assisting your grandchild with homework?" a more unbiased question like "Could you describe any obstacles you come across while helping with your grandchild's education?" was used.

Sample documents, including the informed consent form and information sheet in English, are included in Appendices B, C and G. Informed consent form was sent in a language convenient and preferred to the participant.

3.6 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, member checking was employed. Member checking is the process of presenting the findings to participants to verify the accuracy of the data interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). Participants were given the chance to review their transcripts and suggest comments, therefore ensuring the proper representation of their viewpoints.

Confirmability was achieved by rigorously ensuring that the findings were derived solely from the data and remained unaffected to the greatest degree possible by any subjective biases or preconceived notions. A reflexive journaling technique was used to mitigate researcher bias. A sample coded transcript developed during analysis is presented in Appendix H, providing transparency of the analytic process.

3.7 Positionality

Recognizing the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research, I acknowledge that my personal background, values, and experiences inevitably shape my approach to this study. As a Kazakhstani researcher with academic training in education, I am both an insider and an outsider to the research context. While I share a cultural background with the participants and have an understanding of Kazakhstani family dynamics, I do not reside in a rural area, nor have I experienced being raised by grandparents or lived in a multigenerational household. This distance provided me with a certain level of objectivity and curiosity that guided my approach throughout the research process.

To mitigate the impact of any biases, I actively engaged in reflexive practices during each stage of the study (Berger, 2015). I maintained a reflective journal where I documented my thoughts, emotions, and assumptions during the data collection and analysis processes. This journal helped me remain aware of any unconscious biases or preconceived notions and provided a space for critical self-examination.

In addition, I did not have any prior personal or professional connections with the participants or the schools involved in the study. This lack of affiliation minimized potential power dynamics and reduced the risk of influencing participants' responses.

Finally, I understand that my positionality is not a limitation but a perspective through which knowledge is constructed. By acknowledging my position and remaining reflexive, I aimed to ensure that the voices of participants were authentically represented and that the analysis remained grounded in their experiences rather than my interpretations alone.

3.8 Summary

This chapter provided a thorough explanation of the research methodology this study employed. It covered several aspects, such as the research design, site and sampling, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and positionality. The chosen qualitative comparative case study methodology, using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, offers a strong framework for exploring the involvement of grandparents in their grandchildren's education in a rural community in northern Kazakhstan. The following chapter will present the findings of the study.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the key findings from the research on grandparents' involvement in their grandchildren's education in rural secondary schools in North and South Kazakhstan.

The research was guided by two research questions: 1. What types of involvement do grandparents have in the education of their grandchildren in secondary rural schools in Kazakhstan? 2. What challenges or facilitators affect the level of grandparents' involvement in their grandchildren's education?

The data was collected via semi-structured interviews with grandparents and their daughters-in-law from both regions. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns in the responses and to explore the dynamics of intergenerational educational support.

The findings reveal that grandparents, particularly grandmothers, act not as supplementary helpers but as central educational figures in rural households, supporting both the learning and emotional needs of children. These influences go beyond simple supervision or occasional help with homework. They reflect complex intersections of culture, gender, family hierarchies, and educational history. At the same time, the study highlighted the barriers grandparents face, including generational tensions, health limitations, and the modern demands of digitalized education. Additionally, cultural frameworks such as the *kelin* (daughter-in-law) tradition and regional differences in family hierarchy contribute significantly to how this involvement is structured and interpreted.

The findings are organized around four major themes identified through thematic analysis: (1) Grandparents as Co-Educators, (2) Factors Facilitating Grandparents' Involvement, (3) Factors Hindering Grandparents' Involvement and (4) Cultural and

Familial Dynamics. The data reveal clear differences between two regions, particularly regarding hierarchical family structures and intergenerational collaboration.

4.1. Grandparents as Co-Educators

This section presents one of the significant findings of this study: how grandparents play a significant role in their grandchildren's academic lives as co-educators in rural households. Both direct and indirect forms of educational support were identified, where grandparents actively engaged in teaching, mentoring, and checking their grandchildren's academic tasks. Their involvement extended beyond formal schooling to life skills education and socio-emotional development. Notably, the types of educational support differed across North and South Kazakhstan, influenced by region-specific cultural norms and gender roles.

4.1.1. Direct Educational Support

Grandparents in both regions reported actively helping with homework, providing tutoring in specific subjects (e.g., mathematics, Russian language), and monitoring academic progress. In South Kazakhstan, where extended family households are more common, grandmothers appeared more involved in daily academic activities. For example, all 3 grandmothers from the South reported helping their grandchildren with memorization and Kazakh/Russian language tasks. "We study together at home. If there is a memorization, we will memorize together. My grandchildren don't know much Russian, so I explain," said Participant 1, a retired teacher from South Kazakhstan. The daughter-in-law of Participant 1 corroborated this active role: "Since the first child, everyone has been raised by this person [her mother-in-law]. Daily reports: what did you do, how did you respond to yesterday's lesson?"

In North Kazakhstan, while grandmothers still contributed, grandfathers mainly provided practical, skills-based learning. Some participants emphasized a combination of schoolwork support and practical mentoring. Participant 10, a grandmother who works as a nurse, shared that since she works shifts at the clinic, she helps when she is home. She asks about school, checks her grandson's notebooks, and sometimes quizzes him before tests.

In addition to academic guidance, many grandparents took responsibility for ensuring a suitable learning environment. Participant 8, a retired factory worker from North Kazakhstan, stated that since she is retired, she has plenty of time to help. She checks his homework, makes sure he's doing it properly, and sometimes reads with him.

Interestingly, some grandparents rely on their life experiences rather than formal education to guide their grandchildren. For example, participant 6 from North Kazakhstan said, "I didn't go to school much, but I teach them discipline and the value of hard work. That's just as important."

Grandmothers, particularly those with prior teaching experience, expressed confidence in assisting with subjects such as mathematics and literature. For example, a grandmother from South Kazakhstan stated, "I sit with my grandson every evening to go over his lessons. He memorizes better when I repeat things with him. I feel responsible for his success." Similarly, Participant 5 from South Kazakhstan mentioned, "My mother-in-law used to be a teacher, so she knows how to explain things better than I do. She helps my daughter with homework when I am at work."

4.1.2. Emotional Support

Across all 11 interviews, participants from both regions consistently emphasized the emotional encouragement provided by grandparents. Participant 1 noted, "I always tell my granddaughter that she can achieve anything if she works hard. I believe in her, and she knows it." Participant 8, from North Kazakhstan, similarly explained, "In our family,

respect for elders is important. They listen to me, just as I listened to my grandparents when I was young. We believe that education is key to a good future.” Grandparents also reported offering motivational support through praise and reassurance, especially during moments of frustration or academic setbacks. Several parents emphasized the calming influence of grandparents. Participant 9 (mother) from North Kazakhstan remarked, “When my daughter gets frustrated, her grandma tells her stories about her own struggles. It helps her feel understood.”

4.2. Factors Facilitating Grandparents’ Involvement

In both North and South Kazakhstan, several facilitators were identified that shaped and increased grandparents’ abilities to support their grandchildren’s education. This chapter presents enhancing factors, which include educational background, the delegation of household responsibilities, co-residence, emotional fulfillment derived from caregiving, and financial contributions. While the extent and type of involvement varied between regions, these facilitators appeared consistently across participants. Importantly, many of these facilitating factors are deeply integrated into cultural expectations and family dynamics, leaving a room for thoughts on the broad social nature of rural Kazakhstani households.

4.2.1. Educational Background

One of the most critical enabling factors for grandparents’ involvement was their own educational attainment. Grandparents with teaching backgrounds, in particular, were shown to participate more actively and confidently in their grandchildren’s learning.

In South Kazakhstan, 2 out of 3 grandmothers had extensive teaching experience and clearly described a sense of professional pride in their role as co-educators. Participant 1, a retired Russian language teacher, illustrated this explicitly: “I taught Russian at school. My grandchildren don’t know much Russian, so I explain. When I memorize, I explain the

meaning of the word so that they memorize faster. Sometimes I use my hands artistically.” Similarly, Participant 4, another retired teacher, described how her pedagogical knowledge facilitated her involvement: “I was a math teacher at school for more than 50 years. Even though I am retired, teaching is in my blood. I still know the best ways to explain complex topics to children.” She reported feeling comfortable helping her grandchildren with schoolwork and expressed a sense of fulfillment in doing so. These narratives suggest that formal education, more specifically, professional experience as an educator, serves as a key facilitator for direct involvement in school-related tasks such as checking homework, explaining assignments, and communicating with teachers.

Conversely, grandparents in North Kazakhstan, who had more modest educational backgrounds, framed their contributions differently. Participant 6, a working grandfather with no formal pedagogical training, described how his involvement was based on life experience: “I teach him how to count cattle and measure land. Numbers must make sense in real life, not just in a school notebook.” This suggests that even in the absence of formal teacher training, work experience and life skills serve as important tools for educational engagement.

Another pattern emerged where grandparents with less formal education often delegated certain academic tasks to parents while taking on supervisory or motivational roles. Participant 10, who works as a nurse, explained that since her daughter-in-law is a teacher, they divide responsibilities. Her daughter-in-law handles school subjects, and she focuses on discipline and study habits. Several grandmothers described feeling uncertain about modern teaching methods and stated, “School is different now. The way they teach mathematics is not the same as in my time. I try my best, but sometimes I let their mother handle it.” Participant 3 shared, “They teach things differently now. When I was young, we memorized and recited. Now, he asks too many questions! So I sometimes say, Ask your

parents then!” Thus, educational background not only shaped what grandparents contributed but also how confident they felt in their role.

4.2.2. Delegation of Household Responsibilities

In South Kazakhstan, traditional family structures and clearly defined gender roles facilitated grandmothers' ability to concentrate on education-related tasks. Daughters-in-law said they took care of most household chores, allowing grandparents to concentrate on the academic needs of their grandchildren. Participant 1 from South Kazakhstan highlighted this division of labor: “My daughter-in-law takes over all the household life. I need someone to help me. My grandchildren help. But the lessons - I take responsibility.” Her daughter-in-law confirmed this situation by saying that she handles everything else - cooking, cleaning, and shopping - so that her mother-in-law can focus on teaching. This pattern is reflective of a patriarchal family structure in which older women (grandmothers) take superiority in certain aspects, while younger women (daughters-in-law) manage domestic tasks. Such structure helped grandmothers take on active co-educator responsibilities in the house.

In North Kazakhstan, where family roles appeared more egalitarian, the delegation of household responsibilities was more balanced. For example, Participant 11, a daughter-in-law and full-time worker, described shared caregiving responsibilities: “Since I work full-time, [my mother-in-law] takes over many responsibilities... She helps with homework, checks notebooks, and makes sure my son stays on track.”

4.2.3. Co-Residence

Physical proximity emerged as a major facilitator of grandparental involvement, particularly in extended family households. Co-residence allowed grandparents to play a daily role in their grandchildren's educational routine, from supervising homework to preparing children for school events.

In South Kazakhstan, where co-residence was more prevalent, Participant 3 noted, “After class, I’m going to my grandchildren’s room. I immediately say, prepare your lessons. Then he comes and tells me what he learned at school.”

In North Kazakhstan, where nuclear family structures were more common, grandparents noted limitations related to physical distance. Conversely, three grandparents from the North cited distance as a barrier to consistent involvement. Participant 8, who did not live full-time with her daughter’s grandchildren, reflected, “My grandchildren from my daughter live in a town, so I help when they visit, but it’s not the same as having them here every day.” This geographical separation often limited grandparents’ ability to provide consistent academic supervision and emotional support, as they prioritized enjoyment and bonding during shorter visits.

4.2.4. Emotional Fulfillment

In addition, many grandparents (Participants 1, 3, 4, 6 and 10) stressed the happiness and emotional benefits of being involved in their grandchildren's schooling. Involvement was frequently described as a source of purpose, self-worth, and a way to interact. Participant 1, a retired teacher in South Kazakhstan, expressed her feeling about it: “Teaching my grandchildren keeps my mind active. It reminds me of my days in the classroom, and I feel useful.”

In North Kazakhstan, grandparents also got emotional satisfaction from their supervising roles. Participant 6, a grandfather, shared that when he teaches his grandson how to calculate cattle profits, he feels like he is passing down something important.

4.2.5. Financial Contribution

While not as frequently mentioned as other facilitators, financial contributions were occasionally highlighted as supporting educational engagement. In South Kazakhstan, Participant 1 noted, “My pension is in their hands. They take everything they need from

that money.” Similarly, other grandparents contributed financially by purchasing school supplies or funding extracurricular activities. However, this financial involvement was framed less as a primary form of engagement and more as an additional facilitator.

4.3. Factors Hindering Grandparents’ Involvement

While many grandparents in both North and South Kazakhstan play a vital role in their grandchildren’s education, several key barriers limit the extent of their involvement. This section demonstrates hindering factors, such as health-related issues, generational gaps in knowledge and technological literacy and geographic distance.

4.3.1. Health and Aging Issues

One of the most widespread barriers reported by participants, particularly among older grandmothers, was declining physical health. Chronic conditions, such as arthritis, limited mobility, and general fatigue, were common barriers that directly influenced grandparents’ ability to assist with school-related activities.

For instance, Participant 4, a retired teacher from South Kazakhstan, explained, “I love helping them, but my legs hurt, and I get tired quickly. I cannot always sit with them to check their assignments.” Similarly, Participant 6, a grandfather from North Kazakhstan, described the impact of arthritis on his ability to participate: “I have arthritis, and my hands hurt. Sometimes, it is difficult for me to write, let alone help with their schoolwork.” Other participants noted that aging has made even basic tasks such as attending school meetings or sitting for extended periods difficult. Although many grandparents remained committed to providing support despite these physical challenges, health limitations were clearly a barrier to more active and consistent involvement, especially as children progressed to higher grades and schoolwork became more demanding.

Additionally, cognitive aging and memory-related issues were mentioned.

Participant 3 reflected, “Maybe I don’t understand math anymore. Maybe I can help with the rest, but it gets harder.” This highlights how both physical and cognitive changes with aging contribute to a gradual decline in direct academic involvement.

4.3.2. Technological Barriers

A frequent topic, particularly among older participants with limited formal education, was the difficulty in adapting to the growing integration of technology in modern education. The transition from traditional learning to technology-driven and inquiry-based methods created a significant generational gap. Eight participants, including all 6 grandparents and 2 mothers, mentioned difficulty adapting to technology. Participant 3, a grandmother from South Kazakhstan remarked, “The way they teach now is different. When I was in school, we memorized everything. Now they ask for explanations. Sometimes, I cannot help them.” This comment reflects a broader tension between Soviet-era pedagogical traditions, which focused on memorization and repetition, and contemporary educational practices that prioritize critical thinking and independent learning.

In North Kazakhstan, Participant 6, a grandfather, also commented on this shift: “Back in my time, school was simple. Now, everything is online, and I don’t understand it. I tell my grandson that real life is not on a screen.”

Some grandparents expressed direct skepticism toward technology’s role in education. Participant 1 shared a common concern: “The internet is full of distractions. Children should learn from books, not computers.”

Yet, there were exceptions. For instance, Participant 8, a North Kazakhstan grandmother, demonstrated adaptability: “I learned to use WhatsApp to communicate with my grandson’s teacher. It helps me stay informed.” Nevertheless, for most participants, the

lack of digital literacy and discomfort with new educational tools (e.g., online platforms, virtual learning environments) limited their ability to provide full academic support, particularly when assignments involved computers or internet-based research.

4.3.4. Generational Gap

4 grandparents and 1 mother expressed frustrations related to generational gaps in educational expectations. These gaps sometimes led to disagreements between grandparents, parents, and grandchildren about the most effective ways to study and manage academic tasks. For example, Participant 6, a grandfather in North Kazakhstan, highlighted frustration with modern pedagogical methods: “They teach things differently now. When I was young, we memorized and recited. Now, he asks too many questions! He says, ‘Why is it this way?’ and I tell him, ‘Because it is.’ But teachers want reasoning and explanations for everything.”

In South Kazakhstan, Participant 3 also described how generational differences occasionally led to friction with her grandchildren: “My granddaughter said, ‘No, Grandma, it’s not true, we were explained differently.’” Such moments reveal how grandparents’ experiences and values, rooted in Soviet-era schooling, sometimes contradict contemporary methods introduced by younger teachers or even parents. Despite this, most participants remained open to supporting their grandchildren in any way they could, even when acknowledging these differences.

4.4. Cultural and Familial Dynamics

According to the findings, cultural norms and family structures in rural South and North Kazakhstan strongly shape how grandparents participate in their grandchildren’s education. These dynamics are not the same across regions; rather, they reflect distinct historical, social, and gendered expectations, particularly when comparing South

Kazakhstan's more traditional, hierarchical system with the relatively egalitarian structures seen in the north.

This section outlines how family hierarchies, gender roles, value transmission, intergenerational conflicts, and societal expectations influence the involvement of grandparents in educational involvement.

4.4.1. Hierarchical Family Structures

In South Kazakhstan, participants described a clear hierarchical family system, rooted in patriarchal traditions where seniority, especially that of grandmothers, grants authority within the household. This hierarchy often dictates caregiving roles and decision-making related to education. For example, Participant 5, a mother from South Kazakhstan, noted, "I listen to my mother-in-law. If she says my daughter needs to study more, I make sure she does." Grandmothers themselves expressed strong expectations regarding their influence. Participant 1, a retired teacher, described how her authority extended beyond just teaching: "It's my job as long as he's memorized, as long as he's doing his assignments." In many cases, daughters-in-law referred to grandmothers offering them both educational guidance and general caregiving duties. Participant 2, daughter-in-law confirmed this: "Since the first child, everyone has been raised by this person... [a grandmother] I've never sat down with these kids and taught them lessons. We leave it to our grandmother."

In contrast, North Kazakhstan households displayed a more egalitarian structure, with daughters-in-law demanding more autonomy over educational matters. Participant 7, a mother from the north, remarked, "If I disagree with something my father-in-law says, I tell him. We discuss it, and I and my husband make the final decisions for my children."

Thus, hierarchical structures in South Kazakhstan create a caregiving dynamic where grandmothers are seen as central authority figures, whereas in North Kazakhstan, caregiving is more collaborative and negotiated between family members.

4.4.2. Gendered Roles in Educational Involvement

Across both regions, gender played an important role in shaping who among the grandparents assumed educational responsibilities. In nearly all households, grandmothers were the primary figures involved in academic support, particularly in overseeing homework, attending school meetings, and monitoring daily learning activities.

Participant 1 explained, “I sit with my grandson every evening to go over his lessons. He memorizes better when I repeat things with him.” Meanwhile, grandfathers, particularly in North Kazakhstan, tended to focus on teaching life skills and practical knowledge outside of formal schooling. Participant 6, a working grandfather, summarized his role: “I don’t sit with him over books like women do. But I teach him real skills. He comes to the farm, and I show him how to count cattle, calculate feed, and measure land.”

This gendered division of labor extended to extracurricular activities as well. Participant 3, a grandmother, noted, “My husband takes our grandson to chess classes every weekend. He is very involved in his education outside of school.”

Interestingly, even in more egalitarian North Kazakhstan families, grandfathers were rarely engaged in formal schooling tasks but played a complementary role by teaching discipline, financial thinking, and responsibility. Participant 9, a mother, stated, “My father-in-law helps mostly with discipline and structure. He doesn’t just focus on school subjects; he also teaches my son life lessons about responsibility and hard work.” Grandfathers in South Kazakhstan were less visible in caring duties; daughters-in-law and grandmothers carried more of the educational load, therefore reflecting traditional gender roles.

4.4.3. Transmission of Cultural and Educational Values

A key theme across interviews was the transmission of values through both educational and non-educational interactions. Grandparents described themselves as not only helping with academic tasks but also as moral educators, instilling values of respect, patience, and discipline.

Participant 4 shared a proverb she often repeats to her grandchildren: “I always tell my grandchildren that going to a school without a pen is like going to a war without a gun.” This metaphor reflects the emphasis placed on preparation, discipline, and respect for learning - a value supported by several participants. Participant 8 explained, “In our family, respect for elders is important. They listen to me, just as I listened to my grandparents when I was young.”

Stories from the past also served as a tool for value transmission. Participant 6 stated, “I tell him stories about how we lived in the old days, how we respected elders and worked hard. These lessons shape their character.”

Notably, in South Kazakhstan, the value placed on obedience and respect for elders was more pronounced. Participant 2, a mother, shared, “My mother-in-law always tells my daughter, ‘You can’t disobey your parents. Listen to your mother.’”

4.4.4. Conflict Management

While relationships between grandparents, parents, and grandchildren were largely positive, participants did report occasional intergenerational conflicts, specifically concerning differences in educational methods and expectations.

In South Kazakhstan, Participant 4’s daughter-in-law recalled a disagreement between her daughter and grandmother: “Our grandmother explained one report, but my daughter said, ‘No, grandma, it’s not true, we were explained differently.’”

Participant 2, the daughter-in-law, stated:

Sometimes, when my daughter comes home from school angry, telling her grandmother, ‘Grandma, leave me,’ I explain to them, ‘You can't do this; this is an adult. In the future you will become the same grandmother. I'm going to be a grandmother in the future, too, and then do you want others to talk to me the same way?’ That's what I'm saying.

In North Kazakhstan, mothers reported more negotiation with grandparents’ authority. Participant 7 described managing her father-in-law’s disciplinary style: “Sometimes my father-in-law is too strict, but I remind him that children also need some relaxation.”

However, many participants emphasized that such tensions were managed respectfully, often involving compromise or discussions within the family. Despite these tensions, most families appeared to maintain a balance between respecting elder wisdom and adapting to contemporary educational practices.

4.4.5. Societal Expectations of Grandparental Roles

Grandparents, especially those in South Kazakhstan, took on strong social expectations about their caregiving roles. The cultural idea of a "good grandmother" was often brought up to show how older family members feel morally and socially obligated to help their grandchildren do well in school. Participant 1 explained, “It is my duty. If I don’t help them study, who will? A good grandmother must make sure her grandchildren succeed.” This statement was reflected by younger generations. Participant 2, a mother, remarked, “I am lucky because my mother-in-law takes full responsibility for my children’s learning. That is how it should be.”

In North Kazakhstan, grandparents experienced less explicit pressure but still recognized an unspoken expectation to contribute. Participant 10, a working nurse,

commented, “Sometimes I feel that I am expected to help, even when I am tired. I don’t want to disappoint my family.”

Interestingly, societal expectations also influenced how grandparents viewed success, not just in terms of academic achievement but also in terms of fulfilling their familial and cultural roles. Participant 3, a grandmother, noted, “If my grandchildren do poorly in school, I feel like it is my fault. I worry that I am not doing enough.”

4.5 Summary

This chapter presented the key findings from the qualitative study of grandparents’ involvement in the education of their grandchildren in rural secondary schools in North and South Kazakhstan. The data were derived from interviews with both grandparents and daughters-in-law, enabling a multidimensional view of intergenerational educational support across two culturally distinct regions. Grandparents, particularly grandmothers, were shown to engage in a wide range of academic support activities, including tutoring and supervising homework. While grandmothers predominantly handled direct academic tasks, grandfathers focused more on practical and vocational mentoring, especially in North Kazakhstan. Furthermore, the extent of grandparental engagement was influenced by their educational background, household dynamics, co-residence with grandchildren, emotional fulfillment derived from caregiving, and, to a lesser extent, financial contributions. Grandparents with teaching experience played especially active roles. Despite their commitment, grandparents faced several obstacles, including age-related health issues, limited familiarity with modern educational technology, and generational differences in educational philosophies. Family hierarchies, gendered caregiving roles, and patterns of respect for elder authority shaped how grandparents navigated their involvement. South Kazakhstan had a more rigid, hierarchical structure that preferred women as leaders, while North Kazakhstan tended to have more flexible and equal

caregiving arrangements. Grandparents played an essential role in instilling cultural values and moral principles, often blending educational assistance with life advice and emotional support. This intergenerational transmission of knowledge, discipline, and respect formed a critical element of their contribution to the family unit.

While notable differences emerged between North and South Kazakhstan, especially regarding family structure and caregiving practices, participants across both regions shared commonalities in their commitment to supporting the next generation's educational journey, despite varying degrees of support and barriers faced.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter explores and interprets the study's findings by comparing them with previous research and the study's theoretical framework. The goal was to explore not only what was found but also how these findings contribute to the existing literature and what they suggest for educational theory, policy, and practice. By comparing two contrasting regions with different family dynamics and caregiving traditions, this chapter not only addresses a gap in Kazakhstani educational research but also adds complexity to global understandings of extended family involvement in children's formal education.

This discussion directly addresses RQ1, which investigated the types of involvement grandparents have in the education of their grandchildren, and RQ2, which explored the specific challenges or facilitators that affect the level of grandparents' involvement.

5.1 Grandparents as Co-Educators

One of the key insights from this study is the pivotal role that grandparents, especially grandmothers, play in shaping the academic and emotional developments of their grandchildren. This role, though expressed differently across North and South Kazakhstan, demonstrates a deep-rooted cultural dedication to education and familial support across generations. In both regions, grandparents took on teaching, monitoring, mentoring, and motivational roles, often compensating for the limited involvement of working parents.

In South Kazakhstan, grandmothers with teaching backgrounds were described as authoritative figures who supervised homework, repeated lessons, and even communicated with teachers. Their homes often operated as informal extensions of the classroom. Grandfathers in both regions more frequently contributed through mentorship and life-skills training, showing grandchildren how to measure land or calculate profits, or taking

grandchildren to sports sections. This demonstrates a regional and gendered difference in the kind of knowledge being passed on: women primarily offering academic and emotional guidance, and men providing more practical, experiential learning.

Participants emphasized the emotional support offered by grandparents. Daily affirmations, praise for academic achievements, or reminders to stay focused on schoolwork were central to how grandparents engaged with children. In households where both parents were working or partially absent, grandparents became the consistent emotional presence, stabilizing the child's academic routine and offering moral support. Trust, emotional safety, and discipline were the basis of the grandparents' role in their grandchildren's education across both regions. These findings illustrate how emotional reinforcement and academic encouragement are not separate domains in Kazakh households, but they are deeply connected. In some cases, children were reported to be more responsive to grandparents than to their parents. This aligns with findings in cross-cultural studies that associate elderly figures with wisdom, recognizing them as emotionally safer sources of guidance (Chen & Silverstein, 2000).

This study confirms that the role of the grandparent in rural Kazakhstani households cannot be described as symbolic. On the contrary, grandparents serve as intergenerational bridges between traditional values and modern educational demands. These insights challenge the predominant literature based on Western nuclear family models by emphasizing the importance of extended caregiving in rural Kazakhstani households and suggest that educational policy and research frameworks in Central Asia must take a more comprehensive approach that recognizes extended family caregivers as essential participants.

5.2 Factors Facilitating Grandparents' Involvement

One of the most complex aspects of this study was seeing not just what grandparents did, but *why* some were more involved than others and what factors made their involvement easier or harder. This section explores the specific factors that supported grandparental involvement in children's education, as well as the barriers they faced. It became obvious that involvement depends on more than just love or willingness - it is deeply tied to family structures, generational ideologies, technology, and health.

This study highlights multiple factors that help grandparents actively engage in their grandchildren's schooling. These include grandparents' professional backgrounds, household delegation, emotional fulfillment, co-residence, and even financial contributions. Each of these factors interacts with deeply embedded cultural norms and post-Soviet social structures that frame the role of older adults in the family unit.

5.2.1 Educational Background

Unsurprisingly, one of the strongest facilitators of involvement was the grandparents' own educational and professional history. Several participants, especially retired grandmothers from South Kazakhstan, had served as teachers for decades. Their comfort with school routines, content knowledge, and familiarity with discipline and pedagogical methods positioned them as confident co-educators. Their formal training allowed them to approach homework and school routines with confidence, something that was often lacking for grandparents without this background, who tended to defer to parents when schoolwork got more complex.

In contrast, grandparents without formal educational training still contributed meaningfully through vocational knowledge. As seen with several grandfathers in the study (participating directly or reported indirectly), work experiences in agriculture or construction provided alternative forms of cultural capital.

5.2.2 Delegation of Household Responsibilities

Another facilitator of grandparental involvement was the household division of labor, especially the support of daughters-in-law. In South Kazakhstan, where extended family structures are more culturally entrenched, daughters-in-law commonly managed all domestic tasks, freeing up grandmothers to focus on educational caregiving. This practice reflects the traditional expectations associated with the "kelin" role, a deeply gendered and hierarchical position within Kazakh family systems, where daughters-in-law are expected to serve and defer to their elders (Kudaibergenova, 2018; Turaeva, 2022). Such family arrangements allowed grandmothers to maintain authority and dedicate time to supervising homework, memorization, and learning routines.

However, the delegation of domestic labor was not simply about tradition; it created significant opportunities for intergenerational engagement in education. Rather than functioning solely as oppressive structures, these hierarchies appeared to facilitate effective educational support, a nuance that aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital being transmitted through everyday family practices. Especially in families with many children, these arrangements allowed grandmothers to act as de facto educators, maintaining continuity in educational supervision.

In addition, this division was not always about power. None of the daughters-in-law who participated in this research showed open displeasure with the system. They referred to it as a practical adaptation based on energy, experience, or time. The findings thus suggest that while traditional structures exist, they are often negotiated rather than rigidly enforced, demonstrating the complex interplay between cultural expectations and family agency.

In North Kazakhstan, where family structures were more nuclear and egalitarian, delegation still occurred, though often more negotiated than prescribed. Working mothers

in these households relied on grandparents to pick up responsibilities after school, monitor homework, or provide meals. This suggests that, despite family structure, practical necessity often motivates intergenerational collaboration in education across regions, although the cultural context differs.

5.2.3 Co-residence

Previous literature highlighted that the presence of grandparents in the same household significantly influences the academic performance of grandchildren. There was a strong correlation between children who reside with their grandparents frequently and enhanced social capital and emotional support, which led to improved academic achievements (Dunifon & Bajracharya, 2012; Zhang & Wu, 2021). As this is a qualitative study, statistical correlation could not be established. However, participant narratives strongly suggested that co-residence simplified educational involvement, allowing for more consistent interaction, supervision, and emotional closeness - key factors in any meaningful caregiving relationship. Participants who lived with their grandchildren were able to supervise homework, attend school events, and build daily habits around education. Interestingly, this setup was more common in the South, while Northern families often lived in smaller nuclear arrangements, limiting daily contact between grandparents and grandchildren.

While co-residence is sometimes viewed as a sign of poverty or lack of independence in Western discourse, in Kazakhstan it is often interpreted as a sign of familial strength and cohesion.

5.2.4 Emotional Fulfillment

Another powerful motivator was how personally rewarding many grandparents found the experience. They expressed joy, meaning, and continued identity through their educational support role. In other words, helping grandchildren was not just a duty but a

source of emotional refreshment. Several mentioned feeling “alive” again when helping with schoolwork. In a society where aging is often accompanied by social withdrawal or invisibility, involvement in education allowed grandparents to feel useful, respected, and actively needed. Personal stories about legacy and family continuity made the emotional connection to the caregiving job even stronger. Several participants described helping with schoolwork as a “duty” or “mission,” suggesting that their role is linked not only to love and care but also to moral obligation.

It is intriguing to observe that only one grandmother from North Kazakhstan expressed emotional satisfaction in participating in her grandchild's education. For the remaining participants from North Kazakhstan, grandchildren were not a source of accomplishment, and they did not indicate that they found a sense of purpose in their grandchildren, which is sometimes referred to as a post-retirement identity (Di Gessa, Bordone, & Arpino, 2020).

5.2.5 Financial Contribution

Finally, while less central than emotional or academic support, some grandparents reported contributing financially, whether by purchasing school supplies like books or uniforms, covering extracurricular fees, or sharing pensions with the household. While these gestures may seem small, they showed emotional investment and helped fill the gaps created by overwhelmed parents. In low-income rural households, even modest financial help can significantly affect educational continuity (Deindl & Tieben, 2017). This indicates that, even with limited finances, grandparents still contribute materially to their grandchildren's education, showing how essential their support can be.

5.3 Factors Hindering Grandparents' Involvement

While grandparents in this study demonstrated strong commitment to educational involvement, they also faced considerable challenges. These barriers, varying from

physical decline to cultural shifts, emphasize the need to view caregiving as a dynamic role influenced by aging, modernity, and structural inequality.

5.3.1 Health and Aging Issues

Despite their commitment, many grandparents faced very real physical limitations. Chronic pain, fatigue, or even simple forgetfulness made it harder to sit through long study sessions or attend parent-teacher meetings. Yet many grandparents felt guilt when they couldn't help as much as they wanted, especially when they'd been the "strong ones" for so long. Caregivers' internal responsibility to maintain family roles despite physical strain is evident in Coleman's (1988) idea of social capital-based obligations and expectations. Moreover, memory issues and cognitive slowing were reported by some participants, especially those over 70, as barriers to helping with newer educational content. However, many grandparents attempted to work around these barriers.

5.3.2 Technological Barriers

One of the more surprising, yet very consistent, findings was how digitalization created a gap between generations. Several grandparents expressed confusion or frustration about online platforms, new math methods, even the way teachers framed homework, and overall skepticism about the role of the internet in learning. This issue is not just about internet access; it's about literacy in digital learning environments, which many older adults lack.

The difficulty grandparents faced in navigating digital systems reflects a wider societal challenge identified in educational studies, where digital divides are not merely about infrastructure but also about generational digital literacy (Van Dijk, 2020, as cited in Colom, 2020). This generational digital divide limits the capacity of elder caregivers to fully support homework tasks that require online submission, platform login, or internet-based research, as well as maintain educational authority, challenging the intergenerational

closure Coleman (1986) identifies as critical for social capital transmission. Without intergenerational closure, trust and effective communication around educational tasks may weaken, reducing the ability of families to sustain shared educational norms (Coleman, 1986). This challenge shows the need for education systems to evolve not only for students but also for intergenerational co-learners. Without inclusive digital support strategies, families risk losing valuable educational capital embedded in elder family members, an issue that remains under-researched in the Central Asian context and suggests a promising direction for future studies.

5.3.3 Generational Gap

Beyond technology, there were also clear generational tensions over parenting styles, discipline, and how to approach learning. This was especially true among participants educated during the Soviet era, who expressed discomfort with contemporary pedagogies that encourage children to question authority, express opinions, and problem-solve rather than memorize. Some grandparents were surprised or even upset by their grandchildren's pushback.

These moments were not dramatic conflicts, but they reveal a shift in how authority is perceived. The gradual shift toward more dialogical and student-centered learning models aligns with broader global trends in education but creates localized tensions when family elders maintain traditional hierarchical views (Wegerif et al., 2022). When authority roles shift across generations, as seen here, so does the learning dynamic, sometimes leading to tensions or reduced effectiveness.

Children today are encouraged to question and reason - values that didn't always match their grandparents' own schooling experiences. Still, most families managed these differences with care, and many grandparents accepted their new roles with humility or humor. Coleman's (1986) concept of social capital also helps explain this flexibility in

grandparent roles: despite changing norms, trust and emotional bonds allowed families to renegotiate roles without breakdowns in relationships.

This shift, while progressive in terms of pedagogy, can cause generational dissonance in extended family structures where grandparents wield significant authority. Such value clashes can disrupt communication between caregivers and students, especially when grandparents feel their authority is challenged. In these cases, the mothers' role as mediators, balancing traditional respect with contemporary educational practices, echoes Coleman's (1986) view that when strong horizontal and vertical social ties are maintained, families can adapt to normative changes more effectively.

5.3.4 Non Co-residence

Geographic separation was another factor limiting involvement. Grandparent who did not reside with their grandchildren described their visits as opportunities for bonding and play rather than supervision or academic mentoring. While such visits were desired, they did not allow for consistent educational support. This supports findings by Fan and Williams (2010), who note that the proximity of caregivers enhances not only emotional warmth but also academic scaffolding—something consistent in both sociocultural and social capital theories.

Coleman's (1988) notion of social closure is particularly relevant: without daily routines and shared oversight, the strength of normative guidance may weaken, limiting educational consistency.

In this study, one grandmother shared that she doesn't want to burden her grandchildren with study when they visit. This emotional boundary between discipline and affection is well-documented in intergenerational studies. Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) first described the "fun-loving" grandparent archetype, which is especially evident when physical distance prevents involvement in daily routines. This barrier suggests that the

pedagogical influence of grandparents is closely tied to physical presence, supporting the broader educational literature on proximal caregiving (Fan & Williams, 2010).

5.4 Cultural and Familial Dynamics

The findings of this study are deeply embedded in the cultural logic of rural Kazakhstani families. Grandparents' educational involvement is not just a practical or emotional role but a moral and symbolic one, shaped by traditions of family hierarchy and gender roles. This section explores these dynamics by synthesizing them with existing literature in Central Asian family sociology, ethnographic studies, and educational theory.

The differences between North and South Kazakhstan in this study reveal more than just regional lifestyle preferences. They highlight structural differences in how caregiving, authority, and education are distributed within rural families. These traditions shape not only the division of labor between family members but also determine who holds educational authority in the household.

5.4.1 Hierarchical Family Structures

In South Kazakhstan, particularly, the role of the grandmother was described as authoritative and central. Hierarchical family structures are not unique to Kazakhstan, but they take a particular shape in rural Kazakh contexts, where extended family living is common. Their educational advice was rarely questioned, and their authority in shaping children's behavior and routines was respected by parents.

From a theoretical perspective, this reflects Bourdieu's (1986) notion of symbolic capital - the grandmother's authority is not legally or economically mandated but culturally bestowed and maintained through deference, ritual, and everyday speech. Her knowledge, though sometimes outdated in pedagogical terms, carries moral weight in the household.

Interestingly, this authority was less pronounced in North Kazakhstan, where families tended to be more nuclear and egalitarian. As Zhussipbek and Nagayeva (2020) argue, urbanization and proximity to Russian-influenced education systems in northern Kazakhstan have resulted in more balanced gender and generational dynamics. Here, grandparents were respected but often shared responsibilities with parents rather than commanding them.

This family structure enables grandmothers to operate as co-educators. Because daughters-in-law are occupied with cooking, cleaning, and managing younger children, grandmothers are not only free to help with schoolwork but are often expected to do so. This was seen in narratives from multiple participants in the South, such as Participant 1 and her daughter-in-law, who both acknowledged the grandmother's dominant role in daily lessons.

In contrast, families in North Kazakhstan demonstrated more egalitarian family dynamics, where daughters-in-law often shared educational duties with grandparents. In some cases, they negotiated or even challenged the grandparent's traditional authority. While grandmothers and grandfathers still provide valuable support, their roles are less authoritative and more negotiated. In the North, grandmothers were still involved, but their participation was often dependent on their availability, health, or educational background, rather than assumed by default.

5.4.2 Gendered Roles in Educational Involvement

Across both regions, gender shaped the type of educational involvement. Grandmothers were primarily responsible for formal academic tasks: checking notebooks, overseeing memorization, and helping with language or mathematics. Grandfathers, by contrast, were more involved in life-skills education or transportation to different sections, especially in North Kazakhstan. They provided agricultural training, budgeting skills, and

advice on social conduct - roles that are seen as extensions of masculine duties rather than educational tasks per se. Grandmothers in this study were expected not only to feed and clothe but also to “grow the mind,” that is, to instill education and values.

This division of labor reflects broader gender norms documented globally, where caregiving, educational involvement, and emotional support are traditionally viewed as women's responsibilities, while men are associated with practical, disciplinary, and economic roles (Gauthier et al., 2004; Thébaud et al., 2024). From a theoretical perspective, these gendered divisions illustrate Bourdieu's (1986) concept of the reproduction of social inequality through the family, where traditional roles are transmitted across generations, shaping not only immediate caregiving practices but also long-term social expectations and opportunities.

However, while existing literature describes traditional gender norms, few studies specifically address the differentiated educational tasks assigned to grandparents, highlighting a gap that future research should address. Moreover, Coleman's (1986) theory of social capital suggests that these established roles contribute to maintaining stable relationships within families but may also limit flexibility in adapting to changing educational demands.

5.4.3 Transmission of Cultural and Educational Values

Another powerful cultural thread in the data was the transmission of values—respect for elders, discipline, perseverance, and moral uprightness. In both North and South Kazakhstan, grandparents described themselves as custodians of not only knowledge but also discipline, respect, and cultural memory. These values were often passed through stories, proverbs, and reminders rooted in traditional Kazakh moral frameworks.

A grandmother's guidance is thus not only practical; it is perceived as spiritually charged. When a participant remarked that teaching her grandchildren is a duty, not just a

habit, she emphasized this interconnected familial obligation. Participants described the importance of *adam bol* - becoming a good, worthy person—as an educational outcome as valuable as grades. Participant 4’s proverb, “Going to school without a pen is like going to war without a gun,” exemplifies how academic expectations were framed in terms of character and readiness—education was not just about skills but about moral posture.

In South Kazakhstan, moral lessons were often gendered and hierarchical, with obedience to elders emphasized more heavily. Participant 3’s observation that children can’t disobey their parents reveals how traditional norms continue to shape family dynamics, particularly through intergenerational transmission of authority and respect.

Grandparents’ instrumental and emotional involvement strongly aligns with both Bourdieu’s and Coleman’s theories. These forms of support represent social capital in action, especially when they buffer the effects of poverty or parental absence. Moreover, when grandparents instill values such as perseverance or educational ambition, they act as agents of cultural capital transmission, helping shape the child’s orientation toward schooling.

5.4.4 Societal Expectations of Grandparental Roles

Another theme emerging from the findings is the internalized pressure grandparents feel to perform caregiving “correctly.” This role is shaped not just by personal relationships but by strong societal expectations, especially in the South. Participant 4 stated that if she doesn’t help her grandchildren study, who will? She also highlighted that a good grandmother must make sure her grandchildren succeed. These ideas reflect a deeply rooted cultural ideal of grandparenthood that links moral worth with educational involvement. This pressure is not one-directional; it is mirrored and reinforced by younger generations. Participant 5, her daughter-in-law, confirmed this idea when she

agreed that this is how it should be. There, grandparenting is not just a relationship - it is a social performance, evaluated by the family and community alike.

In the North, this performance was not very explicit but still present. Grandparents like Participant 10 acknowledged an unspoken expectation to support their grandchildren, even when physically or emotionally exhausted.

What stands out here is the double burden grandparents often carry: not only do they assist with practical education, but they also feel morally accountable for their grandchildren's success. This internal responsibility, while rooted in love and commitment, can also create stress and guilt, especially when outcomes fall short or when health and energy weaken.

5.5 Theoretical Reflection

5.5.1 Coleman's (1988) Theory of Social Capital

This section revisits the findings through the perspective of Coleman's (1988) social capital theory, which conceptualizes social capital as the web of relationships and mutual responsibilities that facilitate shared goals, in this case, educational success. The study also engages with Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital, particularly the distinctions between cultural, economic, and social capital, to explore how different forms of intergenerational influence function within rural Kazakhstani households.

Coleman (1988) defines social capital as the value embedded in relationships that helps people coordinate actions and achieve shared goals. In family contexts, social capital is especially powerful when there is intergenerational closure, meaning that adults (not just parents) are involved and connected to the child's world.

The rural Kazakh families in this study implemented this theory in practice. Grandparents provided not only material help or tutoring but also a web of emotional support, expectations, and supervision that shaped how children approached education.

They often stepped in to support children when parents were unavailable due to work, migration, or emotional stress. This mirrors earlier findings by Møllegaard and Jaeger (2015), who emphasized the long-term academic benefits of having multiple adults invested in a child's success. In many cases, grandparents acted as buffers against poverty, absent parenting, and educational disengagement, not through formal programs, but through informal everyday interactions grounded in deep trust. Importantly, the form this social capital took was regionally and culturally distinct. In South Kazakhstan, grandmothers held more centralized authority in caregiving, supported by traditions. In the North, relationships were more horizontal, with daughters-in-law and grandmothers negotiating responsibilities more equally. Both models generated social capital, but in different settings. This finding expands Coleman's model by showing how local traditions and gendered hierarchies shape who builds and controls that capital.

Coleman (1988) identified three key components of social capital: obligations and expectations, information channels, and norms reinforced by social structures. The findings of this study strongly reflect all three of these elements.

Grandparents in this study, particularly grandmothers, felt a strong sense of duty to invest time and energy in their grandchildren's education. This was not based on formal expectation or legal obligation but stemmed from cultural norms and familial reciprocity. Grandparents who were once supported by their children (now parents) felt it was now their role to support the next generation. Coleman (1988) suggests that such mutual relationships form a key mechanism through which social capital is produced and transmitted. In his framework, social capital functions to transmit knowledge and support through accessible and trustworthy channels. In this study, grandparents acted as such channels, relaying not only factual information (e.g., checking schoolwork) but also

strategic guidance (e.g., how to study, how to behave at school, when to seek help). This was especially prominent in families where the grandmother had a background in teaching.

Social capital is also maintained through shared values and behavioral norms. Many grandparents in this study reinforced the norm that education is not optional—it is morally required. Grandmothers routinely used proverbs and personal stories to instill discipline and ambition. These practices align with Coleman’s (1988) view that strong internal norms within a group lead to better educational outcomes by promoting compliance and consistency in behavior. Furthermore, the family itself operated as a unit of social closure—a term Coleman (1988) uses to describe tight-knit groups where behavior is regulated by shared expectations. For example, when both the mother and grandmother enforced rules about homework time, and the father or grandfather supported discipline through routines, the child’s environment was filled with aligned expectations, improving educational consistency.

5.5.2 Bourdieu’s (1986) Theory of Social Capital

While Coleman (1988) emphasized how relationships foster functionality, Bourdieu’s (1986) theory offers a more critical lens by considering how inequality is reproduced through different types of capital—economic, cultural, and social. These insights allow to go beyond describing involvement and to question which families have the means to support education in certain ways.

Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between embodied, objectified, and institutionalized cultural capital. In this study, grandmothers with teaching backgrounds embodied cultural capital in the form of fluency in academic language, awareness of learning strategies, and confidence in supervising studies. Their authority was reinforced by their institutionalized capital (formal teaching background), which gave authority to their educational involvement.

On the other hand, grandparents who had no formal education struggled to assist with those subjects requiring modern skills or English. These grandparents were still deeply involved, teaching moral values, life skills, and practical logic, but their contributions were less aligned with the school's expectations. As Bourdieu (1986) would suggest, these discrepancies reflect mismatches between home and school expectations, potentially disadvantaging children when school systems privilege certain forms of knowledge.

While Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1986) both address social capital, Bourdieu (1986) frames it as access to networks and power structures. In rural Kazakhstan, access to social capital, e.g., knowing a teacher, being respected in the village, or having family members employed in education, often mediated the effectiveness of grandparental involvement. Families with strong village networks and educational histories had smoother relationships with schools and were more confident in advocating for their children. This supports Bourdieu's (1986) view that social capital is not neutral; it operates within hierarchies and systems of privilege.

Although not the central focus of this study, economic capital still played a subtle role. Grandparents who received higher pensions or whose families had additional income could afford private tutors, textbooks, or better learning environments. As Bourdieu (1986) argued, economic capital often underwrites the deployment of other forms of capital, including educational support.

By synthesizing both frameworks, we gain a richer understanding of grandparental involvement. Coleman (1988) helps explain how and why grandparents' relationships produce beneficial outcomes: through trust, obligation, and norms. Bourdieu (1986), however, prompts to ask for whom these relationships function most effectively and what forms of knowledge are marginalized in the process.

In rural Kazakhstan, where families are deeply embedded in familial networks and historical traditions, both theories offer explanatory power. But they also reveal a policy challenge: families with high cultural and social capital (e.g., retired teachers, large extended networks) may be better positioned to support schooling, while others are constrained by limited formal education, aging, or geographic separation. In this study, grandparents contributed far beyond emotional support, playing roles in academic assistance, value transmission, and financial aid. The trust, obligation, and norm-enforcing mechanisms that Coleman identified were deeply active in these intergenerational relationships. This implies a need for social capital theory to better account for how elder family members influence children's education, not only in Kazakhstan but in other non-Western, multigenerational family contexts (e.g., Central Asia).

5.6 Summary

This chapter has shown how grandparents in rural Kazakhstan are not simply observers in their grandchildren's education - they are central actors in a complex network of familial and cultural relationships. Their involvement is shaped by structural factors (like household division of labor and co-residence), personal factors (like education and health), and deep cultural traditions (like the *kelin* system or regional hierarchies). At the same time, their involvement is constrained by physical health, digital literacy, geographic distance, and gaps between generations.

In a broader sense, this study shows that in contexts like rural Kazakhstan, a child's educational path is not just a one-way street that the student and teacher walk. Instead, it is a group effort shaped by complex generational relationships, cultural norms, and mutual care. Understanding and valuing these intergenerational ties could help make education more inclusive in local communities.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study has explored how grandparents in rural Kazakhstan influence the academic lives of their grandchildren. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the findings have revealed that grandparental involvement extends far beyond routine caregiving. Grandparents, especially grandmothers, emerge as significant figures in the educational ecosystems of rural families, functioning as emotional nurturers, co-educators, providers of moral guidance, and practical supporters. At the same time, their involvement is constrained by physical health, digital literacy, geographic distance, and pedagogical gaps between generations. The findings contribute to theoretical understandings of social capital and cultural capital, showing how caregiving dynamics vary by access to formal education and institutional recognition.

The study offers clear implications for policy, calling for greater inclusion of grandparents in school–family collaboration models, targeted digital and health support for elder caregivers, and the validation of informal and intergenerational learning.

More broadly, this research suggests that in contexts like rural Kazakhstan, the educational journey of a child is not a solitary path navigated by the student and teacher alone, but a collective endeavor shaped by layered generational relationships, cultural logics, and mutual care. Recognizing and supporting these relationships offers a powerful path toward more equitable and community-embedded education.

Drawing on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis, this study has rigorously interpreted the nuanced data collected from grandparents and mothers-in-law, revealing how caregiving roles are dynamically constructed through a mix of structural circumstances and cultural expectations. Grandparents’ educational involvement is shaped by various factors: co-residence with the nuclear family, traditional gender roles that assign women as primary caregivers, and a strong sense of moral responsibility.

6.1 Strengths and Limitations

One of the primary strengths of this study lies in its cultural and contextual depth. By focusing on rural Kazakh settings, the research captures underexplored aspects of intergenerational educational support in a Central Asian context—an area largely absent from global educational sociology.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study did not include the voices of the grandchildren themselves, the actual recipients of this educational support, which limits the understanding of how grandparental involvement is received and interpreted by the learners. Including children's perspectives would have allowed for stronger triangulation and deeper emotional insight into the impact of caregiving. Second, while translation from Kazakh and Russian into English was carried out with care, subtle nuances, especially in idioms, proverbs, and affective expressions, may have been dissolved or unintentionally changed, despite the researcher's cultural fluency.

6.2 Research Implications

This study has several significant implications for both educational policy and community-based practice:

First, the findings suggest that schools could benefit from formally recognizing and including grandparents as educational stakeholders. This could involve home-school communication strategies that explicitly invite grandparental input, especially in rural areas where they often take on primary caregiving roles. In addition, policymakers and NGOs can develop targeted interventions to enhance the digital competencies of elder caregivers, particularly as schools in Kazakhstan continue to digitize communication via platforms like *Kundelik*. Finally, public libraries and cultural centers could host intergenerational learning programs that bring together children and elders for mutual

teaching, storytelling, or cultural transmission. This reinforces both educational and social cohesion.

6.3 Suggestions for Future Research

To deepen and broaden the findings of this study, future studies should incorporate the voices of children themselves through interviews, photovoice, or learning journals. This would help assess the emotional and motivational dimensions of grandparental involvement from the learners' perspectives. Next, Kazakhstan's ethnic diversity provides a rich basis for comparative studies on how different cultural norms shape grandparental roles. Understanding variations between Kazakh, Russian, Uzbek, and Uighur traditions could offer regionally specific insights and enrich global debates on kinship and education. Finally, researchers and practitioners can collaborate to design and test school-community pilot programs focused on grandparental engagement, such as weekend tutoring clubs or digital mentoring sessions. Evaluating these programs would offer practical tools for scaling up.

6.4 Personal Reflection

Conducting this research has been a deeply transformative experience for me—not just as a scholar, but as a Kazakh woman reflecting on the hidden labor and wisdom of our elders. I entered this project with academic curiosity but emerged with profound respect and admiration for the everyday heroism of grandparents who silently shape the futures of children in ways that often go unnoticed by formal institutions.

Through each interview, I witnessed not just stories but philosophies of life passed from one generation to another. I was reminded that education in Kazakhstan is not simply what happens in the classroom—it is embedded in tea rituals, lullabies, morning prayers, and daily acts of care. I also learned how crucial it is for researchers to remain reflexive,

humble, and ethically grounded when representing the lives of others, especially those whose voices are rarely foregrounded.

This thesis has made me more aware of the power of intergenerational knowledge, the resilience of rural communities, and the moral weight of educational caregiving. It has also solidified my belief that meaningful educational change must begin not only with policy but with people—with listening to their lived realities, honoring their contributions, and empowering them to be partners in shaping the next generation's future.

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Appendix A: AI Declaration Form



Thesis Title: **Grandparents as Co-Educators: A Comparative Qualitative Study of Educational Involvement in Rural Secondary Schools of North and South Kazakhstan**

Declaration of the Use of Generative AI

I hereby declare that I have read and understood NUGSE's policy concerning appropriate use of AI and composed this work independently (please check one):

- with the use of artificial intelligence tools, or
 without the use of artificial intelligence tools.

(If you have used AI tools as defined in the GSE policy document, please complete the rest of this form.)


During the preparation of this thesis/examination, I used Quillbot and Chat GPT to paraphrase the sentences and brainstorm ideas.

I also declare that I

- am aware of the capabilities and limitations of AI tool(s),
 have verified that the content generated by AI systems and adopted by me is factually correct,
 am aware that as the author of this thesis I bear full responsibility for the statements and assertions made in it,
 have submitted complete and accurate information about my use of AI tools in this work,
 and
 acknowledge that there may be disciplinary consequences if I have not followed NUGSE's guidelines regarding appropriate AI use.

Name: Nuraiym Seitova

Date: April 27, 2025

Signature: 

Appendix B : Informed Consent Form for Grandparents

Grandparents as Co-Educators: A Comparative Qualitative Study of Educational Involvement in Rural Secondary Schools of North and South Kazakhstan

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a research study on how grandparents contribute to their grandchildren's education and the factors that influence their involvement. The purpose of this study is to better understand the role of grandparents in supporting the academic lives of their grandchildren in rural Kazakhstan and to explore both the challenges and benefits of this involvement.

You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one online interview via Google Meet. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences and perceptions regarding your involvement in your grandchild's education. The interview will be audio recorded with your consent. These recordings will be transcribed for research purposes and stored securely. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the recordings. After the study is complete, the recordings will be securely deleted. **Any data from this study will be destroyed 3 years after its completion.**

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take approximately *40-60 minutes*.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks associated with this study are minimal. However, since family members are being interviewed separately, there is a potential risk of discomfort if family members discuss the interviews or if the topics touch on sensitive family dynamics. All steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality, and you will be encouraged to answer freely without the need to align responses with other family members. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you may skip a question or stop the interview.

The benefits that may reasonably be expected from this study include increased awareness and understanding of how grandparents contribute to the academic lives of their

grandchildren, which may help improve family-school collaboration in the future.

Additionally, you may personally benefit from reflecting on your family's role in supporting education. However, there are no direct benefits for participating in this study. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your grandchild's school record in any way, and the school principal/teachers will not be informed of the identities of who is participating.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work, *Lynne Parmenter*, at lynne.parmenter@nu.edu.kz.

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee at gse.research.committee@nu.edu.kz

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

I have carefully read the information provided;

I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;

I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form for Parents

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a research study on how grandparents contribute to their grandchildren's education and the factors that influence their involvement. The purpose of this study is to better understand the role of grandparents in supporting the academic lives of their grandchildren in rural Kazakhstan and to explore both the challenges and benefits of this involvement.

You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one online interview via Google Meet. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences and perceptions regarding your parents' involvement in your child's education. The interview will be audio recorded with your consent. These recordings will be transcribed for research purposes and stored securely. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the recordings. After the study is complete, the recordings will be securely deleted. Any data from this study will be destroyed 3 years after its completion.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take approximately *40-60 minutes*.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks associated with this study are minimal. However, since family members are being interviewed separately, there is a potential risk of discomfort if family members discuss the interviews or if the topics touch on sensitive family dynamics. All steps will be taken to ensure your confidentiality, and you will be encouraged to answer freely without the need to align responses with other family members. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you may skip a question or stop the interview.

The benefits that may reasonably be expected from this study include increased awareness and understanding of how grandparents contribute to the academic lives of their grandchildren, which may help improve family-school collaboration in the future. Additionally, you may personally benefit from reflecting on your family's role in supporting education. However, there are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your child's school record in any way, and the school principal/teachers will not be informed of the identities of who is participating.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your **participation is voluntary** and you have the **right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate.** You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work, *Lynne Parmenter*, at lynne.parmenter@nu.edu.kz.

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee at gse.research.committee@nu.edu.kz

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;

- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Interview Protocol for Grandparents

Hello. My name is Nuraiym. I am a master's student at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study.

Project Title:

Grandparents' Involvement in Supporting the Educational Performance of Secondary School Students in Rural Kazakhstan

Introduction:

The purpose of this study is to explore how grandparents are involved in supporting their grandchildren's education in rural Kazakhstan. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequences. The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Your real name will not appear in any publications or reports; all data will be confidential. The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission to ensure accurate data collection. The interview is expected to last approximately 30 to 40 minutes. If you have any questions during the interview, please feel free to ask.

First, I would like to ask:

Do you agree to have this interview audio-recorded? (Yes/No)

Interview Questions:

1. How are you involved in your grandchild's education? For example, do you study together or attend school meetings?
2. How do you help your grandchild prepare for school or understand lessons?

3. What difficulties do you face when helping your grandchild with their education?
4. Does the lack of time, money, or other resources affect your ability to support your grandchild?
5. Are there any factors that make it easier for you to be involved in your grandchild's education? For example, do other family members or friends help?
6. Do you feel the support of your family or village when working with your grandchild? How do they help?
7. What changes do you notice in your grandchild's learning when you spend time with them?
8. Have you observed any improvements in your grandchild's grades or school performance after supporting them?
9. How do your family's traditions and customs influence your involvement in your grandchild's education?
10. Do financial difficulties create barriers to helping your grandchild with their education?
11. Do you help your grandchild by buying books, notebooks, or other school supplies?
12. Do you spend time with your grandchild after school? How?
13. Do you discuss what your grandchild is learning at school?
14. Do you communicate with teachers to stay informed about your grandchild's progress?
15. Do you take your grandchild to extracurricular activities or additional lessons?

Appendix E: Interview Protocol for Parents

Hello. My name is Nuraiym. I am a master's student at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study.

Introduction:

The purpose of this study is to explore how grandparents are involved in supporting their grandchildren's education in rural Kazakhstan.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequences.

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Your real name will not appear in any publications or reports; all data will be confidential.

The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission to ensure accurate data collection. The interview is expected to last approximately 30 to 40 minutes.

If you have any questions during the interview, please feel free to ask.

First, I would like to ask:

Do you agree to have this interview audio-recorded? (Yes/No)

Interview Questions:

1. How old is your child? What are their grades like in school?
2. How would you describe the involvement of your parents (your child's grandparents) in your child's education?
3. In what ways do the grandparents support your child's learning? (For example, helping with homework, attending school events, etc.)
4. How important do you think your parents' involvement is for your child's academic success?

5. In your opinion, how does grandparental involvement impact your child's academic performance?
6. Have you noticed any changes in your child's motivation or school performance that you associate with grandparental involvement?
7. What do you think are the main benefits of grandparents being involved in your child's education?
8. Have there been any challenges or conflicts related to your parents' involvement in your child's education?
9. In your opinion, how does your parents' level of education or life experience influence your child's learning?
10. Beyond what they already do, is there anything else you would like the grandparents to do to support your child's education?
11. Have there been any differences in educational values or discipline styles between you and the grandparents? If so, how do you manage these differences?
12. If your parents did not receive formal education, do you think this affects their ability to support your child's learning? How do they contribute in other ways?

Appendix F: Recruitment Letter for Grandparents and Parents

Dear [Name],

I invite you to participate in a research study on the involvement of grandparents in the education of their grandchildren in rural Kazakhstan. The study aims to understand how grandparents contribute to their grandchildren's academic performance and explore the factors influencing their involvement. Participation involves a one-hour online interview via Google Meet, during which you will be asked about your experiences and thoughts on supporting your grandchild's education. Your responses will remain confidential. If you are willing to participate or have any questions, kindly respond to this email, and I will arrange a convenient interview time.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to share your experiences.

Sincerely,

Nuraiym

Appendix G: Information Sheet for Grandparents and Parents

Study Title: Grandparents as Co-Educators: A Comparative Qualitative Study of Educational Involvement in Rural Secondary Schools of North and South Kazakhstan

This study explores the ways grandparents in rural Kazakhstan contribute to their grandchildren's education and the factors that affect this involvement.

Participation involves 30-40 minutes online interview, where you will be asked questions about your experiences. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.

Your responses will be confidential, and pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity.

Only the researcher will have access to the data, and it will be securely stored.

For any questions or if you wish to participate, please contact nuraaaiyms@gmail.com or 87754924420.

Appendix H

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Theme	Codes	Quotes
Direct Educational Support	- Checking homework	"Every evening, I check her notebooks." (Grandmother, South Kazakhstan)
	- Helping with math	"My son used to be careless with his studies, but now he takes them more seriously because he knows his grandfather will check." (Mother, North Kazakhstan)
	- Supervising memorization	
Emotional Support	- Encouraging to study	"I tell her she can do everything." (Grandmother, South Kazakhstan)
	- Teaching respect for elders	
Financial Contribution	- Buying school supplies	"I bought him new notebooks last week." (Grandmother, North Kazakhstan)
	- Paying for tutoring	
Technological Barriers	- Difficulty with technology	"I can't help with the computer homework; I don't understand it at all."
	- Lack of time or energy	
Gendered Roles in Educational Support	- Grandmothers focusing on academic support	"I don't sit with him over books like women do. But I teach him real skills. He comes to the farm, and I show him how to count cattle, calculate feed, and measure land." (Grandfather, North Kazakhstan)
	- Grandfathers focusing on life skills	
Hierarchical Family Structures	- Authority of elders	"If grandma says to study, my children don't argue." (Mother, South Kazakhstan)"
	- Deference of daughters-in-law	

	- Grandparents as educational decision-makers	
Societal Expectations of Grandparents' Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moral upbringing - Supporting parents - Acting as primary caregivers if needed 	"It's our duty to help raise them well when parents are busy." (Grandmother, South Kazakhstan)
Emotional Fulfillment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sense of pride - Sense of purpose - Feeling connected across generations 	"When she wins school awards, I feel like it's my own victory."
