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Strategies for Improving School – Family Cooperation in the Romanian Primary Educational System

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Abstract

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The way that teachers and parents communicate has a huge influence on the development and education of children. Therefore, it is essential that school and family have common goals. The quality of the partnership between school and family is influenced by the attitudes, expectations and opinions regarding the role of the school in children's development. The purpose of this study is to investigate the opinion of the parents towards the communication between school and family, the quality of cooperation and the strategies that we should apply in order to improve the school-family partnership. Our paper focuses only on the parents' views regarding the best ways to improve the school and family communication and offers us an image of what parents expect from teachers. The instrument used for data collection was a semi-structured questionnaire, which can be found in the Appendix. The questionnaire approached subjects like: most efficient forms of communication with teachers, frequency and efficiency of communication and also causes and solution of conflicts that appear between teachers and parents.

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Keywords: Communication; School-Family Partnership; Romanian Primary Educational System.

1. Introduction

This study has an important role for offering us an overview of the educational realities that influence the quality of the communication between school and family. It is very important to understand parents' opinions regarding the positive relationship that should be established between



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family and school. We consider that the goal of facilitating collaboration among parents and teachers is not easily obtained. We need commitment and willingness to find new strategies that help us do the things differently and much better, to strengthen the school and family partnership. According to Swick (2003, p. 275), “in relation to parent–teacher and family–school–community partnerships, communication is the critical factor. For example, teachers and parents need to see their communicative relationship in a partnership manner”. Furthermore, “in a vulnerable social economic context, dominated by the growth of poverty phenomenon, by emigration, the extension of social inequalities, increasing unemployment, fear of job loss, distrust in public institution and services, school-families cooperation has become a national priority.” (Margaritoiu & Eftimie, 2011, p. 42).

According to Epstein (2002), teachers should communicate with families about school programs and child progress. Moreover, teachers have the duty to create and maintain two-way communication channels between school and home during their cooperation. There are six types of family involvement, included in the model developed by Epstein: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. “Educational partnership, as a form of communication, cooperation and collaboration in child support in the educational process implies a unit of requirements, options, decisions and educational activities among educational factors” (Gurloiu, 2015, p. 606). We consider that the key to each successful partnership is the efficiency of the communication and the positive relationship between partners.

2. Methodology and results

The data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire. We conducted the survey on a sample of 38 parents aged 27 to 47 from a rural area from Cluj County. The research question was: What can parents and teachers do in order to communicate more efficiently? The questionnaire contains 15 questions regarding the most efficient form to communicate with the teachers, the frequency of communication and the person that should initiate it, the efficiency of communication, the importance of the relationship between parents and teachers, the cause of conflicts and solutions that could be found in order to improve teacher-parent communication. Participants had answered to closed or opened questions. Concerning the level of education, participants have different levels of education: 44,74% with low education level, 50% with average educational level, and 5.26% with high educational level. Their children are enrolled in the Romanian primary educational system. The questionnaire was completed by 35 mothers (92.11%) and only 3 fathers (7.89%). We are giving below a summary of the answers to the questions that were applied.

The results for “What is the most efficient form of communication between you and the teacher?” showed that most parents prefer telephone conversations (15,79%), parent meetings (18,42%), individual meetings (18.42%) and both parent meetings and telephone conversations (47.37%). (see Fig. 1).

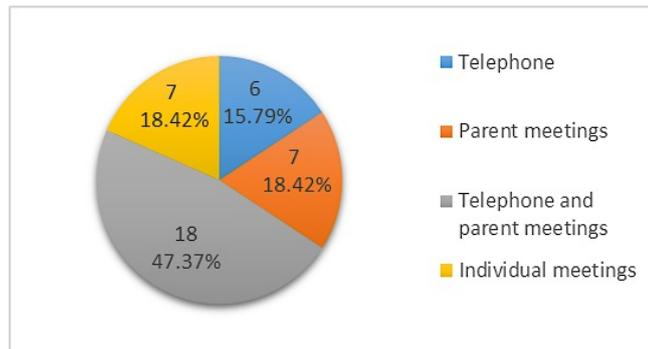


Fig. 1. Communication channels preferred by parents

The answers to the question “Who is the person that should initiate the most frequently the communication between teachers and parents?” show that 55.26% considered that teachers should have the initiative while others (44.74%) indicate that parents are responsible for initiating more frequently the dialogue with the teachers. (see Fig. 2).

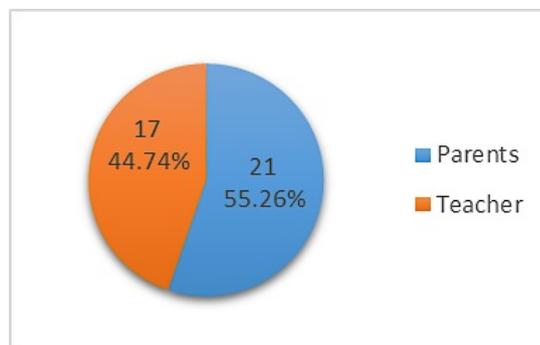


Fig. 2. Person which should initiate the conversation

The answers offered question 3 showed that the majority of the participants had communicated with teachers once a week, while the rest had communicated once in a semester or a month. (see Fig. 3). It is interesting to outline that even the parents who meet very often the teachers had suggested, according to the answers given to the final question, to meet more often with the teacher.

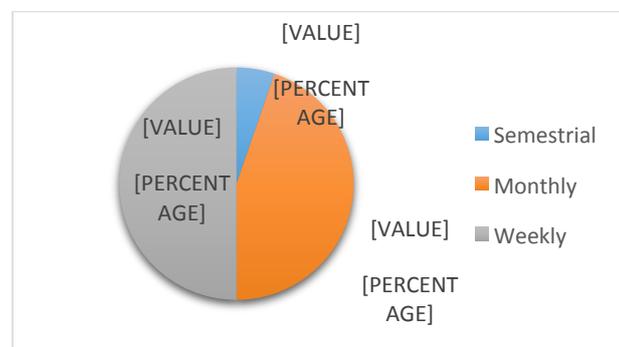


Fig. 3. The frequency of communication

The results for “What are your areas of interest?” are submitted in Fig. 4. The most of the participants said that they are interested in being informed about the child’s school results, and about

the behaviour of the child in the school environment. Only a small proportion of the participants answered that they are interested in finding out efficient strategies for improving the school results of the students (see Fig. 4).

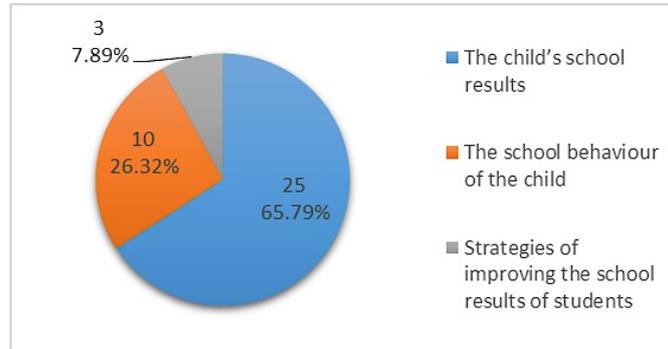


Fig. 4. Areas of interest of the parents

The answers offered to the question 5: “How do you communicate with the teacher?” indicate that all parents consider themselves as being efficient in the way that they communicate with the teacher. At the same time, the answers given to question 6 indicate that parents considered that opinions and suggestions are sometimes taken into account by the teacher (7.89%), often (26.32%) and always (65.79%). (see Fig. 5).

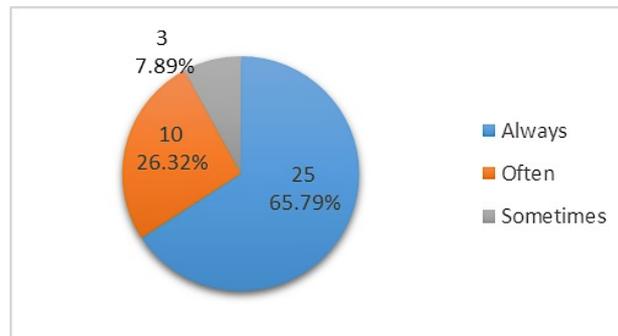


Fig. 5. The frequency with which teachers accept parents' suggestions

The answers to the seventh question, regarding the children's school results, reveal that parents appreciate the school results as being: good (47.37%) and very good (52.63%). It is interesting that the majority of the parents (65.79%) believe that their child will obtain school results similar to the ones obtained currently, others appreciate that the results will be better (31.58%) while one parent (2.63%) appreciates that his child will obtain lower results in the future (question 8).

The answers to questions 9 and 10 indicate the importance of the cooperation between parents and teachers from the perspective of children and parents. All the participants considered important or very important the cooperation with the teacher. (see Fig. 6 and 7). It is interesting that parents believe that their children wish more than them to have a good cooperation with the teacher.

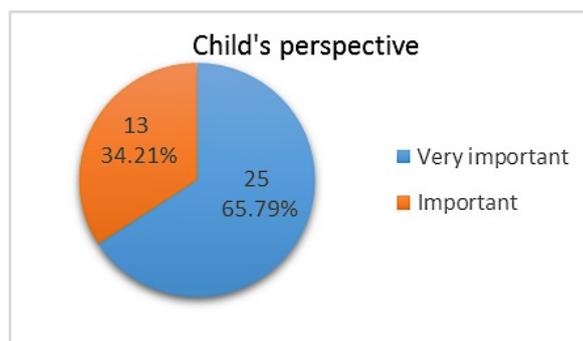


Fig. 6. The opinions of the children regarding the importance of the cooperation between school and family

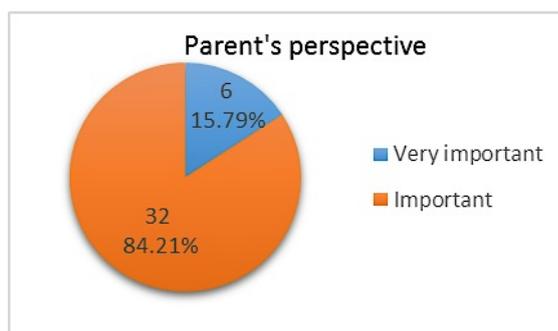


Fig. 7. Parents' opinions regarding the importance of the cooperation between school and family

All the participants (100%) consider that teachers have a good attitude towards them (question 11) and cooperate well and very well with the teacher (question 13). The affirmative answers to question 12 “Would you like to find out more about your child’s qualities from his/ her teacher?” reveal that it is beneficial to initiate conversations about the positive qualities of the children.

Parents were asked to list the causes of conflicts that can occur between parents and teachers and the solutions that they suggest in order to optimize their communication and cooperation (question 14 and 15). Table 1 contains the main obstacles that could intervene in teacher-parent communication and solutions suggested by parents.

Table 1. The vision of parents regarding the problems and solutions that could be applied in the communication process

Causes of conflicts	Solutions
- disagreement;	- frequent meetings with parents;
- lack of communication;	- increasing frequency of communication;
- injustice and differential treatment of children;	- opening to talk and listen, mutual respect and understanding;
- the way that teacher solve children’s problems and conflicts;	- a better relationship between parent and children;
- the false stories said by children about what happens at school;	- availability to find solutions to reach a common agreement;
- the belief that their child is the best and should not be criticized in any way;	- acceptance of the fact that the child is not perfect and can make mistakes;
- the low educational level of the parents;	- high interest and wish of both partners;
- conflicts between parents and teachers;	- clear schedule for meetings;
	- constant parent involvement in the school's life
	- a better cooperation and communication;

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|---|--|
| - parents' negative attitudes, including lack of respect; | - contexts that encourage communication and cooperation; |
| - child's negative behaviour; | - objective information regarding child's activities. |
| - low parental involvement. | |
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3. Discussions

The results of the current paper reveal some important answers regarding the way that teachers should initiate discussions with parents in order to optimize their teaching activity.

Analyzing the answers it is evident that parents consider that the teacher has a huge influence on the quality of communication and cooperation. We also found out that parents and children consider important and very important the partnership between school and family. An important aspect revealed by the research is that all parents would like to know more things about the positive qualities of their children and there is an increased interest for a better communication with the teacher. It is necessary to outline that some of the participants are Members of the Parent Committee. Based on their answers, we can conclude that: they prefer parent meetings and weekly contexts of communication, they expect that the teacher initiates more frequently the conversations and feel that their suggestions are often taken into account by the teacher. None of the respondents prefer to be contacted through e-mail or notes. The research findings include educational realities that influence the educational practices regarding school-family partnership.

4. Conclusions

The main goal of the study was to identify effective ways to optimize school-family communication, starting from parents' attitudes regarding their actual collaboration with the teachers. Common goals by both school and family and positive interactions are necessary and beneficial. We may conclude that teachers should always listen and understand parents' opinions and needs and take responsible decisions to enhance school-family communication. One of the limits of this study is the fact that only the opinions of the parents were considered. The future studies could take into account teachers' opinions regarding school-family communication and include participants from Romanian urban areas.

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Appendix 1

Dear parents,

This tool has been created in order to be used in the research field. The research achieved has the purpose of offering solutions for the improvement of the relationship between parents and teachers from primary education. We would like you to answer our questions as sincerely as possible. The information collected is confidential and shall be used only with the purpose of research.

Survey regarding the efficiency in communication between school and family

Parents' age: ____ years

Member of the Parent Committee: Yes No

Studies: Higher education Secondary or postsecondary education General studies
 No general studies

Sex: Male Female

Number of children: ____ children

The grade of the child: Preparatory class Ist grade IInd III^d IVth

1. What is the most efficient form of communication between you and the teacher?
 - a) E-mail
 - b) Telephone
 - c) Parent meetings
 - d) Individual meetings
 - e) Notes or other written references
 - f) Other:
2. Who is the person that should initiate most frequently the communication between parents and teachers?
 - a) Parents
 - b) Teacher
3. How frequently do you communicate with your son's/ daughter's teacher?
 - a) Semestrial
 - b) Monthly
 - c) Weekly
4. What are your areas of interest?
 - a) The child's school results
 - b) The school behavior of the child
 - c) Strategies of improving the school results of students
 - d) Other:
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5. How do you communicate with the teacher?
 - a) Efficient
 - b) Inefficient
6. Are your opinions taken into consideration by the teacher?
 - a) Always
 - b) Often
 - c) Sometimes
 - d) Never
7. How do you appreciate the school results of your child?
 - a) Very good
 - b) Good
 - c) Poor
 - d) Very poor
8. How do you consider the future school results of your child to be?
 - a) Better than the ones he receives at present
 - b) Same as the ones he receives at present
 - c) Poorer than the ones he receives at present
9. How important is it for your son/ daughter the relationship you have with his/her teacher?
 - a) Very important
 - b) Important
 - c) Less important
 - d) Not important at all

10. How important it is to you to have a quality relationship with your child's teacher?
 - a) Very important
 - b) Important
 - c) Less important
 - d) Not important at all
11. Do you consider your child's teacher to always have an appropriate attitude towards you?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
12. Would you like to find out more about your child's qualities from his/ her teacher?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
13. How do you appreciate your relationship with the teacher of your son's/ daughter's class?
 - a) Very good
 - b) Good
 - c) Bad
 - d) Very bad
14. What do you consider to be the cause of conflicts that become more and more frequent between parents and teachers?

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15. What can the parents and teacher do in order to communicate more efficiently?

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