

School – Family Communication and the Expectations of the Actors Involved in it



Linguistics

Keywords: parental involvement in education, schools and families, teachers, pupils, etc.

Ardian Tana

University of Elbasan. Ministry of Education. Elbasan, Albania.

Abstract

"Families and teachers may wish that schools alone can perform its work. But, nowadays, the school needs families, as well as for families need school. In many ways this mutual need can be a great help to change".² The Albanian School has embarked on a process of reform since the 90s and has attempted to change and create another spirit of cooperation. This change relates to the consideration of the family as a partner, which means that the parties must be in reciprocity reports, dedicated to fulfilling the belonging duties and responsibilities. The conceptual change and the traditional practices of family involvement, in particular communication is a difficult process and that took time.

Introduction

The lack of a tradition of parental involvement in education is not a small gap for our school and its relationship with parents. Our schools before '90 did not see the parent as a partner and an important source of mutual support for realizing the goal of better education of the child. The only obligation of the school in this direction was to inform parents about the child's progress and certainly call the parent at school only in those cases when a problem in schools made evident any problems in behavior. Hermitizing a school was an ideological matter and overcoming this "wall" was impossible. A parent cannot overcome this "wall" only in extremely rare cases and at all it was embedded a belief that education matters are an exclusive right of school.

Under the influence of western school experience and the necessity of democratization of relations within and outside, the Albanian school of the last 20 years has tried to build relationships with parents and the community at large. For this purpose, the legal framework has been developed, which recognizes the school's obligation to cooperate and communicate with the family and community. Undergraduate Education Law (Article 62), Normative Provisions, School Inspection Manual, recognize its obligation to implement this interaction, so they do not leave it in the desire of the school. Thus, cooperation between school and family is not a spontaneous choice, but a duty. What school does not realize it must give account.

This shows the importance of legal obligation that institutions provide to the communication between school and family, but is it sufficient? To best facilitate this process it is imperative that stakeholders understand their role, but above all the role of this process in the child's progress and achievements in school, which is in fact the reason these parties are related to each other.

"The quality of interaction between school and family, instead of the amount of contacts, has been shown to have a positive impact on students' achievement and behavior" (Patrikakou&Weissberg, 1999).

² Rich, D. (1987). Schools and families: Issues and actions

To view the expectations of the stakeholders involved in the process of communication between school and family and their assessment of it, a survey was conducted with teachers and parents in the district of Elbasan.

Respondents were teachers / school administrators in basic schools and parents of students in grades 5-12 to these schools in the city and countryside.

Below there are some statistics on the number of schools, pupils and teachers in Elbasan district for the school year 2012-2013 (time when the survey was conducted).

Elbasani District	Basic Education	High School Education
Number of schools	101	32
Number of pupils	25497	10051
Number of teachers	1688	554

The general descriptive data on the sample

The number of respondents was 600 in total, of which 300 were teachers and 300 parents.

For the parent survey, the distribution of pupils by type of school was 86% (258) public, with 14% (41) private, and by gender there were 39% (117) female and 61% (183) male. The distribution of students by grade is as it follows:

Distribution of pupils by grade:

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total	Absentees	No.
Number of pupils	13	14	12	58	30	37	49	30	26	7	9	12	297	3	300

Distribution of parents who completed the report form was 194 mothers and 104 fathers, and among the respondents there was only one single parent.

Among the characteristics of the sample of parents, we mention parental education, where the distribution of results as it follows: 76 (25%) of primary or 8-form school, 125 (~ 41%) of secondary education and 99 (~ 33%) of higher education.

The location of parents and pupils were in favor of the city, with 65% (194) in the city and 35% (106) in the village. About 57% (171) of parents declared they were employed, while 42% declared they were unemployed.

Social characteristics of the sample of parents said they mostly highly educated parents are employed, while parents who live in the city are more likely to be employed.

300 teachers were surveyed, of which 85% female and 15% male, (94%) of them were employed in the public schools and in private schools only (6%). About 60% of teachers working in schools in the city, and 40% in villages.

To draw conclusions about the purpose of conducting this survey, there were faced the expectations of parents and teachers on school-family partnerships. These expectations form the main basis of an effective communication and dealing with the frequency of meetings, discussion of issues and forms of communication.

First, parents were asked about their involvement in communication with teachers. It is understood that this indicator reflects the perception of parents and not really observed contacts. The data show that a large part of the parents, about 85% of them feel themselves involved or very involved.

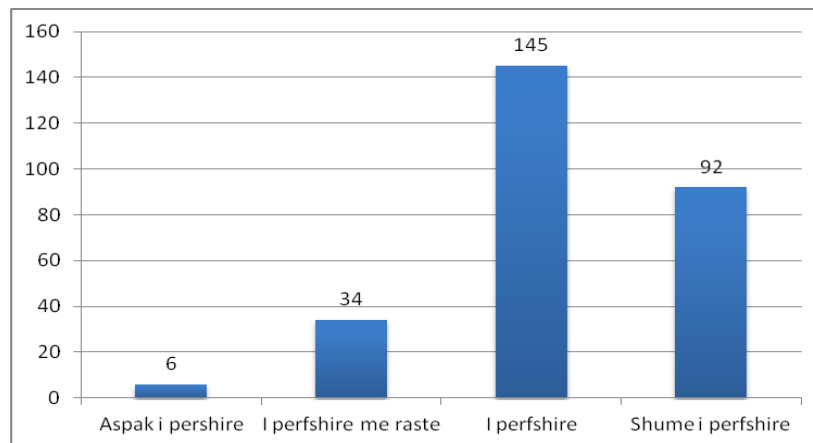


Figure 1: Parents' involvement

These results were confronted with the expectation that surveyed teachers' attitude about the usefulness of communication. Question (q.5) was developed through Likert scale (not at all useful, very useful). The survey shows that over 90% of teachers surveyed consider communication as very useful. These figures are similar to parental involvement in communication (85%), what gives us reason to conclude that parents and teachers alike appreciate the high usefulness of communication between them, which forms the main basis for engaging in a successful and effective communication.

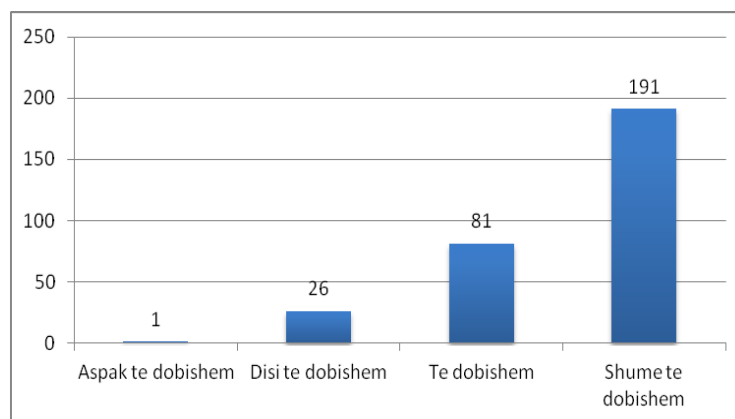


Figure 2: Q.5 How do teachers assess the usefulness of communication

To go beyond the interpretation of expectations it is important, especially for the target group of parents, to be faced up the importance parents showed in the survey, which can be a desired response, with their manifested behavior. For this, teachers were asked about the problems they face, where it turns out that among the problems with communication, teachers estimate that some parents are not involved enough. The evaluation of this claim was made by the question "How often do teachers face the problem that parents do not come to school meetings?" (Q. 8_1), indicated that only for about 26% of teachers it is regarded as a problem the absence of parents in scheduled school meetings.

Parents attending the scheduled school meetings					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	14	4.7	4.9	4.9
	Very rarely	61	20.3	21.3	26.1
	Rarely	122	40.7	42.5	68.6
	Usually	49	16.3	17.1	85.7
	Often	32	10.7	11.1	96.9
	Very often	9	3.0	3.1	100.0
	Total	287	95.7	100.0	
Missing	System	13	4.3		
Total		300	100.0		

From the theory it is assumed that the frequency of meetings between parents and teachers depends on the perception of stakeholders about the importance of certain issues. After all parents and teachers should have similar expectations on the outcome of the meeting. In this context it is important to become familiar with the issues and reasons that bring parents and teachers in order to organize meetings or communication. For the parents were asked what were the most common reasons that they contact the teachers that they need to rank in order of importance (Q. 9). The question was semi-structured, because it listed the main reasons that had to do with behavior, emotional state of pupils', outcomes and curriculum issues, but also left room to add other reasons that parents assessed as valid. The ranking was from 1-4, where 1 was the first and the last 4, valid for variable suggested by parents. The results of the query Q. 9 are interpreted based on the average it takes to construct each variable. The smaller the general average observed variable (nearly 1), the most important ranking it is. From the table below it is judged that parents appreciate most contacts for matters relating to pupils' behavior (average 2.11) and academic

outcomes (average 2.16). Communication issues of curriculum and teaching load is not seen as a very important issue from parents (about 4), but due to the relatively large value of the standard deviation (about ± 1.2), this result should be interpreted with reserves. Probably in the future this question will be further on explored to observe the concrete problems that concern parents and teachers.

	No.	Min.	Max.	Average	Dev. St.
Contact school/teachers concerning the behaviour	297	0	4	2.11	1.146
Contact school/teachers concerning the social/emotional state	296	0	4	2.70	1.032
Contact school/teachers concerning the results	295	0	4	2.16	1.143
Contact school/teachers concerning the issue of curricula/teaching load	291	0	4	3.14	1.197

Teachers were also asked about the main issues that they contact the parents about. Teachers should evaluate in order of importance, with a Likert scale from 1 (low) to 6 (high) the communication issue. Even here the average achieved for each variable is the basis of the interpretation of this construct. The table below shows that the main issues for teachers to communicate with parents are the ones dealing with the achievements of pupils (4.99) and behavior.

Descriptive Statistics (Q6:1-4)					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Issues concerning the behaviour (norms) of children	293	1	6	4.35	1.209
Issues concerning the social aspect or emotional welfare of the child	286	1	6	3.89	1.136
Issues concerning the curricula (teaching workload, tasks, etc)	289	1	6	3.96	1.233
Issues concerning the achievements of the child at learning.	297	2	6	4.99	.937

Conclusions

The data obtained from the analysis of questionnaires show that expectations of parents on the grounds of communication are similar both in terms of the usefulness of communication, but as well on major issues as reasons to engage in communication. The parties' expectations create the main basis of a successful communication and here the expectations meet in terms of importance granted by the parties to the mutual issues, the pupils' behaviour and academic achievement. It is clearly, that issues about which parents contact the school largely are confined mainly to the behavior of students and academic achievements. Their involvement in other issues, such as: curriculum, teaching loads, optional subjects, etc is almost negligible. In addition, given to the expectations of the parties it is also important to understand how they are prepared to implement this process. It is required to realize a richer offer school-family communication forms to make the process as quick, simple and easy to be realized. The preparation of the parties to implement the process is very important, thus, it should be dedicated the importance to training of teachers and parents. However, it should be assessed the fact that the evaluation of the process of communication between school and family are related to the parents, and the teachers and the parents do not feel excluded in this process. Both sides, but especially schools, should better utilize these expectations to become an important source for the benefit of the pupils' progress in school.

References

1. Sandra L. Christensen, Susan M. Sheridan. Schools and families *Creating Essential Connecting for Learning*.
2. Joyce L. Epstein. School, family and community partnerships *Preparing educators and improving schools*.
3. Robert E. Rockweel, Lynda C. Andre, Mary K. Hawley. Families and educators as partner.
4. Amy Truesdell. Building relationships: *A study of families, children and teachers*.
5. K. V. Hoover; Carol Gestwicki (2006). Family-school communication.
6. Carol Gestwicki (2006). Home, school and comunity relations.