

FORMS AND METHODS OF SCHOOL-FAMILY COOPERATION

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Abstract

Scientific studies in recent years have shown that school collaboration with parents is very important in their thinking about school and in the process of enhancing student outcomes. Children are more successful learners throughout school if their parents are involved in the school and encourage learning at home, regardless of their educational or social background (Epstein, 2001). School cooperation with the family influences the improvement of working conditions in the school, the improvement of the school climate, and assists teachers in their work with students. Practices show that not all possible forms and methods of school-family cooperation are in use. This paper aims to identify forms and methods of cooperation, the main causes of the dominance of traditional forms and methods of cooperation, attitudes, and practices of parents, principals, and teachers in this regard. For this purpose, research was done in PS "Naim Frashëri" -Tetovë, PS "Cyril and Methodius" -Tetovë, PS "Hasan Prishtina" - Shkup, PS "Monastery Congress" -Shkup, PS "Ismail Qemali" -Gostivar, PS "Goce Delcev" - Gostivar, PS "Sande Shterjoski" – Kërçovë and PS "Vladimir Polezhinoski" - Kërçovë. The research involved school principals 20 teachers, and 20 parents from each school. Data were compiled in SPSS, using the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and t-test. The results of the study show that although parental involvement is generally considered important, schools still lack an effective program to improve forms and methods of family cooperation, dominating traditional ones.

Keywords: forms of cooperation, methods of cooperation, school climate, student outcomes.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, educational research has provided a growing body of evidence regarding the importance of cooperation between the family and the school in the attainment of good educational results. In the 1980s, studies conducted as part of the school effectiveness movement gave prominence to this issue after it was determined that one of the characteristics of successful schools is families being strongly involved in the school life of their children and tending to participate actively in the school (Mortimore et al., 1988). Since then, many studies have highlighted that collaboration has beneficial effects not only for students but also for the families and schools themselves (Avvisati, Besbas & Guyon, 2010; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Halgunseth & Peterson, 2009). From a theoretical perspective, different conceptualizations exist about family-school collaboration (Repáraz & Naval, 2014) and proposals to systematize the dimensions that comprise it (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hornby, 1990; Kohl et al., 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Nordhal, 2006; Vogels, 2002). However, of the theoretical models proposed, the most widely used and disseminated has been the one devised by J. Epstein (1995, 2001), which identifies six modes of collaboration (Table 1). According to this author, these modes encompass actions that pose specific challenges for schools, but for which any school can develop initiatives to strengthen collaboration with families. (Egido Galvez, I. & Bertran Tarres, M. 2017)

Table 1. Modes of family-school collaboration in Epstein’s model

Mode	Definition
Helping parents with parenting	Help families establish conditions that favor study at home (health, nutrition, safety).
Communication	Design effective channels of communication with families regarding school programs and children’s progress.
Volunteering	Promote and organize voluntary assistance and support by parents in the classroom and in school activities.
Learning at home	Provide information to families to help students with homework, as well as the choices and decisions of an academic nature.
Decision-making	Involve parents in decision-making, developing their leadership, and participation in school associations and government and management bodies.
Collaborating with the Community	Identify and integrate community resources and services to strengthen school programs, family practices, and the development and learning of students.
Source: Adapted from Epstein, J. L. et al. (2009): <i>School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action</i> , 3rd. ed. Thousand Oaks: Corwin.	

What are family-school partnerships?

Family-school partnerships are collaborative relationships and activities involving school staff, parents, and other family members of students at a school. Effective partnerships are based on mutual trust and respect and shared responsibility for the education of the children and young people at the school. (Australian Government 2008, Family-school partnerships framework, a guide for schools and families, Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, Retrieved from: <http://www.familyschool.org.au/pdf/framework.pdf>)

Why are family-school partnerships important?

Families are the first educators of their children and they continue to influence their children’s learning and development during the school years and long afterward. Schools have an important responsibility in helping to nurture and teach future generations and families trust schools to provide educational foundations for their children’s future. At the same time, schools need to recognize the primary role of the family in education. This is why families and schools need to work together in partnership. Research demonstrates that effective schools have high levels of parental and community involvement. This involvement is strongly related to improved student learning, attendance, and behavior. Family involvement can have a major impact on student learning, regardless of the social or cultural background of the family. Family-school communication needs to be taken seriously and must be valued, recognized, and rewarded by schools and education systems. It is essential to provide teachers and school leaders with education and training programs to prepare them to communicate effectively with families in an approachable manner. It is equally important to empower and encourage families to communicate effectively with schools. (Australian Government 2008) School-parent collaboration is recognized as a key element in children’s overall development. Parents’ direct involvement in the learning environment of their children (particularly at a young age) increases their children’s motivation to perform well (Bowen, 1999; Broussard, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Grolnick et al., 2002; Marcon, 1999; Peña, 2000; Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997) and increases their attendance (Keith et al., 1998; Teasley, 2004; Zelman & Waterman,

1998).

Intervention by social workers encompasses five levels of collaboration that the former can initiate for the benefit of children, their families, and the relationship between parents and schools (Lawson et al. in Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Lawson & Barkdull, 2001).

1. Family-centred collaboration is based on the view that parents are experts in addressing their situation, and in taking concrete steps to involve them more actively in their children’s school life.
2. Intra-organizational collaboration solidifies the interdependence of existing school services. Social workers, for example, support teachers by developing individualized behavior-management and positive-reinforcement plans.
3. Inter-professional collaboration refers to all forms of joint initiatives addressing specific children’s problems.
4. Inter-agency collaboration entails referring families to appropriate community resources.
5. Community collaboration involves planning and coordinating resources and services in conjunction with community agencies, to the benefit of children and their families. (Drolet, M., Paquin, M., Soutyrine, M. 2006).

Professor Afërdita Deva-Zuna, in her book School-family-community partnership (Partneriteti shkollë-familje-komunitet), forms corporations divides into forms of direct cooperation and forms of indirect cooperation. According to her, the ways of accomplishing the forms of direct cooperation are parent meetings, meetings with interest groups, meetings with working couples, individual meetings, visits, conferences, tribunals, etc. Forms of indirect cooperation are fulfilled through electronic communication, phone calls, and written communication. (Deva-Zuna, 2009).

Professor Deva-Zuna divided the methods of cooperation into two groups: effective methods and ineffective methods of cooperation. The effective methods of cooperation include:

Verbal methods: the method of pre-speaking, the method of partnership conversation, metacommunication (conversation about the conversation):

1. The method of working with a text.
2. The method of written works
3. The method of graphic works and statistical methods
4. The project working method.

Ineffective partnership methods include:

1. Own skin method and
2. Partnership blast method. (Deva-Zuna, 2009)

Empirical aspect of the problem

For the needs of our research, we conducted a survey of directors, teachers, and parents in the Primary Schools “Hasan Prishtina” in Skopje, “Naim Frashëri”-Tetovo, “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” – Tetovo, “Ismail Qemali” - Gostivar, “Sande Shterjoski”- Kicevo, “Mito Gurra” Prima– Strelci, Municipality of Kicevo. The research involved 6 school directors, as well as 120 teachers and 120 parents, i.e. 20 teachers and parents from each school.

Table 2. Attitudes of directors on regular school meetings with parents

		Frequencies	%	% Valid	% Cumulative
Valid	Once a month	2	1.7	33.3	33.3
	Once every three months,	3	2.5	50.0	83.3
	Once a semester	1	.8	16.7	100.0
	Total	6	5.0	100.0	
Missing	System	114	95.0		
Total		120	100.0		

Table 2 shows the attitudes of school principals about regular school meetings, 50% have stated that parent meetings are held once in three months, 33.3% once a month, and 16.7% once in the semester.

Table 3. Teachers' attitudes on regular school meetings with parents

		Frequencies	%	% Valid	% Cumulative
Valid	Once a month	53	44.2	44.2	44.2
	Once every three months,	63	52.5	52.5	96.7
	Once a semester	2	1.7	1.7	98.3
	Not at all	2	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows the attitudes of teachers about regular school meetings, 52.5% have stated that parent meetings are held once in three months, 44.2% once a month, and 1.7% once in the semester.

Table 4. Parents' attitudes about regular school meetings with parents

		Frequencies	%	% Valid	% Cumulative
Valid	Once a month	53	44.2	44.2	44.2
	Once every three months,	63	52.5	52.5	96.7
	Once a semester	2	1.7	1.7	98.3
	Not at all	2	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 shows the attitudes of parents about regular school meetings, 68.3% have stated that parent meetings are held once in three months, 20% once a month, and 11.7% once in the semester.

As can be seen from Tables 2,3, and 4, the attitudes of directors, teachers, and parents regarding the realization of meetings with parents are identical, most of them claim that the meetings are held once every three months, which means that these meetings are mostly held after the end of the three months, the semester or at the end of the school year. The results show that we still do not have an intensification of meetings with parents, but these meetings continue to be carried out identically, as they were conducted in the past, or as inherited from generation to generation with the change of generations of teachers.

Table 5. Most discussed topics in meetings held at school according to directors

		Frequencies	%	% Valid	% Cumulative
Valid	Student Success	1	.8	16.7	16
	Discipline and regularity of students; Involvement of parents in extracurricular activities	5	4.2	83.3	100
	Total	6	5.0	100	100.0
Missing	system	114	95.0		

Table 5 shows the attitudes of school principals on the most discussed topics in meetings held at school, 83,3% of them stated that the most discussed topics in meetings held at school are discipline and regularity of students, 16.7% stated that the most discussed topics in meetings are student's success, and no one of them stated that the discussed topics in meetings are involvement of parents in extracurricular activities.

Table 6. Most discussed topics in meetings held at school according to teachers

		Frequencies	%	% Valid	% Cumulative
Valid	Student success	67	55.8	55.8	55.8
	Discipline and regularity of students;	45	37.5	37.5	93.3
	Involvement of parents in extracurricular activities	8	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 shows the attitudes of teachers toward most discussed topics in meetings held at school, 55.8% stated that the most discussed topics in meetings are students' success, and 37.5% of them stated that the most discussed topics in meetings held at school are discipline and regularity of students and 6.7% of them stated that the discussed topics in meetings are involvement of parents in extracurricular activities.

Table 7. Most discussed topics in meetings held at school according to parents

		Frequencies	%	% Valid	% Cumulative
Valid	Student success	76	63.3	63.3	63.3
	Discipline and regularity of students;	36	30.0	30.0	93.3
	Involvement of parents in extracurricular activities	8	6.7	6.7	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 shows the attitudes of parents toward most discussed topics in meetings held at school, 63.3% stated that the most discussed topics in meetings are students' success, and 30% of them stated that the most discussed topics in meetings held at school are discipline regularity of students and 6.7% of them stated that the discussed topics in meetings are involvement of parents in extracurricular activities.

From tables 5, 6, and 7 we notice that, unlike teachers and parents who claim that the most discussed topic in parental gatherings/meetings is student success, directors claim that it is the success and regularity of students, which means that school directors very rarely or very few attend these meetings. It is also noted that the involvement of parents in extracurricular activities is minimal, the statements of directors in this regard are that they are not included at all, which means that the presence of parents in school life is very low and that our schools remain closed for cooperation with parents.

Table 8. Directors' opinions regarding the organization of excursions, picnics, and parties with the attendance of parents

		Frequencies	%	% Valid	% Cumulative
Valid	A few	4	3.3	66.7	66.7
	A lot	2	1.7	33.3	100.0
	Total	6	5.0	100.0	
Missing	System	114	95.0		
Total		120	100.0		

Table 8 shows the opinions of school principals regarding the organization of excursions, picnics, and parties with the attendance of parents, 66,7% of them stated that they have a few attendances of parents, and 33.3%

stated that they have a lot of attendance of parents

Table 9.

		Frequencies	%	% Valid	% Cumulative
Valid	Not at all	19	15.8	15.8	15.8
	A few	56	46.7	46.7	62.5
	A lot	45	37.5	37.5	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Table 9 shows the opinions of teachers regarding the organization of excursions, picnics, and parties with the attendance of parents, 46,7% of them stated that they have a few attendances of parents, 37.5% stated that that they have a lot of attendance of parents and 15.8% of them stated that they have not at all attendance of parents.

Table 10. Parents' opinions regarding the organization of excursions, picnics, and parties with their attendance

		Frequencies	%	% Valid	% Cumulative
Valid	Not at all	36	30.0	30.0	30.0
	A few	60	50.0	50.0	80.0
	A lot	24	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Table 10 shows the opinions of teachers regarding the organization of excursions, picnics, and parties with the attendance of parents, 46,7% of them stated that they have a few attendances of parents, 37.5% stated that that they have a lot of attendance of parents and 15.8% of them stated that they have not at all attendance of parents. Tables 8, 9, and 10 show that the attitudes of directors, teachers, and parents regarding the organization of excursions, picnics, and parties with the participation of parents are identical, most of them claim that these organizations are few. This is another proof of the closure of schools about cooperation with the family.

Table 11. Directors' opinions regarding the organization of counseling activities with parents

		Frequencies	%	% Valid	% Cumulative
Valid	Once every three months	5	4.2	83.3	83.3
	As is needed	1	.8	16.7	100.0
	Total	6	5.0	100.0	
Missing	System	114	95.0		
Total		120	100.0		

Table 11 shows the opinions of school principals regarding the organization of counseling activities with a parent, 83,3% of them stated that they have once every three months and 16.7% stated that they have as is needed.

Table 12. Teachers' opinions regarding the organization of counseling activities with parents

		Frequencies	%	% Valid	% Cumulative
Valid	Once a month	14	11.7	11.7	11.7
	Once every three months	78	65.0	65.0	76.7
	As is needed	28	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Table 12 shows the opinions of teachers regarding the organization of counseling activities with a parent, 65% of them stated that they have once every three months, 11.7% of them stated that they have once a month and 23.3% stated that they have as is needed.

Table 13. Parents' opinions about organizing counseling activities with them

		Frequencies	%	% Valid	% Cumulative
Valid	Once a month	42	35.0	35.0	35.0
	Once every three months	67	55.8	55.8	90.8
	As is needed	11	9.2	9.2	100.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0	

Tables 11, 12, and 13 show that both director and teachers' and parents' opinions regarding the organization of counseling activities with parents are identical, so the statement "once in three months" dominates, which reflects the real situation in our schools. This advice come out as a result of the legal obligation of schools at the end of the three months, the semester, or at the end of the school year, rather than reflecting the readiness of schools to assist parents on how to help or support their children when are at home.

2. Final reviews

The research results show that the most common forms of school cooperation with the family are direct forms, with the dominance of parent meetings. It is also noticed that the method of working with projects is practiced very little, and the participation of parents in various manifestations in school, and creative workshops are very low. The results also show that indirect forms of cooperation with the family are practiced very little. For this reason, it is necessary to share responsibilities to make the forms and methods of cooperation to become more effective, especially as this strengthens and expands existing school improvement initiatives.

For this reason, it is necessary to share responsibilities to make the forms and methods of cooperation more effective, especially as this strengthens and expands existing school improvement initiatives. Parental involvement in schoolwork and life can have an impact on increasing student outcomes in all classes. This is because culture, socio-economic background, and family characteristics influence the degree of parental involvement in cooperation with the school. Minority cultures, lower-income families, and families with one parent are less involved in cooperating with the school, compared to middle-class families and this means they will have less of an impact on their children's achievements. Real parental involvement is a term that requires dialogue between teachers and parents and this dialogue should be built based on sincere, open, and transparent cooperation. The principles of mutual respect and trust are fundamental for creating effective partnership programs.

Recommendations

- The Ministry of Education and Science needs to cooperate with the Municipalities to find mechanisms to support the implementation of contemporary forms and methods of parental involvement in school;
- The Bureau for Development of Education needs to cooperate with schools to conduct teacher training regarding the establishment of the partnership process with parents;
- The Bureau for the Development of Education needs to compile a Handbook for schools regarding the active involvement of parents in the school;
- Schools should pay attention to the professional development of teachers to promote the effective involvement of parents in the education of children;

- The school should organize conferences and tribunes to inform parents about the curriculum so that they can help, to support students more at home, during the period they are studying, to do homework or carry out practical work.
- Schools should treat parents as equal partners, including them in the decision-making process, as well as in the implementation of extracurricular activities, and in certain cases also in teaching.
- The school should consider the possibility of parental involvement in cooperation with the school through forms of voluntarism.
- The school should encourage and provide the community and families with closer student-centered collaboration.

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