



PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AS A MEANS OF PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL WORK

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Abstract

Effective communication between parents and teachers results in numerous benefits for all participants in the communication process and, consequently, for the child. The aim of the research was to determine the perceptions of parents and teachers about what constitutes effective communication. For this purpose, 156 primary school teachers and 163 parents in the Republic of Croatia responded to the Murphy questionnaire via Google Forms. The questionnaire consists of two parts: a sociodemographic part and a part of questions that include parental involvement and teacher-parent interaction. The purpose of the research was to guarantee the respondents' anonymity and allow them to withdraw at any time. The research reveals that primary school teachers fail to meet parents' expectations in communication, emphasizing the need to improve regular communication and plan curriculum components that include ways of parental involvement through various means of communication. This research emphasizes the importance of effective communication and parental involvement in the educational environment, which would contribute to the development of partnership relationships.

Keywords: *effective communication, parental involvement, school-family partnership, primary education*

Introduction

In educational institutions, the quality of the relationship between parents and teachers is shaped by a range of factors, including two-way and open communication (Hornby, 2000), mutual trust, voluntary parental engagement, aligned values in the upbringing and education of the child, and ultimately, a shared focus on the child's well-being (Epstein et al., 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & O'Connor, 2002; Hornby & Greaves, 2022). The researchers emphasize that active parental participation in school activities contributes to improving children's academic success (Jeynes, 2024; Li & Vachon, 2023; Ogg & Anthony, 2020; Otani, 2020; Yu et al., 2022), as well as benefits for teachers and parents. Furthermore, quality relationships among adults operating in the child's environment significantly contribute to children's development (Bierman & Sheridan, 2022). In the process of involving parents in the school, it is of utmost importance for teachers to understand parents' expectations regarding the educational system (Alharthi, 2023; Brušine et al., 2014; Jeynes, 2024).

Hornby and Greaves (2022) highlighted the importance of considering parents' expectations through the lens of Hornby's model of involvement, which emphasizes that parental involvement is based on respecting the needs of both teachers and parents, as well as on equality in decision-making that is significant for the child's development (Hornby, 2000). Rattenborg et al. (2019) stressed the need for jointly establishing rules regarding responsibility towards the child, as well as for clearly defining the roles of parents and teachers within the school environment. Epstein et al. (2002) believed it is crucial to define the strengths and weaknesses of the interaction between parents and teachers, and to establish a vision of the school that is oriented towards actively involving parents. To make the interaction between parents and teachers as effective as possible, Hoover-Dempsey and O'Connor (2002) suggested guidelines for schools that would encourage more frequent parental involvement in school activities. One of these guidelines encompasses the importance of direct and clear communication with parents about the significance of their involvement, including creating opportunities for interactive communication and valuing parents' suggestions and ideas.

Major (2023) emphasized the critical importance of communication between parents and teachers in promoting favorable outcomes associated with parental involvement. Within the context of qualitative research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 31 educators working in primary schools, and the subsequent analysis was performed using Atlas.ti software. The findings indicate that regular communication, the utilization of a shared language, a positive disposition from both parties, and the judicious application of information and communication technology tools are vital for effective communication. Moreover, it is essential to provide parents with feedback regarding the results of their involvement and its influence on their child's educational achievements, as well as to enhance the communication skills of both teachers and parents (Amanova, 2023; De Coninck et al., 2023), which are integral to fostering effective communication.

Effective Communication Between Parents and Teachers

A person is inherently a social being, possessing an intrinsic need to communicate in various forms. Each spoken word that constitutes communication embodies a specific thought and concept that the speaker intends to convey regarding a particular situation or issue (Watzlawick, 1978). The interlocutor may either concur with or contest the message received; consequently, the participants in the dialogue may hold differing perspectives on the content of the communication. A shared understanding of messages fosters effective communication, which is a developmental process essential for cultivating mutual relationships (Bierman & Sheridan, 2022; Deslandes et al., 2023). The effectiveness of communication between teachers and parents is influenced by a multitude of factors, including the utilization of contemporary communication tools as an optimal strategy for enhancing the partnership between educational institutions and families (Bocoş & Marin, 2022; Kraft & Bolves, 2021; Major, 2023), as well as the motivation of both teachers and parents to engage in reciprocal communication (Hardiansyah & Zainuddin, 2023). Mutual beliefs about the importance of communication can improve relationships between parents and teachers (Abubakari, 2020; Bordialba & Bochaca, 2019; Lyu, 2023; Wasserman & Zwebner, 2017; Wu et al., 2023).

Hardiansyah and Zainuddin (2022) underscored the notion that the efficacy of communication between teachers and parents significantly enhances the impact of teachers. The participants in their study indicate that such communication can occur through a variety of channels, including telephone calls, internet platforms, chat applications, electronic mail, written correspondence, meetings, and workshops. Moreover, the findings of the study reinforce the critical role of communication as a determinant in the attainment of organizational objectives. Consequently, it is imperative for educational institutions to prioritize the communication

between parents and teachers, as any existing communication gap may adversely affect the performance outcomes of the school.

The findings of an ethnographic study conducted by Conus & Fahrni (2019) within a Swiss educational setting illuminated a prevailing paradox that bears adverse consequences for the development of the family-school relationship. Teachers often embrace the communication principle that "no news is good news," thereby placing the onus on parents to initiate interactions. However, parents not only anticipate that teachers will take the initiative in these communications but also encounter numerous structural and socio-emotional obstacles that impede effective dialogue. The authors, drawing upon their research findings, assert that educational institutions and teachers must reevaluate their roles in routine communication and strive to eliminate barriers in alignment with the communication needs of parents.

Leenders et al. (2019) asserted the significance of fostering robust relationships between parents and teachers. Their research, which encompasses 55 interviews conducted with teachers across various educational institutions, reveals that two-way communication is predominantly employed in schools characterized by a heightened risk of peer violence. Furthermore, the findings indicate that teachers often encounter challenges in engaging parents in the decision-making processes pertaining to specialized care for their children. The authors highlighted that the efficacy of the relationship between teachers and parents is most pronounced when addressing specific topics of discussion. They underscore the necessity for teachers to cultivate a heightened awareness of their professional responsibilities, thereby alleviating any difficulties associated with two-way communication and mitigating apprehensions related to addressing conflicts involving students.

Vasarik Staub et al. (2023) explored the dynamics of communication and collaboration between educational institutions that have implemented personalized learning concepts and the families of their students. A qualitative analysis of a longitudinal mixed-methods research project resulted in the development of an analytical instrument based on the study of partnerships between schools and families. This instrument encompasses five key communication and collaboration structures, including a channel for two-way information exchange and collaboration, the flow of information from schools to parents, a core event, parent volunteering, and parental involvement in decision-making. Three types of schools have been identified, differing according to the dominant forms of communication and collaboration: informal communication and collaboration, reactive communication and collaboration, and strategic communication and collaboration. Moreover, it is imperative to guide parental engagement towards matters pertaining to education and to guarantee that parents are afforded the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.

The findings of the research by Chatzinikola (2022) indicated that teachers regard the invitation for parents to visit the school as exceedingly important. Moreover, it is deemed essential to communicate with parents through various channels, including telephone, email, or informational messages. Additionally, both principals and elementary school teachers underscore the significance of the initial meeting between teachers and parents within the school setting. The primary objective of this meeting is to provide parents with timely information regarding the school's mission. It is conveyed to parents that both teachers and parents share a collective responsibility for the students' academic progress. Furthermore, Chatzinikola (2021) highlighted that active listening constitutes a fundamental skill in effective communication, which teachers employ in their interactions with the parents of their students. The empirical research involved 222 teachers and 33 principals of elementary school departments. Teachers emphasized that in their communication with parents, they apply active listening, accept parental statements, maintain a neutral stance, and show empathy in order to share their thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, during the application of active listening as a skill for effective communication between teachers and parents, teachers highlighted the importance of their verbal interventions.

In this way, they ask open and closed questions for clarification and repeat key points made by parents without expressing personal opinions. During their verbal positioning, teachers first highlight the positive traits of the children and then focus on their learning weaknesses.

Stamatis and Chatzinikola (2021) examined the barriers that hinder communication between teachers and parents. In this study, two hundred and twenty-two teachers and thirty-three primary school principals participated, highlighting the importance of communication with parents. According to their findings, this communication contributes to creating a sense of security among students, as well as improving their learning and behavioral skills. Teachers are convinced that effective communication between teachers and parents benefits the school unit itself, thereby increasing its overall effectiveness. However, teachers have identified several reasons that complicate communication with parents. These reasons include parents' lack of time to visit the school department, low social or educational background of the parents, as well as poor performance or behavior of their children. Teachers do not agree with the claim that the structure of the educational system poses a barrier to their communication with parents, emphasizing. Ultimately, teachers contend that guidance is of paramount importance, as it serves to mitigate challenges that obstruct effective communication between teachers and parents.

Research Focus

This research focuses on identifying the effective communication between parents and educational professionals. Starting from the premise that communication is a potential source of problems but also solutions, identifying communication patterns between parents and educational professionals provides a valid scientific and research framework for further scholarly research of this issue, as well as practical actions within the educational institutions themselves.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this research was to ascertain how parents and teachers in the Republic of Croatia view effective communication, whether they have different opinions about the elements that contribute to the communication process, and whether these elements influence parents' involvement in schoolwork. Specifically, the research aimed to answer these questions:

1. What are the differences between parents and teachers in their perceptions of the frequency of use of various communication channels?
2. Do parents and teachers differ in their emotional responses towards different communication modalities?

Research Methodology

General Background

Students achieve academic success and emotional growth when parents communicate effectively with their teachers. Combining open communication with regular updates leads to increased parental involvement, producing better student results (Epstein et al., 2002; Hornby & Greaves, 2022). The relationship between parents and teachers suffers when their educational expectations differ (Conus & Fahrni, 2019). The key components of successful communication consist of trust between parties, attentive listening, straightforward feedback and multiple communication channels, including email, phone and digital platforms (Kraft & Bolves, 2021; Major, 2023). Structural and social barriers and conflicting views on communication frequency and effectiveness create ongoing challenges (Leenders et al., 2019). The study examines how

Croatian primary school parents and teachers define effective communication to develop better strategies for enhancing school-family partnerships.

The research was conducted using a quantitative methodology. The data collected through structured questionnaires provided valuable insights into the perceptions of both parents and teachers regarding their communication practices. The data collection was carried out between April and October 2024.

Sample

The research sample consisted of 156 primary school teachers (145 women – 92.9%, 11 men – 7.1%, 114 urban – 73.1%, 42 rural – 26.9%) and 163 parents (153 women – 94%, 10 men – 6%, 135 urban – 82.8%, 28 rural – 17.2%) from various regions in Croatia. The sample size was determined based on accessibility and previous studies (Mestry & Grobler, 2007; Patton, 2019) with similar sample ranges, aiming to ensure adequate statistical power for non-parametric comparative analysis. The sampling was non-probabilistic, and the sample included diversity in participants' gender and geographical location (urban/rural), contributing to the findings' credibility and transferability.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting primary schools and parent networks. Before conducting research, principals in 31 Croatian schools were contacted for agreement for their teachers and parents of children from that school to participate in the research. 12 schools refused to participate, while the rest agreed to proceed with our invitation to parents and teachers. To participate in research, potential participants must meet research inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria required that participants (a) be current primary school teachers or parents of children enrolled in Croatia and (b) express a willingness to participate voluntarily in the research. This ensured that all respondents had direct experience with the communication processes under investigation. Everyone who signed an agreement for participation and provided their e-mail address got an online invitation for research participation. In total, 977 e-mails were sent. 416 participants filled out a questionnaire, while 319 were valid. Declined and uninvolved questionnaires were not used in further research because of repeated answers.

Participants were guaranteed anonymity, the use of data for scientific purposes was explained to them, and they were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason.

Instrument and Procedures

The research instrument consisted of two parts. The first part included a sociodemographic questionnaire that gathered data on participants' gender, role, and place of residence.

The second part was a translated and adapted version of Murphy's (2009) questionnaire, designed to assess parent-teacher communication and parental involvement. The questionnaire was translated into Croatian using the back-translation method to ensure linguistic accuracy and conceptual equivalence (Harkness et al., 2004). It contained 21 items measuring the frequency and satisfaction with various communication channels, including informal meetings, telephone, mobile phone, email, and individual meetings.

Participants responded using a 4-point Likert scale for frequency (1 – never, 2 – sometimes, 3 – often, 4 – very often) and satisfaction (1 – never, 2 – sometimes, 3 – frequently, 4 – very often).

Separate versions of the questionnaire were developed for teachers and parents and adapted to reflect their specific roles in the communication process. While the core structure remained similar, certain items were modified to suit each group's perspective. Both groups used the same Likert-type questionnaires.

Two independent experts in educational communication reviewed the questionnaire to ensure content validity, thus confirming that the items accurately represent the construct being measured and are appropriate and relevant for the target population. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with results indicating high internal consistency: $\alpha = .89$ for teachers and $\alpha = .92$ for parents.

Data were collected through an *online* Google Forms survey between April and October 2024.

Data Analysis

The participants' sociodemographic data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in percentages. Inferential statistics were used to examine differences between the two groups, employing non-parametric statistical tests. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was applied to examine the normality of the data distribution. The results indicated a non-normal distribution, which justified the use of non-parametric statistical procedures.

The Mann–Whitney U test was utilized to compare the differences in perceptions of communication between teachers and parents. This test is appropriate for comparing two unpaired groups when a normal distribution cannot be assumed.

The collected data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0 (SPSS, Chicago, IL, USA).

Research Results

The Mann–Whitney *U* test was conducted to analyze differences in communication frequency (Table 1). Results revealed statistically significant differences in several variables, with teachers reporting more frequent communication than parents. The data indicate that teachers consistently reported more frequent use of communication methods, especially regarding telephone calls and electronic communication, where the differences reached the highest level of statistical significance ($p < .001$).

Table 1
Differences in Communication Frequency

Variables	Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>
Telephone communication frequency	Parents	2.25	0.88	8277.5	21643.5***
	Teachers	2.85	0.97		
Individual meetings frequency	Parents	3.00	0.82	12461.0	25827.0
	Teachers	3.04	0.75		
Written communication frequency	Parents	2.49	0.84	11815.5	25181.5
	Teachers	2.60	0.86		
Outgoing calls	Parents	1.72	0.64	6823.5	20189.5***
	Teachers	2.40	0.77		
Non-formal meetings	Parents	1.58	0.77	9663.0	23029.0***
	Teachers	1.97	0.91		
E-communication (e-mail, web)	Parents	2.93	0.92	8321.0	21687.0***
	Teachers	3.49	0.77		
Communication frequency (overall)	Parents	2.67	0.82	8757.5	22123.5***
	Teachers	3.12	0.73		

$p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

In the second part of the analysis, emotional responses to different communication modalities were assessed using the Mann–Whitney U test (Table 2). An analysis of the data revealed that only one variable showed a statistically significant difference in the context of feelings and communication between teachers and parents. Parents reported significantly more positive perceptions of outgoing calls ($M = 2.73$) than teachers ($M = 2.47$). This difference suggests that teachers may feel less comfortable initiating contact with parents than vice versa regarding outgoing phone calls. Conversely, the lack of significant differences in perceptions of communication suggests a general agreement on the effectiveness of most communication channels. This may indicate a similar comfort level in using various forms of communication and could also reflect common expectations regarding communication practices.

Table 2
Differences in Feelings About Different Ways of Communication

Variables	Group	M	SD	U	Z
Important information	Parents	2.77	0.70	12159.5	25525.5
	Teachers	2.82	0.82		
Written communication	Parents	2.82	0.72	12443.0	25809.0
	Teachers	2.85	0.84		
Telephone communication	Parents	2.61	0.82	11478.5	23724.5
	Teachers	2.45	0.85		
Outgoing calls	Parents	2.73	0.83	10576.5	22822.5**
	Teachers	2.47	0.85		
Non-formal communication	Parents	2.77	0.86	11759.5	25125.0
	Teachers	2.88	0.83		
Communicating via e-mail/web	Parents	2.90	0.79	11699.0	25065.0
	Teachers	3.01	0.82		
Communication in general	Parents	2.83	0.79	12173.0	25539.5
	Teachers	2.86	0.82		
Speaking important information	Parents	2.83	0.78	11743.0	23989.0
	Teachers	2.86	0.81		
Discussing pupil-specific issues	Parents	2.82	0.76	12033.5	24279.5
	Teachers	2.70	0.77		
Phone conversations regarding issues	Parents	2.21	0.91	12654.5	24900.5
	Teachers	2.17	0.80		
Informal problem discussions	Parents	2.23	0.87	12236.0	24482.0
	Teachers	2.15	0.79		
Digital problem communication	Parents	2.39	0.90	12080.5	24326.5
	Teachers	2.30	0.84		

$p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

Discussion

This research aimed to evaluate the perception of effective communication between teachers and parents in primary schools. Previous research by Hardiansyah and Zainuddin (2022) recognized that communication between parents and teachers can occur through various communication tools (such as the Internet, telephone, email, and informal meetings). From the current research results, it is important to highlight that teachers have a more positive

perception of the frequency of communication with parents regarding all communication tools. Among these tools, individual meetings were the most frequently used by teachers and parents ($M_{\text{parents}} = 3.00$; $M_{\text{teachers}} = 3.04$). This finding could also have a potential regarding findings by Conus and Fahrni (2019), who determined that the relationship between school and family develops most effectively during face-to-face interactions, indicating that Croatian parents most frequently use the communication tool with the most significant potential for enhancing the effectiveness of the teacher-parent partnership. On the other hand, informal meetings were not rated as positively by teachers and parents in this study, despite their recognized potential in developing school-family relationships, according to Conus and Fahrni (2019). The elementary school environment could explain the lower number of informal meetings. Specifically, Murray et al. (2014) concluded in their research that the mode of communication from teachers to parents varies depending on the educational setting; individual meetings are more frequent in primary school environments, while informal gatherings and parent newsletters are more common in preschool settings.

A more detailed analysis of the frequency of communication tools used indicates that teachers rated the frequency of phone calls more positively ($M = 2.85$) compared to parents ($M = 2.25$), with a statistically significant difference ($Z = 21643.5$; $p < .001$). Additionally, teachers rated the frequency of outgoing calls more positively ($M = 2.40$) compared to parents ($M = 1.72$), and this difference is also statistically significant ($Z = 20189.5$; $p < .001$). Furthermore, teachers assessed the frequency of informal meetings more positively ($M = 1.97$) compared to parents ($M = 1.58$), again with a statistically significant difference ($Z = 23029.0$; $p < .001$). The fact that teachers perceive greater frequency of communication with parents than parents do can be explained by the continued traditional approach where teachers are the ones who initiate collaboration, which primarily relies on individual meetings (Bošnjaković & Galeković, 2022; cf. Hornby & Greaves, 2022). The previously mentioned perception could also be due to the “no news is good news” communication principle mentioned by Conus and Fahrni (2017).

Major (2023) also acknowledged the beneficial impact of communication between parents and teachers on parental involvement. Results of this research suggested that teachers generally rate the frequency of communication with parents more positively ($M = 3.12$; $p < .001$) compared to the assessment of parents ($M = 2.67$; $p < .001$). Murphy (2009) corroborated similar findings; his research revealed that teachers typically assess a greater frequency of successful communication compared to parents. Conus and Fahrni (2019) deemed it essential to adapt the frequency of communication between teachers and parents to better cater to parents' communication needs. Accordingly, it is relevant to consider the results of this research, which showed that parents *rate the communication frequency more negatively than teachers*. This discrepancy highlights the importance of fostering a more collaborative dialogue between educators and families. By addressing these differing perceptions, schools can implement strategies that enhance parental involvement and ensure that communication is not only frequent but also meaningful and effective. The results are significant, as prior research by Stamatis and Chatzinikola (2021) has acknowledged the frequency and importance of communication, noting that it fosters a sense of security for students, enhances their learning abilities, and improves their behavior. Moreover, fostering a positive relationship between educators and families can lead to improved student outcomes, as parents feel more empowered to support their children's education. This partnership not only benefits academic performance but also promotes a holistic approach to student well-being, reinforcing the idea that education is a collaborative endeavor. Conversely, Abubakari's (2020) research indicated that parents and teachers seek more frequent communication, which contrasts with these findings, as parents evaluated communication more unfavorably than teachers.

Teachers also rated the frequency of communication via email and websites more positively ($M = 3.49$) compared to parents ($M = 2.93$), with a statistically significant difference

($Z = 21687.0$; $p < .001$). Previous research by Halsey (2005) showed that both sides can become discouraged if the perceived communication efforts differentiate. Regarding communication through digital tools, Abubakari (2020) and Bordalba & Bochaca (2019) found that both parents and teachers consider digital media useful tools and desire their greater integration into school-family communication for faster and easier information flow. Although our research did not find a statistically significant difference in attitudes towards using digital media for communication, there is a slightly more positive attitude from teachers ($M = 3.01$) compared to parents ($M = 2.90$) regarding their use.

Regarding differences in feelings about different ways of communication, a statistically significant difference was found in the assessments for the category of outgoing calls ($Z = 22822.5$; $p < .01$). Parents have a more positive perception of outgoing calls directed toward teachers ($M = 2.73$) compared to teachers ($M = 2.47$). These results may be because making individual outgoing calls is time-consuming for teachers. On the other hand, parents may find that making calls to teachers helps them resolve their issues more quickly. Previously stated results differ from the results of Murphy's (2009) research, which concluded, based on a sample of parents, that calls are not always necessary and that parents believe other methods of communication are more effective, thus avoiding the need to burden teachers with calls. This is likely because communication with teachers via other channels is satisfactory, reducing the need for calls. In Murphy's (2009) study, parents preferred email and text messages.

Conclusions and Implications

Effective communication between the sender and the recipient of a message allows for honest and open communication. It is an example of the interchange of ideas, thoughts, and information in which the recipient receives the information in exactly the same form as the sender did. When giving negative feedback, this is particularly crucial because it is the exact thing that might endanger relationships over time. Effective communication makes it possible to focus even criticism and attempts to change someone's behavior on fostering and improving connections with others. The obtained results of this research indicate a clear need for further research into this issue, especially since communication can be considered crucial for establishing good relationships and partnerships between teachers and parents, as well as between schools and families in general. Accordingly, the practical implications of these findings suggest that identifying communication patterns at the micro-level is necessary to define an optimal communication framework, considering both the comprehensiveness of communication methods and acceptable forms and channels of communication.

The limitations of this research are in the lack of more precise parameters that would determine the effectiveness of communication between parents and teachers, which would provide a more in-depth understanding of this phenomenon. Future research should focus on more specific observations of this issue and a more detailed study of the effectiveness of teacher-parent communication. Systematic research on parental involvement in school activities will help reduce barriers to school-family partnership and ensure the positive effects of parental involvement on children.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no competing interest.

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