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Parent – Teacher voices in Kosovo schools

A micro-study on parental involvement in Kosovo context

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Abstract. Parent involvement is crucial element in the successful child home learning, involving a multitude of duties and responsibilities. Studies of successful schools found that the role of parents in children's education is irreplaceable and of paramount importance, therefore it is the most accurate predictor of a child's success in school. Recent data shows that the majority of research agree to the point that despite many strides made by schools to get things better, there are hindered barriers either coming from the family as well as from the school. Creating a sustainable collaborative partnership seems to be the biggest challenge faced by practitioners engaged in school reform, as many schools continue to struggle with defining and measuring substantial parent involvement. This study is a preliminary attempt to investigate, analyze and assess the parents' education level, employment status, mother/father involvement and other specific aspects that may affect child's home learning. Teacher perceptions on this relation were used as supplementing part of the study. A group of 100 parents and 10 primary school teachers constituted the sample of the study. Two types of questionnaire were designed, each containing specific questions. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. It is the researchers hope that this study will give voice to Kosovo parents in creating more collaborative efforts and in turn more successes for children as they continue on their educational journey.

Keywords: parent involvement, teacher, learning, school, Kosovo education system.

1. Introduction

Education of every child begins from home. The education and socialization aspects are a shared responsibility between home and school. Michael Fullan (2000) thinks education is useless unless it has a moral purpose. Only with moral purpose teachers can make a difference in the lives of students, regardless their background. However, many parents believe that their children's education should be entirely left in the hands of teachers. Teachers share different views on this concept. Some view the concept from a more pessimistic angle. For some of them parent involvement is just another modest effort in search for general guidance, whilst others consider the topic more seriously by creating actual conditions and space for them to be more involved in their child home learning driven by the belief that they are very useful assets.

The first attempt to explore the topic surfaced with the work of Buchanan and coworkers (1969) examining the relationship between parent involvement and student learning outcomes in the late 1960's. The concept of parental involvement became even more explored and known when problems in society worsened, the education was tinkering, and a breakthrough was needed to make necessary changes in education. This breakthrough resulted with a first mandate that came with Education, Children Act (EAHCA) demanding schools to enhance collaboration with parents of disabled children in the US and produced a considerable amount of research that argued the benefits of family involvement in schools (Auerbach, 2009; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004; Martin et al., 1999) therefore, changes in laws and policies began to be implemented globally, encouraging schools to foster parents to become more attached to their institutions.

Nowadays this concept is considered an essential component of every educational institution. Unlike other countries in Kosovo this concept is merely explored and results low, despite the fact that there are proper laws, regulations and policies in place. The law for pre-university education in the Republic of Kosovo considers parents as important stakeholders and recognizes their right to get organized and represent their interest in decision making processes related to quality education of their children. The last two decades were categorized by an unprecedented move to bring about radical changes to the way education was conceptualized and reformed. A new reformation framework was introduced with the purpose to meet the needs of Kosovar children. Questioning the issue of partnership and involvement of parents in Kosovo school, KEC (2009-2010), conducted a preliminary study and found a number of problems, including socially excluded parents, lack of proper information and communication means and lack of proper collaboration strategies in schools. Although some progress has been made in the recent years, MEST document on strategic planning (2017-2021) re-confirms the existing problems with gap in parent-teacher relations and parent involvement in Kosovo schools and sets it as a priority target for improvement in order to ensure proper education and quality assurance.

If we observe the current practices encountered in primary schools and the feedback from teachers and specifically data obtained from parent questionnaire we can by reason presume that parent-teacher relations in our schools are more sort of an imposed phenomenon that occurs unwillingly and unconsciously rather than a carefully planned and maintained school strategy, as the data obtained from parent questionnaire confirms evident lack of opportunities for parental involvement in Kosovo schools.

Statement of the problem

The intend of this study is to uncover some of the attitudes and perceptions and provide a more accurate picture of parent involvement, as well as understanding the barriers to increased involvement in Kosovo schools.

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- Explore the current parent -teacher relation in Kosovo schools.
- Explore parent education level with respect to their involvement in parent-teacher relations.
- Explore employment status with respect to their involvement in parent-teacher relations.
- Explore father versus mother with respect to their involvement in parent-teacher relations.
- Measure the level of difficulty that parents face, when trying to be part of the process.
- Identify factors that influence a child's home learning.
- Determine the level of trust between teachers and parents.

Research Questions / Hypothesis

- Parent-teacher relations in Kosovo schools meets the standards of developed countries.
- Parents education level or employment status has no influence in parent-teacher relations.
- Parents are equally involved in parent-teacher relations.

Literature Review

The parent involvement concept seems to have been an absolute challenge for many educators' researchers, experts and education reformers therefore it has been defined in a variety of ways. The most common description of this concept is the relation between home and school. According to Perroncel (1993), parent involvement is a bond between home, school and community to support the child's learning process. This concept has been largely examined within the international sphere and treated as essential variable for child's socioemotional and academic development. In his article Martin Bronfenbrenner (1987), suggest an ecological framework according to which positive interactions between home, school can contribute positively to child socioemotional and cognitive development.

The evolution of this concept has made a long journey leading us to the most difficult question in the world of education and research. What is parental involvement in today's modern community? This is justified by the fact that parents, educators and members of the community share different opinions in relation to their involvement, their role in the process and the ways each of them can contribute to the educational process. However, a common agreement with researcher points that the roots of this concept are found in every home made of a safe, happy and healthy environment. A number of studies indicate that direct parent involvement in the learning process leads to appropriate learning experiences and positive attitudes about the school. Students achieve much more, when parents are around. (Epstein, 2009; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Rumberg et al., 1990; Zombia Swap, 1993; Whitaker & Fiore, 2001) and the process is more effective when considered as a partnership (Davies, 1996; Emeagwali, 2009; Epstein, 2009).

Abe Feuerstein (2000), thinks that parental involvement is crucial, however, it depends on the several factors, over which the educational institutions have no control. This is a product of the globalized era of demanding changes in education, networking, often forced collaboration and partnerships, as parents, we are often overloaded with the many demands of daily life. Certain parents are often forced to keep two jobs, work long hours, which enable them to attend school and be more informed about their children on regular instances (Ho 2009).

Lee and co-workers (2006) explored the barriers of parental involvement and found that the answer lies on the cultural norms, insufficient incomes and lack of goals in the education process. If considering the daily routine and practice, we know that some people are more dedicated and more active and some are less motivated to therefore remain passive.

Don Davies (1996), assumptions seems to be well grounded. He claims that many parents aren't motivated due to low self-esteem, failure at school during their childhood, and lack of proper knowledge to aid their children. Lack of success experiences of parents can influence children learning as the learning is viewed from a negative corner (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

Michael Fullan (2002) shares a more positive view on this topic. According to him parents are important, because they have assets and expertise that are essential to partnership. They have knowledge of their children that is not available to anyone else. They have vested and committed interest in their child's success, and they also have valuable knowledge and skills to contribute" in other words Fullan concludes that parents are unused source available, therefore they should be fully involved within the educational process.

Joyce Epstein (2001, 2009), draws our attention to the reasons that strengthen parent-school- community partnership. She believes that intense parental involvement is beneficial for the institution as it helps in improving the school climate, creating strong bonds, also in improving programs, creating a community and assisting the teaching faculty with their work. She developed a unique formula containing six factors as her strategy that works for successful parental involvement; parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. The framework suggests that educational institutions should be ready to involve all families at

school. She concludes that each element of the proposed strategy is closely linked with one another and helps in building a flat correlation line instead the regression line as the findings shows us that some children do better, because the family is fully involved and some don't do good due to the lack of support from the side of their families, therefore this line should change by involving each and every parent in their children's education process.

Research Methodology

The surveys were distributed to parents between males (12%) and females (81.5%) and (n=10) female teachers. Completed surveys were analyzed using a five-point Likert scale where possible. To concentrate on a more focused agenda about parental participation, specific questions were chosen to adopt the Joyce Epstein survey model. The questions were chosen to give an indication of parental perception of their involvement in school and what practices responding teachers are using, as well as teacher preferences on implementation of parent partnerships.

Findings and Discussion

The following tables present the data obtained upon the successful administration of the questionnaires. Results from the data obtained show that the median age of parent responders involved in the study is 36 years old, with mothers being more committed towards successful education compared to fathers with 87% vs13%, respectively. Approximately 2/3 are girls and 1/3 boys indicating female dominance in classes. Data also confirms problems with classroom size and high teacher-student ratio. An accepted teacher-student ratio is 20:1 However, a low student - teacher ratio is recommended by the majority of experts of education since it allows the teacher to better manage the class.

Table 1. Characteristics of Parents in Survey
(N=100)

Parent Characteristics	Respondents (%)		
Median Age	36 years		
Gender	87 females: 13 males		
Child's gender	64 girls: 36 boys		
Grade 1	35 %		
Grade 2	32 %		
Grade 3	33 %		
Children preferences	<i>Learning environment</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Socialization with other children</i>
	0 %	23 %	77 %
Parent preferences	<i>Learning environment,</i>	<i>Class organization</i>	<i>Need improvement</i>
	12 %	4 %	84 %
Teaching mode	<i>Traditional</i>		<i>Modern</i>
	88%		12%
Hospitality in school	50 %		

Further, the vast majority of parents declared that the greatest interest of children is in socializing with their schoolmates, rather than being interested in learning or school environment. This finding is quite concerning considering that it is the teachers' responsibility to ensure that the learning environment is appropriate, attractive and positive for the learning to occur.

A good deal of agreement was found in several items in the survey. For instance, problems with learning environment and organization have been confirmed by both respondents, however, the major disagreement is on the teaching style, as the majority of parents feel that classrooms generally continue to be traditional. Parents claim that the teaching is done by instructing students to memorize. Teaching in our primary school classes seems more a controlled environment leaded by use of memorizing and recitation techniques, thereby not developing their critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making skills. Additionally, parents feel that teachers continue to implement the outdated methodologies, despite the fact that they are instructed to work with new competence base curriculum, therefore they fail to make teaching more interesting and learning more fun. Use of modern techniques is rarely encountered, although it is mandatory. Data also indicate lack of hospitality and respect in our schools as only half of

respondents felt they were respected by their child's teacher. This suggests that teachers do not show enough consideration for parents nor are so concerned about the professional side of their identity.

Respect is an essential life skill and number one value of the teacher's profession, which enables them to build relations and ensure transparency.

Another agreement of respondents was found in the item concerning communication. Both respondents claimed standard daily- weekly interactions. This finding is quite positive and promising if true. Having regular communication is essential for student's success. The most frequent communication is on homework assignments. Only a few teachers claimed to initiate interactions that go beyond what traditionally is expected from them. Further high level of awareness of parent -teacher collaboration aspect was encountered by both respondents as 2/3 of the respondents (strongly agree) on the importance, but a disagreement the actual level of collaboration that occurs in schools. There is a variation in responses concerning the organization of parent conferences. Half of respondents declared to have attended conferences during the entire year, the rest have given different incomplete responses, therefore this finding should be reviewed and confirmed in the future studies. On the quality of parent conferences, parents' responders claimed that those conferences are organized in a traditional mood and aren't very beneficial as in general provide an overall view about students' success and possible problems, but do not meet the requirements of each parent. Parents don't feel comfortable to speak and ask questions about their children in the presence of others. If we consider this then we can conclude that parents are satisfied with none optimal and limited involvement. However, schools should create more space for them to be involved and provide them possibilities to give their input and contribution.

Interesting results were encountered in the item concerning family status variables. Parent responders shared different views on this feature. The data show that the majority of them declared to have a degree. Nearly half of parents declared to have a permanent job, the other 1/5 declared to keep part time jobs, mostly working as babysitters, house maintenance, hair dressers. They claim that having a part time job enables them to work, feel productive, but also ensures more time with their families and children. The rest declared to be housewives claiming that not having a job gives them an opportunity to put a greater effort to help them since they aren't preoccupied with a job, but also disadvantages them from having a qualification really makes a difference.

Further, only 41% of parent responders declared on being familiar with current parental involvement strategies in schools. This relatively low percentage is an indicator for very low levels of awareness and interest from the side of parents, who should be more concerned when it comes to this point, by demanding more access in the institutions, but also shows that the school management has developed an isolated working culture, by prohibiting access of information to parents. A properly planned parental involvement strategy enables each and every parent become part of the process and the child's progress.

The parent responses on homework hours reveal dissatisfaction. More than half of respondents claimed that children used to spend less time 1-2 hours with homework, before the implementation of new competence-based curriculum in our schools. 88% of parent responders agreed that homework completion hours have been extended from 1-3 hours and even more causing them a lot of overload and stress. Parent responders agreed that the new competence-based curriculum was needed, as it will enable the students to become more competent, however, it caught them unprepared. Lack of workshops and instruction on the new competence-based curriculum was addressed by the majority of parents. This suggests that institutions, leaders and reform experts generally should pay more attention to the ways the changes will be addressed in the future, as the majority of parents are not familiar with the new implemented curriculum, not been notified or consulted about its content, nor properly informed about the ways this curriculum is being implemented.

Table 2. Characteristics of Parents in Survey

Parent-school relation (Scale 1-5)	1	2	3	4	5
	68 %	7 %	22 %	0 %	0 %
Parent -teacher connection on daily, weekly, monthly yearly basis. P	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Poor -needs improvement.
Quality of parent conferences	0 %	82 %	12 %	0 %	
Parent -school collaboration importance and status- on a scale 1-5	Absolutely important			Relatively important	
	68 %			32 %	
Employment status	Full time		Part-time		Unemployed
	46 %		22 %		32 %

Parent opinions on the current school policy and practices of parental involvement	The school should improve their policies on parental involvement		School don't need to improve their policies on parental involvement		Failed to answer
	41 %		0 %		59 %
The time children spend with homework- before the new CBC	1-2 hrs		> 2hrs		Failed to answer
	66 %		11 %		23 %
The time children spend with homework- with the new CBC	> 3 hrs	Failed to answer	Regular supervision	Intermittent supervision	
And homework assistance	88 %	12 %	68 %	32 %	
Presence of school management in parent meetings	0 %				
Feedback	Feedback on regular basis			Intermittent feedback	
	81 %			19 %	
Children subject preferences	Math	Arts	Albanian	English	
	52 %	14 %	9 %	17 %	
Parent opinions on learning objectives and teacher expectations	Not informed			Partially informed	
	67 %			30 %	
Parent opinions about teachers' professional side	Teacher professional background is complete		Teacher professional background is complete		Failed to answer
	37 %		42 %		21 %
Parent awareness of the learning objectives	Not aware			Failed to answer	
	47 %			53 %	
Parent awareness of international practices of parental involvement	Never received any information on the current international practices on parent involvement			Failed to answer	
	94 %			6 %	
Parent focus in aiding learning at home & home learning conditions	Focus on adding learning at home.			Have optimal learning environment.	
	88%			85 %	
Teacher assessment of learning outcomes	Regular and fair			Irregular and unfair	
	88 %			12 %	

On the question about the leadership presence in parent meetings, the data reveals that there are issues with leadership roles and responsibility in our schools. Unfortunately, the position of leadership is not enviable considering there are no records of management attendance to parent meetings. This is an indicator that the management is not aware of the importance of their presence, of such meetings therefore fails in crating community culture. It takes careful planning and daily practice to effect change and maintain a positive school climate. The survey also shows irregularity in providing feedback to parents. This displays lack of care and responsibility on behalf of the teachers. Teachers should be equipped with proper interpersonal skills in order to systemically interact with parents on their child's academic success and progress.

More than half the respondents declared that their children's interest sparks only in courses that require problem solving and critical thinking unlike courses such as language and arts. This is a quite positive finding, if to be considered true. Although it is required that children possess 21st century critical thinking skills, it is equally important that they are able to assess established communicative skills. Alternative positive findings during this research were not encountered due to pessimistic parent reviews. Teachers should be required to have introductory packets on their course, such as syllabi, things that are evidently missing within the beginning of a child's academic experience. The calculations on the Likert scale show that parents are not very happy with the professional side of teachers. The majority of them agreed that teacher's professional identity in our schools remains incomplete. Almost all parents declared to have never received any information on the current parent involvement practices abroad. This is an indicator that school management is either frustrated to begin with changes required in 21 centuries or they are satisfied with minimal results and participation of parental involvement. The survey shows a high commitment of parents in adding learning at home and optimal learning conditions for children. This is also a positive finding, as parents are their first teachers and they have a key role in shaping up their character. A balance of education at home and school

molds a student's actual learning. The majority of parents have agreed to assessment of learning outcomes by the teacher, although they are not properly informed on the current assessment tools in use. They don't know what? And how? Exactly the learning is assessed when the student assessment is done. Additionally, parents claim that teachers generally fail to speak to students about what is expected from them during the class and what is to be achieved at the end. This finding suggests that the teaching that occurs in our classes is more content based. As per currently implemented curriculum, teachers are obliged to inform and provide additional explanations on the objectives and learning outcomes that should be achieved. This finding shows that teachers in primary schools have problems to shift from traditional ways of teaching (memorizing the content) into modern ways which requires them to be more constructive and practical.

A constructive teacher must spend a considerable amount of time in planning the class. Proper planning is crucial and it doesn't require specific conditions rather than commitment and team collaboration as the estimated time of planning is 1:1 approximately 1 hour of planning for each class. Although the majority of parents have agreed with the item on the assessment of learning outcomes a minor number of them have raised questions on the assessment part. Parents claim that they aren't properly informed about the assessment procedure.

Table 3. Characteristics of Teachers in Survey
(N=10)

Teacher Characteristics	Respondents (%)				
Median Age	38				
Gender	Females 100%				
Grade Level	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade	4th grade	5th grade
	3	2	1	2	2
Teacher opinions about parental involvement (scale 1-5)	1	2	3	4	5
	10 %	15 %	60%	10 %	5 %
Teacher opinions on the benefits of parent involvement in school.	<i>All of the respondents agreed to the importance of parental involvement in school.</i>				
Means of communication to keep parents informed.	<i>More frequent daily communication-phone fiber groups, messenger. Only few of them use them for discussion of homework assignments, the remaining six declared to interact only when a need arises, thus not on a regular basis. Use of emails is not applied at all.</i>				
Teacher opinions on the effectiveness of practices and used strategies	<i>The majority agreed on the effectiveness of practices and used strategies. Actual strategies should be supplemented</i>				
Teaching experience	<1 year		1-5 years	>10 years	
	20 %		10 %	70 %	
Teachers' opinions about the parent involvement in class and home.	Parental involvement in class and home			Failed to answer.	
	70 %			30 %	
Most frequent parent involvement techniques suggested to parents	Reading aloud or listen to reading	Learning though stories and discussion	Learning by doing -crafts	Informal games	Watch and discus TV shows
	100 %	40 %	30 %	30 %	0
Teacher additional explanations related to the unit, module, program	On demand only			Failed to answer	
	70 %			30 %	
Teacher opinions about the parent's meetings -place and time	3 times round a year.				
Is parent involvement an answer to a major problem in school.	Disagree			Failed to answer	
	80%			20 %	
Teachers cannot influence parents to use different ideas for teaching.	100 % agree				
Asking parents to spend time in helping children is too much.	Agree			Disagree	
	0 %			70 %	

Table 3. Describes the characteristics of (N=10) teacher respondents. The majority of teacher responders are females teaching grades from 1 through 5. The teacher range in age is as follows: Three responding teachers are close to the age of retirement, the other 5 are in their thirties and the last two teachers are novice teacher, currently under the probation period.

More than a half of teacher respondents have more than 10 years in service. The remaining number of them declared to have been teaching 1-5 years and the last two have been in service for less than a year. The majority of them have a degree in education. Only few of them have a high school in pedagogy. First and second grade teachers declared to have larger classes with an overloaded number of students up to 36. There is considerable variation of opinions regarding the parental involvement. The majority of teacher responders think that parent involvement is an important component, however a number of teachers are very pessimistic on this part. Teacher respondents believe that parental involvement is matter of collaborative culture of each individual. Some parents are more dedicated, some are happy with medium results, therefore it is an individual matter.

The study findings reveal that the main communication means used by both respondents are smart phones, Viber chat groups, and messenger. Less than a half report to use them for discussion of homework assignments, the remaining six declared to interact only when a need arises, thus not on a regular basis. Use of email or any other communication mean is not applied at all.

The majority of teachers declared to be happy with the current practices applied in their classrooms. However, they feel that they may be supplemented through adoption of international techniques and practices. Another agreement of both respondents was found on the question about parental involvement in class and at home as well. The first practice of parent involvement in class is not encountered and it is to be considered as the missing link in our schools. Whilst regarding the parental involvement at home, they declare they try to encourage parents to work more with their children, but most interactions are with the parents of the special needs' children. Teachers were asked about the more frequent techniques suggested to parents. The majority of teacher responders declared to have suggested the practice reading with children. A relatively low number of teachers have declared to suggest other useful techniques of parental involvement at home. In a developed country such practice is common. Teachers feel free to suggest different facilities to parents, except the ones applied in school to improve the Childs weakness if any, but also as a strategy to bridge the communication gaps between parents and teachers. Teachers think that parent involvement isn't an answer to major problems in school. Also, they feel free to ask parents to spend more time with their children.

Conclusion

The results of the study show that parental involvement in Kosovo schools are staggering. However, most of the parents, especially highly educated ones, recognize the importance of proper education for their children as well as their active role in home child learning. Employment status of parents is beneficial to child's home learning, when a single parent is employed. However, when both parents are employed, it limits their involvement due to lack of time and the amount of stress exposed. Mothers bear most of the burden in home child learning, either due to being housewives, unemployed or semi-employed. A constant involvement of parents in home learning, enables continuous progress of the child's performance. Policy makers need to carefully examine such categories and adopt parent involvement practices accordingly.

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