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Primary Education: Principals' and Parents' views on their cooperation and involvement

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Abstract: This research investigated the views of primary school principals and parents regarding their involvement in school life. The sample consisted of 5 principals and 5 parents from schools in the Central Macedonia Region. Results showed a generally positive relationship. The principals consider parents as equal partners in the well-being of the school. Disproportions in terms of the number of parents compared to principals, as well as daily challenges that arise, affect the frequency and quality of their meetings. Additionally, negative behavior and lack of interest on the part of parents lead to a negative climate.

Keywords: leadership, school principal, parent involvement.

Introduction

Schools in order to create a general positive climate, open up new perspectives for a meaningful collaboration with parents, making them feel that they jointly contribute to the social, intellectual and emotional development of the children. Research results have shown that students whose parents have an active contribution to their education, have greater participation in attending their classes, adapt more easily to the social environment of the school, have higher performance, and develop their social skills faster (Edwards & Alldred, 2000; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Relationships and relational trust between school and families are foundational to any engagement or partnership effort (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). Participating in decision-making, volunteering in school matters, providing counseling, helping with homework, all contribute positively both to students' success and to strengthening their perception that home and school are inextricably linked as an integral part of the daily life of the entire family (Sanders & Seldon, 2009).

It is of crucial importance to recognize the views of families because communication in the school unit is the solid basis on which the educational process is carried out and the achievement of the school's common goals are achieved. Research findings indicate that parents support school-family cooperation, along with guidance and initiations from school administrators (Tak Cheung Chan et al., 2021). Research results have also highlighted the importance of parental involvement in improving children's academic achievement and social and emotional development (Sheridan et al., 2019) and mitigating racial, ethnic, and economic inequities in education (Caspe et al., 2019). Parental involvement, especially in a multicultural educational context has become crucial in the last years, due to the migration flows from different countries of the world. Mutual acceptance between the dominant local culture of hosting countries and the minority cultures of the refugees helps to achieve parental participation, which improves the school performance of children that belong to cultural or linguistic minorities (Foulidi, Papakitsos, 2022). According to Nigussie (2019), some parents find obstacles to their participation in the school life of their children due to limited knowledge, professional obligations, insufficient lack of time and parental conflicts of schedules. In addition, Liu and Gao (2022), stated that obstacles to parental involvement were related to parents' lack of cognitive readiness, affective preparedness, and physical resources.

In creating a positive psychological climate, an important role is played by the principal's effective, professional practices. According to Abouelanein and Hossni (2023), some of these practices include fostering teachers' general well-being, curriculum optimisation and enhancing parents' engagement. Moreover, by using self-awareness, careful observation, and flexible response can help school principals move from a positional approach to a more reflective leadership and therefore achieve better communication with the school community (Namgyal, 2022). Another important factor that contributes to the smooth operation of the school is the successful digital transformation using educational digital resources (EDS). School principals, utilizing a strategic pedagogical perspective, can facilitate the transformation of the digital culture through their ability to foster an open discussion in the educational

community (parents, teachers, students) that allows them to see the integration of EDS into pedagogical models as an opportunity to improve outcomes (Navaridas-Nalda et al., 2020).

Research Results

Exploring Principal-Parent Collaboration in Primary Schools: A Qualitative Inquiry

The purpose of this research was to investigate the opinions of primary school principals and parents regarding their participation in the school life. Specific objectives of the research were to detect: a) the opinions of parents regarding whether and to what extent they consider cooperation with the principal and vice versa as an important factor in the educational process, b) the reasons why they cooperate or not, c) the way in which the cooperation of parents - managers is achieved, and, finally, d) their proposals, so that their cooperation becomes possible on the one hand and more constructive on the other. The choice of qualitative research was considered more appropriate because it can examine a specific topic through data collected from the environment and the people involved. In addition, through it one can approach and focus on the explanation of a phenomenon, a situation and deepen the perceptions and opinions of the participants (Paraskevopoulou-Kollia 2019). The time required for each interview was approximately forty minutes and the interviews were carried out at the school premises in the principals' office and respectively in the parents' homes. The implementation of the interviews followed the guidelines of the code of ethics and ethics. Meetings with all participants took place with the consent of all, who were primarily informed in writing about the purpose and objectives of the research.

Challenges and Dynamics of Principal-Parent Collaboration in Primary Education: A Study on Communication and Cooperation

Regarding the importance of the cooperation between principals and parents, all participants emphasized that this is their main goal. All school principals who participated consider parents as their "partners and assistants", whose contribution is considered valuable. Parents often emphasized the importance of the role played by the principal, placing them at the top of the school community. The analysis of the research data highlighted the existence of the Association of Parents and Guardians as a necessary tool in order to have a meaningful relationship between the school administration and the parents. The support of the school unit in financial matters, the organization and implementation of educational activities as well as dealing with various challenges that may arise in the school, were emphasized by both sides. Parents and principals also stated that it is a two-way relationship, in which the willingness and the existence of interest enables and promotes the relationship between them. Data collection and analysis showed that there are certain factors that make it difficult for the parents and the principals to work together. Both spoke of a disproportion between the number of parents and that of the principal, which makes it difficult from the outset to communicate and resolve issues concerning specific students. In addition, according to the parents' opinions, the daily obligations, but also the general responsibilities of the principal do not facilitate cooperation between them.

Regarding the reasons for which parents and principals are in contact, issues concerning the behavior of the students occupy the first place in their meetings. In addition to pedagogical issues, particular emphasis is placed on financial issues as well as the existence of general problems and difficulties faced by either the parents or the principals and affect the educational reality. According to the opinions of all the participants, the most important issue that concerns everyone is the behavior of the students such as disobedience, disruption in class or even aggression. In addition to pedagogical and financial issues, some parents collaborate with the principals on other issues that are of course always related to daily school life, such as the integration of a new student or dealing with a health problem. Both parents and principals report that meetings are held throughout the school year, but especially at the beginning of the school year, these meetings are very important. All of the parents who participated in the survey have crossed and continue to cross the threshold of the principal's door during the school year, either on their own initiative or on the initiative of the principal. The analysis of the research material shows that the reasons why parents and principals in primary schools do not cooperate are related to the parents' behavior alone. More specifically, the tendency to fight, the bad way of speaking, the constant demands and the lack of respect create a negative climate, which in turn prevents any cooperation between them. Another problem mentioned by a few participants, and more specifically by parents, is parental indifference. The lack of interest in school issues results in cold relations with the principal, with the latter often taking the same attitude as the parents.

Conclusions

The present research was conducted in order to investigate the views of school principals and parents regarding their participation in the school life of their children in primary education. The analysis of the data revealed a relationship of positive interaction and coexistence, which however still has room for improvement, in order to reach the level of mutual cooperation. Principals' meetings with parents take place at regular basis and mostly concern dealing with student behavioral problems, information about the school program and generally settling some situation or problem. Parents are asked to meet the school's requirements, contribute to its financial support and develop relationships with the principal. As far as their communication is concerned, the disproportion between the number of parents and the principal, as well as the daily challenges and difficulties that arise in his work, affect the frequency and quality of their meetings. In addition, the negative behavior and lack of interest on the part of some of his parents lead to communication barriers, creating a negative climate. In encouraging and strengthening communication and cooperation, the most important role seems to be played by parents, whose behavior and willingness determine whether there is a foundation for their cooperation with the principal.

This paper is a theoretical and empirical approach to an issue that concerns not only principals and parents, but also students, who are directly affected and are a point of intersection between them. The school and the family are two institutions that exert a great influence on the psychological, social and educational development of the child. The limitations and weaknesses of the present research focus on the fact that the sample consisted of principals of primary schools and not of other higher levels.

Furthermore, another weakness is that the parents who participated in the research were predominantly mothers, as they and not their spouses chose to answer the interview questions. By carrying out research with a larger and different sample, such as middle or high school principals, as well as with both parents, the findings of this research can be extended. In addition, the investigation of factors such as the educational level of the parents, their cultural background, the years of service of the director and the use of different methodological tools, such as the questionnaire, is considered necessary.

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