RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Communication Management of Parent Participation in Education Process: Practices of Communication between Teachers and Parents

Maria E. Chatzinikola

ABSTRACT

International education community considers the communication management of parents' participation in education process as an important process, since it reinforces students' learning performance, shapes their conduct and leads the school unit to an efficient form. This study focuses on views of primary education principals and teachers about the communication practices used in their communication with parents. Thirty-three principals and two hundred and twenty-two teachers consider it is important to invite parents to visit the school unit by setting a specific date and time. They consider it is equally important to keep them informed them by phone or email or by sending them informative notes. Moreover, primary education principals and teachers consider the first meeting between teachers and parents at school as very important. The basic goal of this meeting is to inform parents on time about the school's mission and the learning course of the year. At this meeting, parents are informed that teachers and parents are considered co-responsible for the students' learning progress. Principals and teachers list in a journal their meetings with parents, as well as children's learning achievements or difficulties.

Keywords: Communication Practices, Informative Notes, Invitation, Journal, Parents, Teachers

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M. E. Chatzinikola*
Department of Sciences of Preschool Education and Educational Design, University of the Aegean, Greece.
(e-mail: mar.xatzi70@gmail.com)

****Corresponding Author***

I. Introduction

Communication between teachers and parents is considered very important for the surrounding systems of family, school and broader society (Stamatis, 2013). When this communication occurs with common goals, focusing on children's learning ability and conduct (Epstein *et al.*, 2009), a relationship based on mutual respect and understanding is developed between teachers and parents.

Sending parents an invitation to visit the school unit of their children is the first step of cooperation between teachers and parents. The invitation must indicate the time, place and content of the meeting. Manolakou-Keke (2009) distinguishes the forms of communication between teachers and parents into formal and informal. Formal communication forms include: a) the first information session for parents, which is scheduled by each class teacher at the beginning of the school year; during this session, the teacher informs parents about teaching subjects and learning process, and sets the evaluation goals of the school year. Moreover, the teacher highlights the fact that teachers and parents are co-responsible for the child's learning progress, b) the establishment of a weekly timeslot for meetings between teachers and parents. The teacher sets a timeslot within his/her working hours, with the aim of informing parents about children's learning issues, but also about issues concerning their conduct. In addition, the teacher provides clear guidelines about the way in which parents can help their children with their homework, c) information about learning activities through a short text distributed to parents, d) listing of achievements, learning difficulties or behaviors in a journal, so as to be in a position to inform parents by providing specific facts. Informal communication forms include: a) extraordinary communication over the phone at the initiative of either party, b) parents' visits outside the scheduled timeslot, to deal with an extraordinary learning issue or behavior, c) contacts and discussions in case of activities and school events, when parents attend the school.

Bender (2005) characterizes the communication between teachers and parents as one-way or two-way. In one-way communication, teachers seek to inform parents in various ways and through various means, such as an introductory letter at the beginning of the school year, informative notes of the class or school, communication books and relevant web pages. Two-way communication includes an interactive dialogue between teachers and parents, which can arise during phone calls or meetings.

With the integration of new technologies into the operation of school units, information and cooperation between teachers and parents takes place also through digital platforms or email, allowing in this way for direct exchange of information about all current issues concerning the teaching process. Moreover, this form of information can be extended also to personal issues, such as children's progress and conduct, potential conflicts at school or learning difficulties (Carr *et al.*, 2015; Palts & Kalmus, 2015).

In Finland, there was a study about the experiences of teachers and parents after the use of the online information and communication platform DC. According to the survey results, parents and teachers were satisfied with the internet communication, for which they consider that it supports the cooperation between parents and teachers, by providing valuable information about students' learning progress and other issues related to students (Juniu, 2009; Kuusimäki *et al*., 2019). Palts and Kalmus (2015) mention that the online information and communication platform DC could also encourage both parents who live separately to participate in school activities. In addition, it allows parents and teachers to communicate during timeslots that are convenient for both sides. Except for the positive aspects of online information through this specific application, communication between teachers and parents is not always efficient. A lot of teachers mention the absence of training in DC know-how, as well as the lack of time during a school day to communicate with parents, which leads to misunderstandings and problems. Moreover, teachers state that informing parents through the application is time consuming and may exceed the limit of working hours of teachers, which are extended to the teachers' free time (Agger, 2011; Palts & Kalmus, 2015).

In a relevant study, Carr *et al*. (2015) mention that digital communication has more advantages than the traditional form of communication: a) timely online information b) direct exchange of views c) direct feedback on parents' and teachers' views and attitudes d) facilitation of early intervention in students with learning and conduct problems resulting in the improvement of their learning problems.

Teachers consider that communication between teachers and parents is important, as children improve their performance and conduct; it is beneficial also for the school unit, as it contributes to its efficiency (Stamatis & Chatzinikola, 2021). Juniu (2009) adds four aspects that must be examined for a better communication between teachers and parents: a) positive communication with messages of encouragement from teachers to parents, b) personalized communication, letters or comments about students' work, c) preventive communication and d) corporate relationship and cooperation between parents and teachers. This communication, whether it takes place physically or by phone or through new technologies, must occur according to efficient communication skills. In a study, Chatzinikola (2021) stresses the significance of active listening as a basic skill of efficient communication regarding the communication between teachers and parents. According to the study results, teachers listen to parents carefully and observingly, accept their views by adopting a neutral attitude and share their thoughts and feelings with empathy.

II. Methodology

The purpose of this survey is to study the views of principals and teachers of multi-teacher primary schools about communication practices applied within the framework of their communication with parents. Based on this purpose, the following research questions were set:

a) Do principals and teachers consider it is important to invite parents to visit the school unit?

b) In what way do principals and teachers invite parents to the school unit?

c) Do principals and teachers consider it is important to send informative notes to parents?

d) In teachers' and principals' views, what is the purpose of the first meeting at school?

e) Do teachers and principals list in a journal the meetings with parents and the content of their communication?

f) Which teachers' views about communication practices have a significant or strong relevance degree, in relation to job position, gender, age and educational level?

In this survey, the closed-ended type of questionnaire was selected as the most appropriate research tool, because it provides a form of closed-type questions that participants are invited to answer on their own (Bryman, 2012). The questionnaire was structured with a five-point Likert scale (Brown, 2010), which includes two negative and two positive options, with an intermediate empty option: Never, Sometimes, I don't have an opinion, Most of the times, Always.

The first part of the questionnaire refers to teachers' personal data, the teachers' position in the school unit, gender, age, prior work experience, basic studies, but also further training. The second part includes questions concerning practices of communication between teachers and parents.

Within the framework of seeking results, indicators were sought for categorical variables (teachers' personal data) and for qualitative variables (questions about practices of communication between teachers and parents). Frequency (N), percentage in total cases (%), average value (A), and standard deviation of average value (SD) were studied. To ascertain a correlation between categorical and qualitative variables, t-test of independent samples was applied. Indicator p-value was applied for the description of statistical significance: (p-value<0.01: Statistically strong relationship, p-value <0.05: Statistically significant relationship, p-value <0.1: Statistically weak relationship) (Linardakis, 2014).

TABLE I: Personal Data of Teachers and Principals

		Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Teachers	Principals	33	12.9
	Teachers PE70	222	87.1
Gender	Men	71	27.8
	Women	182	71.4
Age	22-30 years old	32	12.5
	31-40 years old	65	25.5
	41-50 years old	84	32.9
	51-60 years old	70	27.5
Experience	1-5 years	31	12.2
	6-10 years	26	10.2
	11-15 years	56	22
	16-20 years	59	23.1
	21-25 years	28	11
	26 years or more	53	20.8
Basic studies	Pedagogical Academy *	72	28.2
	Department of Primary Education **	179	70.2
Further studies	Master	91	35.7
	PhD-Master	19	7.5
	Did not answer	64	25.1

*2 years of studies, **4 years of studies

To study the relevance degree in principals' and teachers' views, the following categorical variables were selected: 22-30 years old and 51-60 years old for age, and 1-5 years and 26 or more years for prior work experience, to ascertain if there is a convergence of views between younger and older teachers.

The survey questionnaire was distributed to 35 school units, six-teacher and above, in order to provide a common framework of operation and school environment. In total, 255 questionnaires were answered by teachers PE70 and principals. (Table I).

III. Results

In response to the research questions, the following results emerged. To the first research question *"Do teachers and principals consider it is important to invite parents to visit the school unit?"* principals replied that most of the times they consider it is important to invite parents to visit the school unit (P:48.5%), while parents consider it always important (P:50%). To the second research question *"In what way do teachers and principals invite parents to the school unit?"* principals answered that most of the times they inform parents by phone or email (P:36.4%). Principals (P:69.7%) and teachers (P:74.3%) state that they always inform children's parents by setting a specific date and time. Teachers' views are shared with the same percentage between phone call or emails: sometimes (P:33.3%) and most of the times (P:33.3%) they inform parents by phone or email. To the third research question *"Do teachers and principals consider it is important to send informative notes to parents?"* principals (P:42.4%) and teachers (P:41.4%) state that most of the times they consider it is important to send information notes to parents (Table II).

TABLE II: Principals' and Teachers' Views About the Means Used by Teachers to Invite or Inform Parents (Distribution, Percentage)

Means used by teachers to invite or inform parents	Position	Not at all		Sometimes		I have no opinion		Most of the times		Always		Did not reply	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Inviting parents to school is considered important	Principals	0	0	2	6,1	2	0.9	16	48.5	15	45.5	0	0
	PE70	2	0.9	32	14.4	2	0.8	102	38.7	99	44.6	1	0.5
2. Informing parents by phone or email	Principals	0	0	10	30.3	0	0	12	36.4	11	33.3	0	0
	PE70	23	10.4	74	33.3	2	0.9	74	33.3	48	21.6	1	0.5
3. Informing parents by setting a date and time	Principals	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	30.3	23	69.7	0	0
	PE70	0	0	6	2.7	1	0.5	50	22.5	165	74.3	0	0
4. Sending information notes to parents is important	Principals	0	0	6	18.2	0	0	14	42.4	11	33.3	2	6.1
	PE70	2	0.9	49	22.1	9	4.1	92	41.4	70	31.5	0	0

To the fourth research question *"In teachers' and principals' views, what is the purpose of the first meeting at school?"* principals and teachers answer that they inform children's parents on time about the school's mission and the learning progress of the year (P:54.5%-P:50%). In addition, most of the times they inform children's parents on time that teachers and parents are co-responsible for the children's learning progress (P:57.6%-P:47.3%).

To the fifth research question *"Do teachers and principals list in a journal the meetings with parents and the content of their communication?"* principals and teachers answer that most of the times they list in a journal children's achievements or learning difficulties (P:45.5%-P:42.8%). A share of 42.4% of principals state that they always list in a journal their meetings with parents, while teachers state that most of the times they take this action (P:36.5%) ((Table III).

TABLE III: Principals' and Teachers' Views about the Timely Information of Parents and Listing of Discussions in a Journal (Distribution, Percentage)

Timely information/Listing in a journal	Position	Not at all		Sometimes		I have no opinion		Most of the times		Always		Did not reply	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. First information session: school's mission-learning course of the year	Principals	0	0	1	3	0	0	14	42.4	18	54.5	0	0
	PE70	0	0	15	6.8	4	1.8	91	41	111	50	1	0.5
2.First information session: teachers and parents are co-responsible for children's learning progress	Principals	1	3	1	3	0	0	19	57.6	12	36.4	0	0
	PE70	2	0.9	22	9.9	6	2.7	105	47.3	87	39.2	0	0
3.Listing in a journal children's achievements or learning difficulties	Principals	0	0	4	12.1	1	3	15	45.5	13	39.4	0	0
	PE70	1	0.5	36	16.2	4	1.8	95	42.8	85	38.3	1	0.5
4.Listing in a journal meetings with children's families	Principals	0	0	5	15.2	1	3	13	39.4	14	42.4	0	0
	PE70	23	9.1	50	22.5	6	2.7	81	36.5	61	27.5	1	0.5

For the sixth research question *"Which teachers' views about communication practices have a significant or strong relevance degree, in relation to job position, gender, age and educational level?"*, the categorical variables of the above questions were statistically compared (see questions 1-4, Table 2 and 1-4, Table 3). Statistical comparison of average values shows a degree of relevance only for the categorical variables a) principals/teachers, b) 22-30/51-60 years old and c) 1-5/26 or more years of work experience.

Principals and teachers with a significant relevance degree inform children's parents by phone or email (significance indicator: p=0.042<0.05). Principals and teachers aged 22-30 years old and 51-60 years old, with a significant relevance degree (significance indicator: p=0.025<0.05), believe that inviting parents to visit the school is considered important. In addition, they state that parent's information session takes place by setting a specific date and time with a strong relevance degree (significance indicator: p=0.009<0.01). Principals and teachers with prior work experience of 1-5 and 26 or more years of prior experience, with a significant relevance degree p= 0.041<0.05, consider that sending invitations to parents is important and with a significant relevance degree p= 0.020<0.05 they state that they inform parents by setting a specific date and time (Table IV).

TABLE IV: PRINCIPALS' AND TEACHERS' VIEWS ABOUT THE MEANS USED BY TEACHERS TO INVITE OR INFORM PARENTS (STATISTICAL INDICATORS)

	A	SD	A	SD	t-test	p
	Principals		Teachers			
2.Informing parents by phone or email	3.73	1.232	3.24	1.392	2.089	0.042<0.05
	22-30 years old		51-60 years old			
1. Inviting parents to school is considered important	3.72	1.114	4.21	0.976	-2.274	0.025<0.05
3.Informing parents by setting a date and time	4.38	0.793	4.79	0.413	-2.763	0.009<0.01
	Year of experience: 1-5		26 or more			
1. Inviting parents to school is considered important	3.87	1.056	4.32	0.894	-2.080	0.041<0.05
3.Informing parents by setting a date and time	4.39	0.165	4.81	0.054	-2.441	0.020<0.05

Principals and teachers with a strong relevance degree list in a journal their meetings with parents (significance indicator: p=0.005<0.01). Male and female teachers with a significant relevance degree list in a journal children's achievements or learning difficulties (significance indicator: p=0.031<0.05). Teachers aged 22-30 years old and 51-60 years old with a significant relevance degree (significance indicator: p=0.031<0.05) and teachers with prior work experience of 1-5 years and 26 years or more with a significant relevance degree (significance indicator: p=0.011<0.05) list in a journal their meetings with children's parents (Table V)

TABLE V: PRINCIPALS' AND TEACHERS' VIEWS ABOUT THE TIMELY INFORMATION OF PARENTS AND LISTING MEETINGS IN A JOURNAL (STATISTICAL INDICATORS)

	A	SD	A	SD	t-test	p
	Principals		Teachers			
4.Listing in a journal meetings with children's families	4.09	1.042	3.5	1.381	2.924	0.005<0.01
	Men		Women			
3.Listing in a journal children's achievements or learning difficulties	3.82	1.099	4.13	0.011	-2.173	0.031<0.05
	22-30 years old		51-60 years old			
4.Listing in a journal meetings with children's families	3.16	1.394	3.79	1.190	-2.212	0.031<0.05
	Year of experience: 1-5		26 or more			
4.Listing in a journal meetings with children's families	3.19	1.400	3.96	1.073	-2.637	0.011<0.05

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

According to the results of this survey, primary education teachers and principals consider it is important to invite parents to visit the school unit by setting a specific date and time. They consider it is equally important to inform them by phone or email or by sending informative notes. Shajith and Erchul (2014) studied the three types of invitations sent to parents by the school, the school's invitation (for events or activities), the teacher's invitation (for information or actions at class level) and special personalized teacher's invitation (for individual learning difficulties or behavior issues). According to the results, parents respond more to the special personalized invitation, which is considered by the researchers as a factor of prediction of parents' participation in comparison with the other types of invitation.

Barrera and Warner (2006) hold that communication between teachers and parents is achieved through informative notes, meetings, informal messages and phone calls. Graham-Clay (2005) holds that consistent sending of information notes from class and school provides an efficient communication tool. Teachers must use the same color, quality and size of paper for all informative notes, so as not to separate children or parents into categories, and apply correctly the syntax, grammar and spelling code of the spoken

language. In one of their studies, Kraft and Rogers (2015) conclude that the delivery of short weekly messages to parents concerning their children's progress reduced almost by half the school dropout in an urban school area in the north-eastern United States. Davern (2004) points out it is important to take into account when it is more appropriate to organize a face-to-face meeting than deliver a written informative note.

Graham-Clay (2004) includes phone calls in the efficient practices of communication between teachers and parents, pointing out that they should be short with clear points for discussion. Meetings of teachers and parents by setting a specific date and time require more planning than an information session over the phone. The invitation for such a meeting must clearly mention the place and time, as well as the content to be dealt with.

In one of their studies, Thompson *et al*. (2015) showed the increase in parents' preference for frequent communication with teachers by e-mail. They also mentioned sms and social media as emerging ways of communication between teachers and parents. While Thompson (2008) specified email as the main means of communication between parents and teachers, teachers and parents combined also a variety of communication ways to benefit from new technologies. Ho *et al*. (2013) mentioned that mobile phones could be useful for the increase of communication between teachers and parents. Applications such Skype and FaceTime have the possibility to reinforce the communication between teachers and parents, as their communication takes place by means of a screen, allowing also for exploitation of non-verbal communication, which is necessary for the efficient communication on complex issues (Thompson, 2008; Thompson & Mazer, 2012).

According to the results of this survey, primary education teachers and principals consider the first meeting with parents at school as important. The basic goal of this meeting is timely information about the school's mission, learning progress of the year and the fact that teachers and parents are considered co-responsible for the children's learning progress.

The results of relevant studies show that the meetings between teachers and parents with a scheduled content are the most frequent form of direct communication between them (Allen, 2008; Berger, 2008). Parents' participation in scheduled meetings with teachers is relatively high during children's attendance of primary school and potential benefits from their cooperation are well documented (Jeynes, 2010). According to Brandt *et al*. (2014), cooperation means that family, school and community have an equal part and common responsibility for students' education and development. In a relevant study, Oostam and Hooge (2012) mention that there are teachers who inform parents about the learning goals of the year and the equal roles they share regarding children's learning ability and socialization. Research has focused also on informal and not on scheduled meetings between teachers and parents. Dumoulin *et al*. (2013) mention that these informal interactions should be particularly encouraged with parents from minority groups, because they often feel uncomfortable in formal meetings. Informal meetings with moments of interaction can be short daily meetings between teachers and parents at the beginning or in the end of school hours, when parents bring their children or pick them up.

According to the results of this survey, principals and teachers list in a journal their meetings with parents, as well as children's achievements or learning difficulties. Hoover-Dempsey, *et al*. (2005) have formulated some proposals for the improvement of communication practices between teachers and parents, aiming at parents' participation in children's teaching process. They therefore mention the creation, by the teachers, of a welcoming school environment, in which parents will feel comfortable. A positive school environment creates the conditions for an exchange of experiences between teachers and parents. Graham-Clay (2005) mentions that during these meetings, many teachers use daily communication books to share information with parents, especially for children with special learning difficulties. The combination of views, knowledge and information of the family, teachers and children is beneficial for everyone, especially for children. Communication creates for teachers and parents a more complete picture of the interests, needs, learning progress and uniqueness of each child.

V. Conclusions

The conclusions of this survey, which focuses on the views of primary education teachers about the communication practices applied in their communication with parents, can be summarized as follows:

1. Primary education teachers and principals consider it is important to invite parents to visit the school unit by setting a specific date and time. They consider it is equally important to inform them by phone or email or by sending informative notes.
2. Primary education teachers and principals consider the first meeting between teachers and parents at school as important. The basic goal of this meeting is timely information about the school's mission, learning progress of the year and the fact that teachers and parents are considered co-responsible for children's learning progress.
3. Principals and teachers list in a journal their meetings with parents, as well as children's achievements or learning difficulties

VI. Proposals

Extraordinary conditions imposed by Covid-19 pandemic with school unit closures and implementation of synchronous and asynchronous teaching process at international level, create new practices of communication between teachers and parents. New technologies have created a communication network, which is different from the one that existed before the pandemic. The focus of future research could be placed on new practices of communication between teachers and parents with the use of social media applications (Messenger, Viber), education platforms of synchronous education (Webex), asynchronous forms of education (E-me, Myschool). The exchange of views between teachers and parents through education or personal websites or blogs could

also be included. The focus of future research could also be placed on teachers' initial and continuous professional development programs, which promote the development of communication practices for teachers.

LIMITATIONS

Although the sample of the survey is deemed satisfactory, the results are limited to a local scale, without including more regions of Greece or more countries. This means no reliable comparison can be made. Moreover, the sample is limited to teachers of general primary education, without including specializations, such as foreign languages, art, computer science, etc.

The data of this survey are taken from the author's MSc dissertation entitled *"Communication management of parents' participation in education process. Views of principals and teachers at primary schools of Rhodes"*, which was prepared within the framework of the Master's program entitled "Models of Design and Development of School Units" of the University of the Aegean.

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Maria E. Chatzinikola is a Primary Education teacher born in Rhodes Island, Greece. She holds a bachelor degree from the Department of Primary Education of the University of the Aegean (1994). Also, she holds a Postgraduate Training Diploma in Primary Education from "Alexandros Delmouzos" Teachers' Training Institute (2011) and a Master's Degree in Models of Educational Planning and Development from the Department of Sciences Preschool Education and Educational Design, University of the Aegean (2019). Currently, she is a PhD student in the field of Nonverbal Communication.