

PARENTS ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN FAMILY - SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

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Abstract

Family and school partnerships are important for achieving quality results in education and this research is a transient partnership study. In our research, we investigated the communication and participation of parents in decision-making, since both are seen as elements of active parent involvement in building mutual partnership. The purpose of the paper was to examine the impact of an experimental treatment on the development of parent-school partnership in relation to sex and professional qualifications. In this research we used methods: analytical-descriptive method, theoretical analysis method, survey method and experimental method. Parents were interviewed with the same questionnaire before and after experimental treatment (partnership workshops). The research sample consisted of thirty parents of high school students (14 females and 16 males) in the territory of Travnik Municipality. Results of the T-test were statistically significant differences ($p=0.05$). There is a statistically significant difference for male ($t=-4.824$; $p=0.00$) and female subjects ($t=-5.192$; $p=0.00$) between the initial and final survey. The differences may be seen in the case of subjects who have elementary education ($t=-6.504$; $p=0.00$) and secondary education ($t=-5.276$; $p=0.00$). In the case of subjects with university education ($t=-2.138$; $p=0.07$), these differences are not statistically significant.

Key words: parents, partnership, communication, decision-making.

Introduction

Establishing partnership between parents and schools poses a challenge to all the participants in the process of education and upbringing and it has increasingly caught attention of researchers in the field of pedagogical practice. The purpose of the research was to emphasize the importance of parent-school partnership, as well as the need for an active involvement of parents in the work of schools (Raković, 2012). Partnership activity of parents and school is the only solution for pursuing common interests and bringing the child's wellbeing to the forefront, and it has to become a feature of work of a modern school (Zuković, 2013). For the family-school partnership to develop, parents have to get actively involved in the education and upbringing. For that purpose, the USA school managements launched the programme entitled *Home-school partnership model for follow through*. The program foresees early involvement of parents in an active and supporting manner. Basic reasons for such a programme lie in the assumptions that the children who feel that their parents are involved in the school work through various activities and events perceive school in a

different way (Kosić, 2009). The model which operationalizes partnership offers the following types of parent involvement as guidelines for helping students develop and advance in an optimal manner: parenting, communication, decision-making, parent volunteering, work with children and cooperation with the local community (Epstein, 2010). Communication is an important element of active parent involvement in the school work aimed at developing partnership activity. Quality cooperation and mutual communication will help both parents and teachers better to understand the students (Epstein, 2010). In an open, two-way communication teacher will be able to offer parents the information and to listen to the parents' proposals. Parents will be involved in schools more actively if their communication is continuous (Škutor, 2014). Parent-school partnership entails two-way, quality communication. If a dynamic process of joint activity is to be achieved, parents must be equally involved in all the planned school activities (Maleš, 1996). Quality communication is for the benefit of all the participants in the process of education and upbringing. Parental involvement in the school decision-making is the second

element of active parental involvement in schools aimed at developing partner cooperation. Parent involvement includes activities which enable parents actively to decide, together with the management, on issues related to school their child attends. Enhancement of partnership through active involvement of parents in the decision-making process is based on acknowledging the importance of the role of family in child development (Suzić, 2013). The benefit from involving parents in the school decision-making will be received by parents, teachers and students. There is no research conducted in high schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina which applied exact scientific methods to investigate the enhancement of partnership between parents and schools. Our intention was to investigate whether education about this important issue and active involvement of parents in the work of schools has raised the awareness among parents of the importance of participation and of assuming responsibility in the education of their children. We were particularly interested in whether the elements of partnership are applicable in practice. New knowledge that we have acquired in this research may serve the school management in their pedagogical practice. The first purpose of our research was to establish whether the experimental model has any impact on the subjects of the two sexes. The second goal was to examine the effect of the experimental model on parent self-assessment of family-school partnership with regard to parents' professional qualifications. In the first hypothesis we assumed that the experimental model would have an impact on the subjects of both sexes. The second hypothesis was the assumption that the experimental model would have an impact on the subjects of different professional qualifications.

Methods

Sample of subjects

The research included 30 parents, 14 females and 16 males. Out of the thirty parents surveyed in the initial and final survey, 9 have elementary school education, 12 parents have secondary school education, and 9 parents have university qualifications. The sample has been evened by sex and professional qualifications of parents.

Procedure

The research into the elements of active involvement of parents in school work was conducted in the first half of the 2016/17 school year. They first completed a questionnaire about communication and participation in the decision-making, and then they were actively involved in the

workshops organized for the purpose of the research. The communication workshops were related to educating the parents about the importance of two-way communication between parents and the teaching staff, which would help both teachers and parents better to understand the students. The workshops on the participation of parents in the decision-making were related to educating the parents about the importance for parents to express their opinion in the school decision-making process, as well as equal involvement of parents in the planned school activities. Two workshops were organized for each element, and parents were actively involved in the school work for two hours per week. After the involvement of parents in the school work and education in workshops designed beforehand, the parents did another survey, so that the results of the final survey could be obtained.

This is an experimental treatment with repeated measurements. The same subjects are exposed to different measurements (no control group, but the experimental group is also controlling). This implies the absence of problem of group equalization and better economy but also implies the problem of transfer and transmission of performance. Prior consent of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport as well as the school management was obtained to conduct the research.

Instruments

For the purpose of this research, a Questionnaire for Building Partnership between Parents, Teachers and School Management has been taken over and modified (Bujanović et al., 2006). The questionnaire was based on the Joyce Epstein model (Epstein, 2010). The key assumptions of the model of a comprehensive family-school partnership refer to the operationalization of several types of parental involvement as the basis for an efficient partnership. The questionnaire consists from two parts: socio-demographic variables (the professional qualification level and sex), and the second part is a questionnaire related to building partnership-oriented involvement of parents in school work. The questionnaire is constructed in the form of a five-level Likert scale, to which respondents had an opportunity to respond as follows: 1-never, 2-sometimes, 3-seldom, 4-often and 5-always. The same questionnaire was used before and after the treatment. The efficiency of the experimental model was tested by two sub-tests, each including five statements which comprise communication and decision-making as elements of family-school partnership.

Statistical analysis

The results were processed using SPSS 22.0 (program package for Windows). The difference between initial and final survey in male and female subjects, as well as the difference between initial and final survey in subjects with different professional qualifications, we were tested with the T-test for dependent samples. Arithmetic mean values and standard deviation were calculated for all variables. Level to determinate the significance was set to 95% ($p=0.05$).

Results

The first purpose of our research was to establish whether the experimental model had any impact on the subjects of the two sexes. The results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference for subjects of the different sexes in the initial and the final survey in reference to partnership self-assessment.

Table 1 The differences between the subjects in relation to sex (initial and final survey)

Variable	Modality	No. of subjects	Mean		t- test	P	
			Initial Survey	Final survey			
Family-school partnership	Sex	male	16	3.01	3.93	-	0.00
		female	14	2.78	3.80	-	0.00
							5.192

In the case of male subjects, significant improvement can be observed in the self-assessment between the initial $M=3.01$ and final survey $M=3.93$. This difference is statistically significant ($t=-4.824$; $p=0.00$). In the case of female subjects, the value $M=2.78$ for the initial and $M=3.80$ for the final survey with the value $t=-5.192$; $p=0.00$ indicate that there is a statistically significant difference for female subjects too between the initial and final survey in reference to the self-assessment of family-school partnership. These results point to the conclusion that the experimental model has had an equally successful impact on self-assessment of parents of both sexes.

The second goal was to investigate the impact of experimental model on parent self-assessment of family-school partnership in relation to parent

professional qualifications. The result analysis indicates a statistically significant difference between the subjects in the initial and the final survey in respect to their professional qualifications when it comes to self-assessment of family-school partnership. The differences may be seen in the case of subjects who have elementary education, since the value $M=2.57$ in the initial and $M=3.89$ in the final survey with the value $t=-6.504$ is statistically significant at the level of conclusion $p=0.00$.

Statistically significant differences may be observed with the subjects who have completed secondary school since the value $M=2.79$ in the initial and $M=3.92$ in the final survey with the value $t=-5.276$ is statistically significant at the level of conclusion $p=0.00$

Table 2 The differences between the subjects in relation to parent professional qualifications (initial and final survey)

Variable	Modality	N	Mean		t- test	P	
			Initial survey	Final survey			
Family-school partnership	Subject professional qualifications	Elementary school	9	2.57	3.89	-6.50	0.00
		Secondary school	12	2.79	3.92	-5.28	0.00
		University degree	9	3.39	3.79	-2.14	0.07

In the case of subjects with university education, improvement in the self-assessment between the initial and the final survey may be observed; however, these differences are not statistically significant as $p=0.07$. The results indicate that the

experimental model has had a significant impact on the self-assessment of the educated groups, as their self-assessment significantly improved.

Discussion

The research conducted has several deficiencies and limitations. The limitations are a relatively small number of participants in the sample. The sample is a suitable one, which makes the generalizations of the results reached limited. Future research should include a larger sample and verify the impact of the experimental model on subjects from urban and rural areas and their social status. This is the first research conducted in high schools in the territory of Travnik Municipality, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which parents were actively involved and educated about this issue. The significance of this paper lies in the investigation of an important issue in the teaching practice as well as in establishing clear indicators as to which elements of active parent involvement can be applied in building partnership with parents.

Our results have shown that the experimental model has had a positive impact on the improvement of family-school partnership. Chronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire for parents is 0.910, which indicates high internal consistency (the initial survey). Results of the T-test were statistically significant differences ($p=0.05$). There is a statistically significant difference for male ($t=-4.824$; $p=0.00$) and female subjects ($t=-5.192$; $p=0.00$) between the initial and final survey. The differences may be seen in the case of subjects who have elementary education ($t=-6.504$; $p=0.00$) and secondary education ($t=-5.276$; $p=0.00$). In the case of subjects with university education ($t=-2.138$; $p=0.07$), these differences are not statistically significant. Research conducted in some other countries indicates the importance of building partnership, equal communication and agreement on important issues (Jones & Ignelzi, 2000). Several authors (Deslandes 2006, Hoover et al., 2005, Epstein 2010, Radu 2011) mention in their research that high involvement of parents in the work of school is in positive correlation with better academic success of students. The research conducted in Croatia, entitled *Parental needs, expectations and experiences related to involvement in school life* was conducted within the international research project *National Research on Parents in the South-eastern European countries* has shown that parents have a traditional approach as they perceive the classes and extra-curricular activities solely as the school's obligation and they do not see themselves in that at all (Škutor, 2014). The results of our research indicate that the experimental model has had an impact on the subjects in respect to sex. In the case of both male and female subjects a statistically

significant difference has been observed in the self-assessment between the initial and final survey. Research suggests that the experience of parenting and the attitude towards child education depends on the gender of parents (Lacković-Grgin, 2011). The mother has a more powerful influence on the child and is more involved in the upbringing and education of the child (Tomić, 2006). Mothers are more involved in their everyday school activities and more communicate with school staff (Obradović et al., 2003). The results of the study show that parents do not differ in perceptions of parenting, as it suggests a shift from traditional thinking that the care of the offspring is predominantly intended for mothers (Reić-Ercegovac, 2011). A modern approach to parenting involves the equal relationship and participation of both parents (Sočo, 2001). The third finding of the research indicates that the experimental model has had a significant effect on the subjects in respect to their professional qualifications. Statistically significant progress has been recorded with parents who have completed elementary and secondary education in the self-assessment of parental participation in the work of school as a partner institution. The subjects with university degree have also made progress in the self-assessment; however, it is not statistically significant. The reason for that might be the fact that highly educated parents were aware of the importance of partnership with school even prior to their involvement in the experimental program and that the offered model only additionally improved that partnership. Educational level of parents is a variable that influences the development of the personality of a child and his attitude towards education (Grandić, 2001). More educated parents are more likely to help the child during schooling, very often such parents place greater demands on children and are more involved in child education. The research found that children of more educated parents achieved on average better results in school than children whose parents were less educated (Lacković-Grgin, 1994). Parental education is significantly related to the behavior and attitude of parents toward the upbringing and education of children (Arendell, 1997). Parents who invest more in their education are more willing to upgrade their knowledge, skills and abilities for responsible parenting. There is no doubt that parent-school partnership brings multiple benefit and interest to all the stakeholders, which is particularly reflected in the child interests.

Conclusion

Family is a child's most important development environment and school is a significant agent of socialization and often a mediator of experiences students acquire in their home and community they belong to. For the mediator role to be entirely fulfilled, family and school need to build a partnership. The dilemma is whether the school teachers and management are adequately equipped for a quality partnership with family and whether the school is ready to apply the partnership approach of cooperation with their students' parents. In this research we started from the assumption that the experimental model has a positive impact on the efficient involvement of parents and teachers in the school work. The results we have reached indicate that the main hypothesis has been confirmed that the experimental model has a positive impact on the involvement of parents in the work of school. There is no universal family-school partnership program because each environment, school, and family are exposed to multifactorial conditioning. Nevertheless, the vision of joint action through the elements of active involvement of parents in the work of school helps the partnership philosophy take root and assist in enhancing the system of education and upbringing.

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