

# DEVELOPMENT OF STAFF OF A SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOL IN THE SOUTH MORAVIAN REGION IN THE FIELD OF COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

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## Abstract:

Human capital is the cornerstone of any organization, including elementary schools. The role of pedagogical staff is not only to educate and educate pupils, but also to communicate with their legal representatives, with their parents. Currently, the methods and form of communication and its effectiveness are changing. This study focuses on the development of employees of a selected primary school in the South Moravian Region in communication competence with pupils' parents. The questionnaire survey took place in the period September-December 2021 and was attended by 39 teachers. More than 70% of respondents consider their communication skills to be very good, but at the same time more than 80% of respondents say they would welcome an improvement in their skills in this area. The results of the survey show that there is no difference between the length of practice and the need for further development of competence in the field of communication with parents.

## **Introduction**

The school is an institution that educates future generations, develops individual competencies of pupils. School and family are two basic institutions that influence the formation and development of pupils' competencies. (Triwahyuni, 2014) Cooperation between the school and the family, i.e., between the teacher and the parent, is therefore a cornerstone for the complete development of the pupil. (Epstein et al., 2018) For this area, the key competence of the teacher is mastering communication and using appropriate communication channels to cooperate with the pupil's parent. In today's globalized world, school-family cooperation, mutual communication, and open conversation for the benefit of pupil development are key. School-family partnerships are key to mastering good behaviour, sustainable behaviour in society, and developing habits for self-development. (IIER 6: Wyatt (1996) - school effectiveness research, b.r.) Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta emphasize the need for teachers and parents to work together to achieve a set level of education for pupils and to combine elements in and out of school. (2006) Partnership and open communication between school and family, or between teacher and parent, have two key moments: 1) This cooperation has a demonstrably positive effect on the psychological and emotional development of the pupil. 2) Well-established communication and cooperation co-create an honour of security, safety, and a confidential environment for establishing a well-functioning relationship between the two parties.

School-family partnerships play an important role in educating pupils. Nayir & Cinkir (2018) stated that it is not easy today to establish a partnership. Setting up good communication and good cooperation between parents and teachers directly affects teacher performance (Broussard, 2003). Visiting parents at school, communication with teachers not only about the benefit of the student but also about the current state of school improves the relationship between teachers and family. This strengthens mutual cooperation, which brings a synergistic effect in the overall teacher-parent communication. (Bos & Vaughn, 2002).

Establishing a partnership between school and family has a positive effect on communication between teacher and parent. (Bay & Kalay, 2018) When talking to a teacher, parents should learn more about how to work together to develop their child. A suitable form of development of mutual communication and cooperation is a meeting of parents and teachers at the school in the form of regular informative meetings. These meetings can take various forms, such as training activities to improve communication. The overall setting of the strategy of communication and cooperation between parents and the school / teacher is a suitable strategic tool for each school's management.

This study summarizes the findings of a survey concerning the setting up of communication between teachers and parents of a selected primary school in the South Moravian Region with an emphasis on the development of this competence as a tool for further development of pedagogical staff.

## **2 Analytical frameworks**

This study focuses on the development of employees of a selected primary school in the South Moravian Region in communication competence with pupils' parents. The aim of the paper is to find out the tools used for pedagogical staff for communication with parents, the need for development and education in the field of competence with communication with parents.

The presented study presents the results of a questionnaire survey conducted in the period September-December 2021; it was attended by 39 pedagogical staff of the school out of a total of 43. The return of the questionnaires was therefore 90.7%. Teachers were asked about the usual activities with which they communicate with parents (regardless of the current situation around the Covid pandemic), the period of 2021 was monitored. The questionnaire contained a total of 10 closed questions and two open questions, 3 identification questions (length of teaching practice, gender, primary or secondary school teacher). The questionnaire was sent to 43 pedagogical staff, relevant data were obtained from 39 pedagogical staff. The results of the questionnaire survey were evaluated using contingency tables.

Respondents who completed the questionnaire were divided according to the length of teaching practice into groups:

- a) 0-10 years (8 teachers)
- b) 11-20 years (9 teachers)
- c) 21-30 years (14 teachers)
- d) 31 and over (8 teachers)

Research questions were identified to assess the data collected:

- 1) The need for further development in competence of communication with parents does not depend on the length of pedagogical practice.
- 2) The pedagogue informs and communicates with the parents especially in case of a negative deviation in the pupil's behaviour and study results.

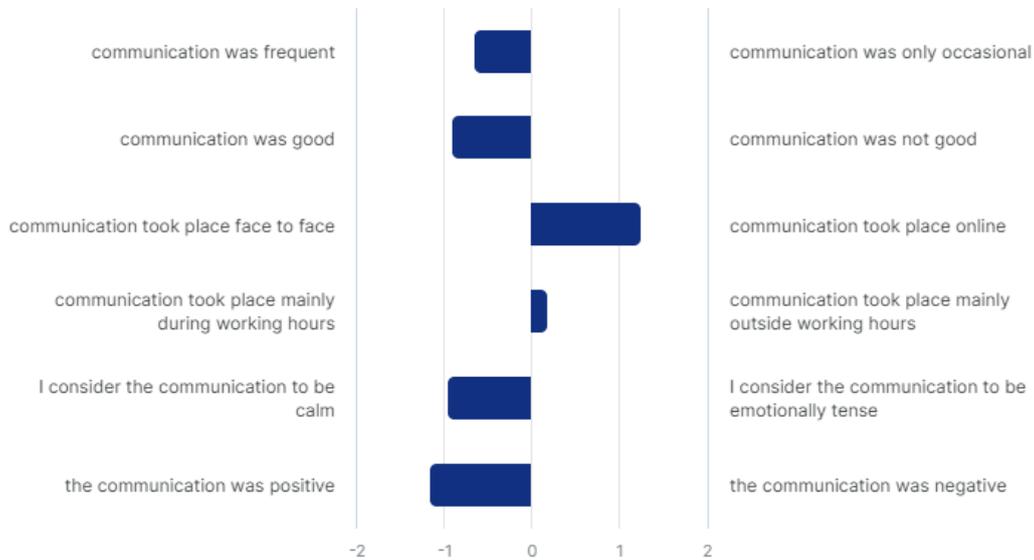
### 3 Results and discussion

This part presents the results of a questionnaire survey in the field of competence of pedagogical staff in the field of communication with parents. In a selected primary school in the South Moravian Region, 39 pedagogical staff (91%) took part in the research.

Out of the total number of respondents, 73 of them stated that they subjectively evaluate their ability to communicate with their parents as very good or rather good, and 27% as rather weak. In the case of resolving a conflict situation with parents, 63% of parents stated that they considered their communication skills to be rather good, 34% said to be rather weak. Although more than half of the school's teaching staff perceives their communication skills towards their parents as rather good, even in conflict situations, only 10% of them would not consider the area of communication with parents in their further pedagogical development.

This may be because 79% of respondents stated that they consider communication with parents to be a source of stressful situations in their pedagogical work. Another argument in support of the development of communication with parents may be the fact that 76% of respondents stated that they encountered aggressive behaviour and aggressive communication from parents in a given year. Considering the length of practice of pedagogical staff and their requirement for further development in the field of communication with parents, it was found that in all groups of teachers perceive the need to develop competence in the field of communication with parents as significant more than 50% of respondents.

**Figure 1:** *Communication with parents during the Covid-19 pandemic*



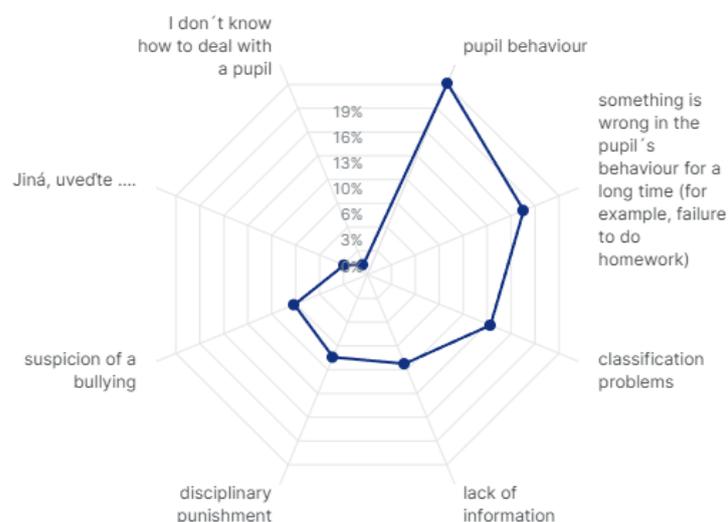
Source: author's own

The Covid-19 pandemic (as can be seen in Graph 1) shifted communication to a much more frequent frequency than before, and the form of communication significantly prevailed in the online area (email, telephone, SMS, social networks). Although 33% of respondents stated that communication took place outside working hours and on weekends, and another 23% of respondents stated that communication took place during and outside working hours, 63% of respondents rate this communication as good, quiet (79%) and positively tuned (82%).

Overall, respondents assessed that in the last year, the Covid-19 pandemic affected communication with parents, but it was no longer as demanding and burdensome as it was in 2020 (during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic). The survey also monitored the area of the most common topics that the teacher communicates to parents. Educators most often inform parents in a situation where the child has a change in behaviour or learning outcomes towards deterioration, e.g., impaired achievement, insufficient attendance, suspected bullying. The educator is thus a messenger of bad news in the field of communication with parents, and this may indicate a bad or stressful experience for both parties from the communication. Topics related to pupils' strengths and achievements, information on teaching methods and forms, the school's educational philosophy, vision, and further development of the school, the class, the pupil are suitable tools for inclusion in the communication.

Currently, there are many new teaching methods such as the genetic method of reading. Parents are usually unaware of these methods, so they cannot know the principle of their use and how to proceed with this method in the framework of home preparation with the child. This is often stressful for the parents, and they can transfer this stress to the subsequent communication with the teacher. However, simply mentioning these new methods in parent meetings may not be enough for many parents. In combination with the fear or reluctance to ask the educator for an explanation, unpleasant situations arise precisely when solving the shortcomings in the pupil's results, which may result from the initial information and communication barrier. The possibility of solving these situations (and thus alleviating the stress and tension in communication) is to regularly inform parents about what is happening at school, what procedures they use, what specific support in home preparation is welcome from the parent. Respondents were also asked about situations they had contacted their parents over the past year. These were mostly situations concerning the pupil's behaviour (89.5%), followed by the pupil's work at school deteriorating over a long period of time (65.8%) and problems with the pupil's classification (50%). Only 10.5% of respondents contacted their parents when there was a lack of information passed between parents and the teacher. Other reasons for communication with parents were given by 10% of respondents, only in this group it was communication in passing on information about the pupil's achievements, activities that the teacher takes in the classroom, new teaching methods, information about the classroom climate, passing on information about projects and opportunities for parental involvement (as in Graph 2).

**Figure 2:** *Topics addressed between the teacher and the parent*



*Source: author's own*

Respondents were also asked about 10 possible forms of teacher-parent meetings. These forms of meeting support and deepen cooperation, increase the parent's trust in the school and the teacher, help shape communication in the right way, as they allow continuous transmission of necessary information (not only in situations where there is a negative deviation in pupil behaviour or learning outcomes) and many also keep parents motivated to work with the school. Of the activities offered that support communication between teacher and parent, respondents use the most consultations / individual class meetings parent-pupil-teacher (15%), this is a so-called tripartite meeting.

The class teacher, the child's legal representative and the child will meet at the agreed time. The class teacher has information and materials from the teachers who teach the child ready for this meeting. (Christenson & Reschl, 2010) Part of these meetings is the evaluation of the development of key competencies of individual children, such as communication and cooperation with classmates and teachers, motivation to learn, logical thinking, creative thinking (as in Table 1). It is common for most parents to communicate with the school only in case of difficulties and problems. Reports coming from school are often considered a criticism or a problem. It is therefore appropriate to keep parents informed about positive facts, about what has been achieved, what activities the children have completed. A parent who is used to communicating with the school more often (even if only passively), while obtaining positive information, will be less afraid of individual meetings with the teacher. If the meeting is initiated by a teacher, it is advisable to prepare the parents in advance, inform about the content and goals of the meeting. If the meeting is initiated by a parent and the solution is a conflict, it is appropriate if a third (neutral) person is present at the meeting (as can be seen in Table 1). So far, an unused activity is the possibility of a curricular afternoon. During the curricular morning, parents learn from teachers and school management what they are learning, how and why. Parents could get acquainted with teaching methods, especially the new and unknown ones. Curricular mornings can become part of the program of information meetings for first-year parents, adaptation courses for children and parents, parent cafes, etc. Parents can help determine / choose the topic themselves, according to what they do not understand about the teaching. The meetings can be led by both teachers and invited experts. The frequency of meetings is at the discretion of the school, but meetings should not take place, for example, only once in the school year, their meaning then disappears. Another unused activity is meeting grandparents with pupils. The school invites grandparents to a lecture, which is given directly by the pupils. Grandparents can see the school and are introduced to the modern technologies used in the school. Pupils will play on the teachers and provide their grandparents with basic instructions and information on how to work with online search engines.

**Table 1:** *Activities supporting communication between parents and teachers (n = 39; v %)*

	Yes, I do this activity	The implementation of this activity is/ could be a source to improve communication
1A) Curricular afternoon/meeting	0	59
1B) Parent involvement in the project day/class project activities	7	15
1C) Teacher's visit in the family	2	13
1D) Parent Cafe/educational seminars for parents that can be organized by a teacher or parent	0	71
1E) Presence of parents in teaching	3	21
1F) Consultations/individual class meetings parent-pupil-teacher	15	43
1G) Joint class meetings of parents (parent-pupil-teacher) associated with a demonstration of the pupil's work	9	53
1H) Class meetings of parents associated with their active involvement (voting, joint activities)	5	67
1I) Meeting of grandparents and pupils	0	31
1J) Individual consultations with parents	13	49

*Source: author's own*

Respondents also stated which of the offered activities, in their opinion, could lead to improved parent-teacher communication. 71% indicated the activity of a Parent Cafe/educational seminar for parents. The school has also not implemented this activity yet. The Association of Parents at School or the Association of Parents and Friends of the School can help organize an afternoon lecture for parents. The parents themselves find out from other parents the interest in the topic and organize the invitation of a certain expert accordingly. 67% of respondents described the activity of parents' class meetings associated with their active involvement. During class meetings, parents can write messages to their children encouraging them, telling them what they have in mind, and adding a "indicia" (picture, symbol, or sentence) so that the child can recognize that the message is from them.

They will only sign themselves as "mom" or "dad". The messages are affixed with magnets on the blackboard and the children's task is to find out the next morning that parental message belongs to them. The children they want can read the message aloud to others. 53% of respondents described the activity in the form of a joint class meeting of parents (parent-pupil-teacher) associated with a demonstration of the pupil's work. These may include children's performances (such as singing performances) or children in triplets representing individual subjects to the parents. Children also introduce themselves, what they like, what they enjoy at school, what they would like to be in the future. (Bos & Vaughn, 2002)

The content of joint class meetings is, of course, also the joint activities of children and parents, such as the technique of mutual drawing of hands – parents and children write in each drawn finger a mutually positive appreciation.

**Table 2:** *Forms of support for the development of communication and cooperation with parents by the school management*

	I already receive this support from the school management	I was interested in this support; it could help me support the development of communication and cooperation with parents
3A) Participation of school management in demanding negotiations with parents (aggressive parent, manipulative parent)	4	44
3B) Participation of a member of the school counselling centre (educational counsellor, prevention methodologist, school psychologist) in negotiations with problem parents	15	64
3C) Objection management training	36	69
3D) Training in the field of verbal and nonverbal communication	26	56
3E) Opportunity to prepare for a demanding meeting with parents in cooperation with the staff of the school counselling centre	19	39
Setting up an internal policy for conducting interviews with parents	0	44
Creating a sample document for minutes of meetings with parents	0	67

*Source: author's own*

Respondents were also asked about the current forms of support from the management in support of the development of competence in communication with parents. So far, the setting of an internal directive for conducting interviews with parents or a model document for minutes of meetings with parents is completely missing. Very little support is also given by teachers in the school management's participation within demanding negotiations with parents (situations where the parent is aggressive or manipulative).

Finally, the respondents were asked what form of support for the development of communication and cooperation between parents and teachers would welcome the school management (principal, deputy principal). The most requested activity is training in the field of objection raising (67%), the need to create a model document for minutes of meetings with parents (67%) and the participation of a member of the school counselling centre in meetings with problem parents (64%) is also perceived.

## **Conclusion**

This presented study deals with the competence of communication of pedagogical staff with parents of pupils of a selected primary school in the South Moravian Region. All 43 employees were contacted, and 39 of them completed the questionnaire. Given that the issues of perception of current competence, tools for its development and support by the school management have so far been examined only sporadically, the topic of the study is unique in its focus.

The results of the research show that more than 70% of respondents consider their communication skills to be very good, but at the same time more than 80% of respondents say that they would welcome an improvement in their skills in this area. The results of the survey

show that there is no difference between the length of practice and the need for further development of competence in the field of communication with parents. This may be because 79% of respondents stated that they consider communication with parents to be a source of stressful situations in their pedagogical work. Another argument in support of the development of communication with parents may be the fact that 76% of respondents stated that they encountered aggressive behaviour and aggressive communication from parents.

Current knowledge can be used by the school management in the strategic development of the competence of its pedagogical staff. This study is also a suitable basis for further research into the hitherto neglected issues of developing communication between teacher and parent with the aim of establishing cooperation in various types of schools in the South Moravian Region and other regions of the Czech Republic.

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