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Negative perception of teacher's work as obstruction of school – parent non-conflict cooperation

Negatywna percepcja pracy nauczyciela jako przeszkoda bezkolektywnej współpracy pomiędzy szkołą a rodzicem

Introduction

The analysis of results from the research on parental involvement in their children's education at school suggests that parental inclusion and involvement positively affects not only children's learning achievements, but also the future prospects of children, their mental health and social relationship with others (G. Driessen, F. Smit, P. Sleegers, 2005; M. Przybysz-Zaremba, 2010, p. 15-30). This effect is long-lasting. However, the phenomenon of parental involvement in the education of children at school is complex and is interpreted by a number of theories: six levels of parental involvement in children's education (J. Epstein, 2007) and teachers and parents relationship (M. Warren, S. Hong CL Rubin, P. Sychitkokhong, 2010).

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Researchers also revealed that communication between parents and school can be embarrassed not only by psychological characteristics of students, but also by psychological, social and demographic features of their families and parents, and the economic situation of a child's family (G. Hornby, R. Lafaele, 2011). Teachers' attitudes, available information about children and the forms of its presentation (in e.g. language, behaviour) have also influence on communication between parents and school. Successful cooperation between school and parents is not a coincidence or an automatic process. It is the result of targeted efforts of both sides which are turned to realise creative ideas into actions and oriented to overcome the obstacles to cooperation (M. Warren, S. Hong, C. Rubin, P. Sychitkokhong, 2010).

In Lithuania, there is a lack of the research investigating the scope of parental involvement in school life, advantages offered by involvement and barriers restricting it. According to the data of the research performed by Grincevičienė (2006, 2014), the parents of pupils do not feel that they are an integral part of the school community. An identical conclusion was formed having analyzed the data of external assessment of the quality of school activity: in a large number of assessed schools, the level of parental involvement is insufficient; the forms of parental involvement are not diverse (Valantinas, Čiuladienė, 2012). According to the data of National Agency for School Evaluation (NASE), a positive correlative link has been established between the parental cooperation and school effectiveness; it was found that parents whose involvement level in school life is low are less satisfied with the school of their child, are more inclined to blame teachers' unobjectivity and insufficient goodwill towards their children and insufficient assistance with experienced learning difficulties for their child's learning failures. Such parents also assert more often that there is the lack of information on their child's achievements and behaviour at school, they complain about disrespectful attitude towards them (Valantinas, Čiuladienė, 2013). According to Grincevičienė (2014), parents would appreciate "that the

organizers of educational process would listen to their thoughts, suggestions and consider them when making essential decisions. However, children's parents do not take the role of originator in this situation, thus, it should be appropriate that the community of pedagogues which enjoys the leader's status would seek the means and methods how to improve the relationships between the school and society".

Parents, teachers and school administration are allies who share a specific objective – optimal results of a child's (self-) education. An uncontrolled conflicting interaction turns allies into enemies – fighters and undermines efforts to achieve the essential objective. The data of external assessment (surveys of parents and pupils, lesson observation protocols by external evaluators) (Čiuladienė, 2013) allows maintaining that it is necessary to pay more attention to a conflict at school at all levels: to stop it/ mediate/ resolve/ manage (J. Hakvoort, 2010). Every conflict at school should perform an educational function – to develop communication and cooperation, constructive problem solution skills of its members.

The purpose of this article is to establish tension fields in parents–teachers relationships on the basis of the data provided by the National Agency for School Evaluation – The Survey on the Opinion of Parents on School Activity. To realize this purpose, the following tasks have been set: 1) to describe critical remarks made by parents concerning education quality during a class; 2) to discuss the scope of the spread of ineffective teaching, in the opinion of parents, by highlighting its relationship with school location, the age of pupils and their attainment.

Methodology

The external evaluation of the quality of school activities organized by Lithuanian National Agency for School Evaluation (NASE) is one of education quality monitoring instruments in the country, which is designed to investigate the educational process at school. The external evaluation methodology and process

is precisely regulated: it is carried out in accordance with the Guidelines for External Quality Assessment in General Education (2009) and other general education laws. The external assessment is a complex analysis carried out in several stages and uses different methods. At the first stage of the process – *making preparations for evaluation*, – a team of external evaluators analyzes data about school (they assess a survey report on school students and the opinion of their parents about school activities, documents represented by school and its founder, information on school's website, etc.). At the second stage – *preparation of school for evaluation*, – a leading evaluator meets with the representatives of school community and other persons who participate or organize an external evaluation, social partners and the school teachers, and discusses how the evaluation will be carried out at school and answers their questions, which bother the school's community. At the third stage – *evaluation of the school*, – the team of external evaluators' works at school (about 3-5 days) observing lessons and other activities, talking with various representatives of the school community groups, analyzes the collected data, evaluates and consults on the quality level of school assessment and formulates key conclusions. At the fourth stage of the external evaluation – *conclusions of evaluation*, – the external evaluation report is submitted and presented to school and its founder.

The evaluation of the quality of school activities includes the analysis of five spheres. Each sphere is detailed by evaluative aspects:

- *school's culture* (ethos, aspirations for progress, order and school relations);
- *education and training* (the general organization of education, the organization of classes, the quality of teaching, the quality of learning, the differentiation of teaching and learning, and the evaluation during the process of education);
- *learning outcomes* (progress and learning outcomes);

- *support for students* (taking care of students, pedagogical-psychological-social support, answering special educational needs, assistance with career planning, the education of parents (as adults));
- *strategic management of school* (the strategy of school, the self-assessment of school, management style, the management of personnel and the management of tangible assets). This article deals with only one aspect of the external evaluation methodology, emphasizing the link between school and parents.

The article deals with the **data from student parents' survey** (parental opinion survey is the required part of external quality evaluation of school activities carried out by NASE). The aim of survey was to reveal the parents' views about the academic, social, emotional and physical environment of school. During the survey, which was carried since 2012 only on-line, respondents were asked to evaluate 19 statements by marking an answer: I completely agree/I agree/I disagree/ I completely disagree. There was space left to write a commentary at the end of the questionnaire – a statement/s regarding an aspect/s that concerns him/her.

The article uses the data of the survey which was conducted in 2010-2012. The comments of parents have been analyzed. 48 290 parents participated in the surveys of this period. It should be noted that a tiny percentage (approximately 10%) of parents wrote comments. It has to be noted that only those comments which were written on-line have been analyzed. The comments that were made in paper questionnaires have not been analyzed, because questionnaires are stored at NASE archive for only 1 year. Thus, only comments of 605 parents (this comprises 1.3% of the sample) have been used.

Based on the character of the content, comments were positive (written praises, joy, and thanksgiving) and negative (expressed discontent, inappropriate, in the opinion of parents, activity, a situation that has to be changed). Negative comments were

written by twice as many parents ($N = 353/N = 177$). It has to be added that still more 67 parents, who filled in on-line questionnaires, perceived both positive and negative aspects in the activity of the evaluated school. This article discusses only the comments of negative character which were provided by 420 respondents. The number of problematic aspects is higher, because not one, but a few problems are mentioned in the comments.

To analyze the data, grounded theory has been chosen (V. Žydzūnaitė, 2006, 2007; B. Bitinas, 2006). In the first stage of the analysis, open coding was performed – individual cases were assigned concepts – labels. When analyzing the content of statements made by parents, 6 conceptual categories were identified. Parents provide remarks concerning:

1. environment which, in their opinion, is not safe and healthy,
2. low-quality education,
3. unreasonable activities of the administration,
4. inappropriate cooperation with parents,
5. the organization of informal education,
6. shortcomings of educational system.

In the second stage of the analysis, the second open coding was performed – individual cases of different categories were assigned concepts – subcategories. This article discusses only one conceptual category – low-quality education. Negative comments on this topic were most frequent. The content analysis of the comments, that discuss the quality of education quality, allowed identifying 4 subcategories: teaching ineffectiveness, a lack of assistance; a lack of discipline; the flaws in the progress and attainment assessment.

The third stage of the analysis is axial coding: the subcategories were examined and their characteristics are revealed. When analyzing subcategories the features of the expression of inappropriate activity, in the opinion of parents, were identified, reasons and consequences were identified by the parents. Thus, the content analysis of comments enabled to see the complexity

of the tension field limiting the successful cooperation between parents and school.

The qualitative research is complemented by discussion of the quantitative research results. The article discusses 7 assessment statements provided by the parents in the questionnaire:

1. I trust subject teachers as the specialists of their subject,
2. The volume of homework is neither too high nor too low,
3. If my child does not understand anything, he can always get an explanation during classes or consultations,
4. The school provides enough information about the assistance of specialists (psychologist, socio educational instructor, speech therapist et al.) which is accessible to my child,
5. We are satisfied with order and discipline during classes,
6. Teachers assess and grade my child fairly and objectively,
7. School teachers evaluate my child's effort and believe in his success.

The breakdown of the assessments of the parents according to 3 factors is analyzed: school location, pupils' age and attainment. Based on school location, respondents are classified into 3 groups: 1) parents of pupils who attend schools in cities (they comprised 42.2% (N = 20374) of the sample); parents of pupils who attend town schools (25.7%, N = 12403); parents of pupils who attend township / village schools (32.1%, N = 15512). Based on a pupil's age, 3 groups of the respondent are also distinguished: 1) parents whose children learn at primary education level (1-4 classes) (28.1%, N = 13505); 2) parents whose children learn at basic education level (5-8 classes) (32.5%, N = 15598); 3) parents whose children learn at secondary education level (9-12 classes) (39.4%, N = 18908). 5 groups were identified according to a criterion of attainment: 1) the child learns very well – their parents comprised 17.1% of the sample; 2) the child learns well - 45.4%; 3) the child learns mediocre – 28.8%; 4) the child learns satisfactorily – 6.8%; 5) the child's learning outcomes are weak

– 1.8% It should be noted that the parents described their child's attainment themselves.

Statistical methods of data processing were used for quantitative data analysis – descriptive analysis (frequency, percentage distribution), the verification of the independence of features (chi-square criterion). Version 15 of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) was used.

The features of parental negative perception of teacher's work based on data of parental survey: qualitative data analysis

In their comments, parents express their indignation over **teaching ineffectiveness** (non-performance). Based on the observations of parents, it is impossible that teaching would be effective when teaching is substituted by another activity (an event is being held/there is a talk going on/the teacher is eating). Furthermore, in the opinion of parents, an ineffective class is when the class is lead by a teacher who is not the specialist of the subject: *There are not always teachers who would be able to substitute others, if need be, therefore, classes are only so-so.* In the opinion of parents, some teachers use inappropriate methods of teaching (“outdated”, inadequate, incomprehensible) *(I'm not quite satisfied with the methods of the early teaching of a foreign language. The teacher does not use innovative methods of teaching when the child learns the language by listening and understanding the words of a foreign language from the context and so on. The method of drilling the information in is used during classes).*

Parents also point out a lack of differentiation. The comments reflect a twofold grievance: 1) teaching without differentiation has a negative influence on more gifted pupils (*Pupils who learn better do not have opportunities to develop*); 2) teaching without differentiation has a negative influence on weak pupils (*Pupils whose learning outcomes are mediocre or weak are not interesting to anybody. I agree that it is difficult to work with them*

during classes. But children sense so very well that teachers are not interested in them, and are not able to increase their learning motivation). It should be added that the grievance of such character can cause generalized evaluation of all the school: *The school is oriented towards weak pupils, whereas no attention, in practice, is paid to the education of strong pupils.*

The purpose of teaching is to promote learning which is continued at home when pupils perform homework tasks assigned to them. Like in the case of differentiation, the dual nature of parental discontent concerning assigned homework was revealed: 1) in the opinion of some, too much homework is assigned (*Homework loads are too much, I think that learning should be accomplished at school, but not at home*), 2) in the opinion of others, too little homework is assigned (*On average, too little homework is assigned*). Inadequate homework load consists in the fact that it is uneven (*There is no homework one day, whereas next day he is burning midnight oil*), it match neither the child's abilities (*Homework, especially creative tasks, often exceed the child's abilities, therefore, parents have to make a considerable contribution*) nor regulations (*For vacations, they are assigned even more homework, because they have more time to do it, however, holidays or vacations should be meant for rest*). There were cases mentioned when homework is not recorded in the electronic school diary: *Homework is not put down in the pupil's record book, or that is done only by a few teachers. In case of sickness, the official learning schedule is gone.*

Based on the research data, parents are distressed when **their child does not receive assistance necessary for him**. It should be noted that it concerns the assistance to understand the topic of a subject (the content of its material) (*I would like that, in my child does not understand the objective of a class, everything would be explained*). Due to the expectations of parents that their child would receive assistance during classes, it came to light that it is provided not by all teachers: *Certain teachers do not waste their time on giving additional explanations.* Due to the expectations

to receive assistance after classes, it can be seen that it is organized not in all the schools: *When my child does not understand anything he does not have an opportunity to ask. There are no additional consultations.* Furthermore, parents are distressed that assistance is not provided by assistance specialists working at school: *I would like more attention from the school psychologist and the special needs teacher when solving the problems of the pupils having weak learning outcomes. It seemed to me that their activity was only “on paper”...*

The data revealed that sometimes children even are punished for the fact that they ask for assistance: *If a pupil missed a new class that had been taught, or did not quite understand its essence, he is afraid to ask his teacher, because the teacher most often accuses a pupil of being inattentive, and it sometimes happens that there are such teachers who use the word “moron”. In which case a pupil is not able to learn that subject, however, he “masters” for the future that it is not allowed to ask. Parents are not always able to explain mathematics or other subjects, therefore, there remains only one way out – to hire a tutor.*

Based on the data, when necessary assistance is not provided at school, parents have to look for it somewhere else: *I have never heard of additional consultations on certain subjects after classes at school itself (my child has difficulty learning the Lithuanian language). This leads us to thinking about paid services.* Furthermore, financial losses are incurred not only concerning additional classes, but also concerning additional material required for classes which due to the lack of assistance is not used properly: *During the classes of technology there was absolutely no explanation given how to do decoupage, because at that time the teacher probably was more interested not to teach a class, but to put class diary in order. I want to emphasize that the children had bought the materials themselves and even at a cheaper price, whereas when children were performing their work there were quite a few damaged works. So I wonder what teacher is doing during classes, and why such a one is needed at all.*

In comments, parents also discuss **flaws in the assessment of their children's progress and attainments**. Remarks are related to assessment principles, organization and functions. In the opinion of parents, assessment is not objective. Different criteria for assessing objectivity can be discerned in their comments: 1) the assessment provided by the teacher does not correspond to external evaluation (assessment received during an examination) (*Is it normal that my child whose annual grade for the Lithuanian language was a 4 receives 70 points during his State examination? Do teachers really not abuse their power by giving bad grades?*); 2) the assessment provided by the teacher is influenced by pupils outward appearance (*Some teachers assess pupils in a non-objective way, e.g. according to their appearance*); 3) the assessment provided by the teacher is influenced by personal favouritism/ disfavour (*I do not know why it is so that the teacher classifies children, which means dislikes. All of them should be equal. Where can we find justice? They also give lower grades and are punished without any reason*); 4) the assessment provided by the teacher is influenced by the pupil's status (*Teachers classify pupils as good children and bad children. Whereas they should be all equal. Teachers assess one child using one assessment principles, while another child is assessed using another set of principles*); 5) the assessment provided by the teacher is influenced by the pupil's behaviour (*There are instances when a pupil is assessed for his behaviour and not for his knowledge*). There is also a lack of the individualisation of assessment (*There are instances when assessment provided by the teacher is quite narrow, oriented only towards the requirements of educational system and/or personal requirements of the teacher, and not towards education of the personality*).

When talking about the organization of assessment parents express their dissatisfaction concerning assessment strategy, and the load of tests. Here, assessment strategy is the system of assessment methods which is used by a teacher in order to assess the pupil's knowledge, and effort. The comments of parents

revealed that assessment strategy of some teachers is not acceptable to them, because it leaves them with uncertainty, disrupts assistance provided by them. Parents were dissatisfied with: 1) assessment techniques (*I dislike the grades that are accumulated during classes, because you cannot see them and assess the learning effort of your child*); 2) assessment frequency: (*I would like to receive more frequent outcomes of the English language in order that I would be able to track the level of my children*); 3) assessment tasks (*Assessment should not consist only of grades received for tests, but also those for homework, papers... other activity than only that which was performed during a class (I would suggest getting more interested in the work style of schools abroad – so far, so sad)*); 4) justification for assessment (logic (*The teacher does not answer my questions in the electronic school diary, and does not comment on the grade. You can grade a pupil giving him a 2, I think, when a pupil does not know anything? I do not understand assessment system*)).

It should be noted that there is a problem which has arisen due to uncoordinated assessment strategy at school level: *There are sometimes 3 - 4 tests a day, teachers and administration argue that those are not tests, although only the time frame allotted for that differs, but not the volume. Pupils avoid objecting, because then the time frame is shortened or they are deliberately given more difficult tasks next day. Whereas pupils have to get ready for all the tomorrow's tests in the evening. The same happens before vacations as well or as soon as they are over, although psychologists and even laws regulate that tests should be avoided during this time frame.*

Parents discern the motivating function of assessment. They regret that teachers do not pay attention to it: *A child's effort to learn should be assessed, because not all the children are gifted in the same way. I would like certain pedagogues to really pay attention to it.* Furthermore, parents also express their indignation over the fact that, for teachers, assessment has become a substitute for a rod; it is a means of punishment (*They threaten*

with the lowest grades). It should be noted that the diagnostic function of assessment is perceived by parents broader than only information on the level of their child attainments. In the opinion of parents, assessment provides also information on the effectiveness of the activity of the teacher: *If after writing a test all the children of the class are graded not higher than 3-6 points, I think that it should be rewritten after the explanation of their mistakes (...and the quality of the conveyed material), later on after having written it for the second time/ the highest grade is a 7. Maybe then the teacher has not done anything? Maybe the topic is too complicated for this group of children?*

Based on the comments of parents, not all the teachers succeed in creating an appropriate learning environment – **there is a lack of discipline during classes** (*Order and discipline during classes are not satisfactory, because there is often a noise in the classrooms, and it is difficult to work and concentrate*). When specifying the problem of classroom management, it can be seen that, in the opinion of parents, inappropriate methods of classroom management are applied: 1) the noise is ignored by the teacher (*Pupils cannot concentrate due to the noise made by other classmates during the class, whereas the teacher does not respond to it*); 2) teaching process is stopped by the teacher (*There are a few pupils in the class who disturb the work of all the class. Sometimes teachers refuse to continue a class due to the noise made by those pupils*).

The comments made by parents also reflect the reasons of ineffective, in their opinion, teaching. It is common that parents link the problem to the teacher's personality: 1) The teacher has negative traits (he/she is sluggish, irresponsible, undisciplined) (*Teachers are lazy to explain to pupils*). 2) The age of the teacher is "inappropriate" (*Some of them are already simply too old to teach their subject and do that not very appropriately*). It should be noted that all the comments of similar manner concern only teachers of older age. 3) The teacher lacks competency related to his subject (*The English language is taught by X who cannot*

speak proper English and makes a lot of mistakes related to the subject. During classes he works only with the weakest pupils of the class, others are left to be bored / I cannot trust the teacher, if he teaches three different subjects).

On the other hand, there has been an objective obstacle to effective teaching - overloaded programs: *In my opinion, the program which is taught at school is very expanded and too complicated.* Thus, parents discern the shortcomings in the education not only at class / school, but also state level. Parents speak about a negative impact on them and their child, it is linked to the activity of the teacher and administration which is determined by the problems related the teacher (his traits, lack of competency and so on), and educational system.

Similarly, as in the case of ineffective teaching the lack of additional explanation was linked both to objective reasons (the number of pupils in the class) (*It is impossible to explain to everybody when there about 30 children in the classroom / the teacher is incapable of coming up to everyone*) and subjective reasons: 1) The teacher has a strange approach to work (the activity oriented not towards the child, but towards the curriculum): (*I think that there is one problem in all the schools. All have to adhere to the teaching curriculum and programs, and teachers do not care whether pupils have understood, whether they have mastered their subject (that at least 50% would understand). Teachers are in a hurry, they rush in order that they would only keep up with the curriculum*). 2) The teacher is not benevolent (*There are a few teachers at school who understand a request to explain or clarify the topic of the class as insolence / I have an impression that teachers want to traumatize pupils with low grades as hard as they can. The emotional state of pupils does not matter; the only thing that is important is that the pupil would not get a better grade than later on when he takes his examination. They should value that children still want to learn, and should not to ruin them*).

Parents presented only a few insights concerning the causes of

the lack of discipline. Firstly, the teacher has to take responsibility himself for the undisciplined behaviour of his pupils, because he behaves in an undisciplined way himself (*The teacher of physical education very often tries to deride and humiliate children in the presence of the whole class, especially those "do not comply" and are not able to perform according to the standards set by her*). Furthermore, parents note that teachers lack empathy (*There are instances when the child's self-feeling and condition are not taken into account, he is given loads that are too big*). Secondly, discipline in the class is disrupted by irresponsible behaviour of the pupils who are not motivated to learn (*In my opinion, when there are chronic noisemakers in the classroom who inhibit the learning of my child and other children, their parents have to pay a fine or something like that, and not that we all suffer*).

The features of parental negative perception of teacher's work based on parental survey data: quantitative data analysis

It should be noted that it is asserted in some comments that teaching is ineffective only in the classes taught by certain teachers, whereas other comments maintain that it is the case with the majority of teachers (*There are professional specialised teachers and wonderful pedagogues, I am pleased to come and communicate. However, it is clear that such teachers are few / because it is already my fourth child who learns at this school, I can maintain that there are good specialists that are able to prepare the child well, however, it cannot be said about the majority*). Thus, in order to establish the extent of the occurrence of the problem in the investigated sample the results of quantitative research (the surveys of pupils' parents of the assessed schools) are used. There are 2 statements in the questionnaire which are connected to teaching: "I trust subject teachers as the specialists of their subject", "The homework load is neither too high nor too low".

90.3% of the respondents (N=43 612) agreed with the

statement “I trust subject teachers as the specialists of their subject”, 6.7% (N=3246) disagreed, 2.6% (N=1257) refrained from any assessment. It should be noted that teachers are trusted less in township / village schools (8% of parents disagreed with the statement), teachers are trusted more in the schools of cities and towns (respectively 5.2% and 7.4% disagreed with the statement) ($p < 0.0001$, $\chi^2 = 269.133$, $df = 8$). Furthermore, teachers are trusted more by the parents of the pupils who learn in primary classes (only 2.2% of parents disagreed with the statement), and less by the parents of senior pupils (8.4% of parents whose children learn at the basic level disagreed with the statement, 8.5% of parents whose children learn at secondary level) ($p < 0.0001$, $\chi^2 = 3330.679$, $df=8$). And pupils’ attainment is attributable to the trust of parents for teachers ($p < 0.0001$, $\chi^2 = 481.257$, $df=16$). Teachers are most trusted by the parents whose children are very strong and weak pupils (6% disagreed with the statement), less by the parents whose children are strong pupils (7% do not trust), least by the parents of pupils with mediocre and satisfactory learning outcomes (8%).

Parents assessed the statement “The homework load is neither too high nor too low”. 82.9% (N=40039) of respondent agreed with the statement, 14.2% (N= 6848) disagreed, 2.2% (N=1086) did not know what to answer. The parents of pupils of town schools expressed the greatest discontent regarding the inadequate load of homework (18.7% of parents disagreed with the statement), less discontent were the parents of pupils of city schools (13.2%), least discontent were the parents of pupils of village schools (12.1%) ($p < 0.0001$, $\chi^2 = 281.061$, $df=4$). There is a stark difference how this statement is assessed by the parents of the children of different ages ($p < 0.0001$, $\chi^2 = 1965.252$, $df = 4$). 6% of the parents of primary school pupils disagreed with this statement, twice as many (12%) of the parents of the pupils attending 5th-8th classes and almost 4 times as many of the parents whose children attend 9th-12th classes (22%). The greatest discontent regarding the homework load was expressed by the

parents of the pupils who learn very well and well (15% of them disagreed with the statement), less discontent were the parents of pupils who have mediocre and weak learning outcomes (respectively 14% and 12%), least discontent are parents whose children have satisfactory learning outcomes (11%) ($p < 0.0001$, $\chi^2 = 255.967$, $df = 8$).

According to the data of quantitative research, approximately one tenth of parents note the lack of assistance for the child (11.4%, $N = 5502$): 92.8% of the respondents ($N = 39959$) agreed with the statement in the questionnaire "If my child does not understand anything, he can always get an explanation during classes or consultations", 6% of the respondents did not assess the statement ($N = 2829$). Based on the data of the research, the problem of the lack of assistance is more relevant to town schools (13.3% of the respondents disagree with the statement, in cities and towns – 11%; $p < 0.0001$, $\chi^2 = 64.877$, $df = 4$). It should be added that this problem is attributable only to the classes of pupils learning at 5th-12th classes. Furthermore, the parents of weaker pupils are more concerned regarding the lack of assistance (their children have mediocre /satisfactory/ weak learning outcomes).

75.3% ($N = 36358$) agreed with the statement in the questionnaire "The school provides enough information about the assistance of specialists (psychologist, socio educational instructor, speech therapist et al.) which is accessible to my child"; 7.4% ($N = 3554$) disagreed (11.5% of the respondents did not assess the statement). Information about assistance specialists is more missed by the respondents whose children learn at township (village) schools, are pupils of 9th-12th classes, and do less well (have mediocre / satisfactory / weak learning outcomes).

There are two statements in the questionnaire of quantitative research related to assessment. 83.3% ($N = 40231$) of the respondents agreed with the statement "Teachers assess and grade my child fairly and objectively", 11.3% ($N = 5456$) of the respondents disagreed (the statement was not assessed by 4.8

% of the respondents, (N = 2332)). 85.6% (N = 41362) of the respondents agreed with the statement "School teachers evaluate my child's effort and believe in his success", 5.6% (N = 2712) of the respondents disagreed (the statement was not assessed by 7.8% of the respondents, (N = 3746)). Based on the data supplied by parents, the assessment problem is more relevant at town and township (village) schools and at the secondary stage of education. It should be also noted that the greatest discontent over assessment objectivity was expressed by the parents of pupils who have mediocre learning outcomes, whereas most discontent over the failure to assess learning effort are the parents of pupils who have satisfactory and weak learning outcomes.

According to the data of quantitative research, one tenth of parents (11.1%) are dissatisfied with discipline during classes. Furthermore, it came to light that among those who disagree with the statement "We are satisfied with the order and discipline during classes" dominate parents whose children learn at town and township (village) schools (respectively 12% and 13%), are pupils of 5th–8th classes (16.4%), have mediocre or satisfactory learning outcomes (12%).

Discussion on contributing to more qualitative school-parent cooperation

The reality of modern day when parents express their discontent concerning the quality of education process to the home-room teacher/school administration not only does it not help manage the conflict, but often causes the beginning of new conflicts. Possible due to insufficient competency of teachers/ the representatives of administration to resolve/ manage conflicts. It should be noted that the institutions of higher education that prepare pedagogues either do not pay any attention to convey direct knowledge of conflicts/ analysis of school conflicts to future teachers or pay very little attention (only one or a few subjects are in the curriculum of studies which can be chosen as an alternative). It should be also added that assistance for

parents in resolving a conflict is, both to the homeroom teacher and the representatives of administration, an additional and time-consuming and effort consuming work which sometimes (time-wise) is incompatible with other direct duties of theirs. Thus, it is no wonder that parents express their indignation over the competency of educators to resolve conflicts: *I would also like teachers to assess the conflict situation among pupils not emotionally, as it happens most often, but having analyzed the situation / Situations are often not fully examined and thought over, whereas decisions are already made / if the child complains to the teacher, he is called "a whistleblower" / Is it normal that after the request by his parents to allow the child to improve his semestral grade by doing some work the teacher does not ask him anything at all?*

On the basis of the purpose of external assessment the data of external assessment are to be also characterised as the prerequisite of the implementation of policy based on evidence: "assessment is meaningless, if its results are not used to make decisions, if they do not become impulses for the further development of education" (R. Ališauskas, R. Dukynaitė, 2005, p. 29). The modern day governance policy has to be based on evidence, whereas decisions have to be made having evaluated evidence and on the basis of the examples of the best experience. When using methodology of decisions based on evidence motives emerge to know the question which is being solved more thoroughly, conditions are created for a logical and motivated decision, the trust of the society and decision makers over the decision that is prepared, is created (B. Mikulskienė, 2008).

One of the strategic decisions in this case could be the implementation of conflict management procedure. On the basis of the experience of foreign schools (e.g., Alpine School District (Utah)), a conflict can be managed by creating a post of an ombudsman and/ or a mediator at school. An ombudsman/ a mediator is a conflict resolution specialist who has knowledge of a conflict, constantly improves his competency of conflict resolution

by resolving/ helping resolve conflicts, expanding his knowledge of the conflict area.

Conflict management process covers a few stages: exposure of a conflict, a thorough discussion of the problem which is the search for the alternatives of its resolution; agreement regarding the decision which is acceptable for both sides. Indignant parents who contact the specialist have an opportunity to express their discontent. Statement alone, identification, and speaking out works soothingly. Later on the specialist, while trying to understand the position of parents and asking additional questions encourages parents to see more aspects of the “problematic” case, reflect the position, and motives of the teacher/s and circumstances of the behaviour. That means that during the discussion not only is effort made to identify as precisely as possible the reason for discontent, but also the contextual knowledge is provided. Later on an ombudsman / a mediator either having spoken with the teacher/ the representatives of the administration on his own, or having organized mutual discussion of the problem, informs the parents about the motives, decisions, changes and the like, organizes the making of an agreement, and is interested in their complying with obligations. Thus, in all instance when parents complain a desired feedback is provided. The main purpose of the activity of an ombudsman / a mediator is assistance to discordant allies in finding an optimal solution to the problem, creation and nurturing of the atmosphere of cooperation. The same conflict management procedure can be used when resolving mutual conflicts of teachers, teachers – the representatives of administration conflicts, teachers – pupils conflicts, and mutual conflicts of pupils. Furthermore, it also performs a preventive function, because it’s essential characteristic is the improvement of communication and cooperation skills.

External assessment is evaluation and diagnostic process, providing schools with a clear basis for a change by getting acquainted with information that reflects objective standards. Maybe

the data of external assessment will become a prerequisite for changes by opening the door of the school to one more assistance specialist (a mediator/ an ombudsman).

Limitation

Qualitative data analysis enabled to see the aspects that concern parents regarding educational process during the classes. The limitation of this analysis should be borne in mind: here, we rely only on short (limited) comments of parents on the topic which is most relevant to them. To examine the opinion of parents, semi-structured interview has to be used which maybe would not reveal *new* problems, however, the total view would be complemented by quite a few details.

Findings

The largest group of complaints expressed by parents is their discontent over the educational process of their child. This group consists of a few subcategories: ineffective teaching, a lack of assistance for the pupil (both during a class and after classes); the quality of the assessment of learning outcomes of pupils (objectivity, reasonableness, systematicity, and informativeness); a lack of discipline.

When analyzing the complaints presented by parents, it was borne in mind that usually more active parents, who have information about the learning outcomes of their child, and his need for attainment, and seeking to get it, participate in such surveys. On the basis that such parents most often complain about the quality of the pedagogical (educational) process of their children, it is possible to maintain that it becomes the main obstacle to cooperation with the school. It is likely that this creates a sort of tension fields between parents and the school. Parents' dissatisfaction with the quality of pedagogical process at school results in distrust in the competency of pedagogues, and that distances parents even further away from the school. Such communication of parents with school and pedagogues based on distrust and

discontent creates prerequisites for ever deepening conflict situation and not for benevolent cooperation which encourages the engagement of parents in the education of their children.

Qualitative data analysis, which defined the tension fields in parents and teachers interaction, also enabled to understand the position of parents on every educational aspect which has become a problem to them. This illustrates that a conflicting interaction also has a positive potential: the behaviour of a conflicting personality highlights his desires, needs, strengths and weaknesses of his personality, moral maturity, psychological stability, and possibilities. However, due to the fact that both sides participate in the conflict, conflicting situations mentioned by parents also reveal the traits of some members of the school community (in this case it more pertains to teachers), those aspects of their activity that have to be improved. In order to achieve a more effective cooperation between parents and the school, it would be appropriate to pay more attention to conflict management. Specific designation of the characteristics of the conflict allows selecting the type and means of impact more effectively.

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Streszczenie

Zaangażowanie rodziców w działalności szkolnej ma pozytywny wpływ na osiągnięcia dzieci w nauce, na uczęszczaniu dzieci do szkoły itd. Brakuje jednak badań naukowych o korzyści i przeszkodach do czynnego udziału rodziców w okresie życia szkolnego dziecka na Litwie. Celem tego artykułu jest poznanie pola napięcia w relacjach rodzic - nauczyciel. Na podstawie danych z bazy Narodowej Agencji ds Oceny Szkół (National Agency for School Evaluation (NASE)) na Litwie, zbadano 29358 rodziców ze 175 szkół. Opinie rodziców na temat działalności w szkole były przeanalizowane, biorąc pod uwagę negatywne komentarze rodziców podane on-line (420 respondentów).

Kontent-analiza wypowiedzi o jakości nauczania pozwala wyróżnić cztery podkategorie: nieskuteczność nauczania, brak wsparcia, brak dyscypliny, osiągnięcia i wady w postępie. Zgodnie z analizą wyników badań, można stwierdzić, że niezadowolenie rodziców z jakości procesu nauczania rodzi nieufność do kompetencji nauczycieli, co skutkuje wyobcowaniu rodziców ze szkoły. Taki klimat w obcowaniu, oparty na nieufności i niezadowoleniu rodziców, jest założeniem głębokiej sytuacji konfliktowej, lecz nie doskonałej współpracy, sprzyjającej angażowaniu się rodziców w procesie edukacji dziecka.

Słowa kluczowe: zaangażowanie rodziców, skargi rodziców, Litwa, Narodowa Agencja ds Oceny Szkół

Abstract

Parental involvement has a positive impact on children's learning achievement, school attendance etc. There is a lack of research of the parental involvement in school life extent, it's advantages and obstacles in Lithuania. The purpose of the article is to find out the voltage fields in parent-teacher relationship. The data base of National Agency for School Evaluation (NASE) in Lithuania was analysed: 29358 parents of 175 schools participated in this survey. Parents' opinions about the school's activities survey data were analyzed as well. Only parents comments on -line were analyzed and only negative comments were considered (420 respondents).

Content analysis of the comments discussing the quality of education allows to distinguish four sub-categories: teaching inefficiency, lack of support, lack of discipline, achievements and progress disadvantages. According to the analysis of survey results, it can be said that the parents' dissatisfaction with the quality of the teaching process gives birth to distrust the quality of school teacher competency, which further alienates parents from school. Such atmosphere of communication based on parents distrust and dissatisfaction are the assumptions of deep conflict situation rather than well-wishing cooperation conducive to parental involvement in children's education.

Keywords: parental involvement, parents' complains, Lithuania, National Agency for School Evaluation