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Parental involvement in school education as a factor determining a child's academic success

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Abstract

Research objectives (aims) and problem(s): The aim of this article is to describe parents' participation in their children's educational processes and the optimal conditions for its implementation. The research problem was defined as follows: What are the basic conditions and principles of parental participation in educational processes that give students a chance to achieve academic success?

Research methods: A literature review on the subject was conducted.

Process of argumentation: The issue of parental involvement in school life, as well as the analysis of their role and the quality of school–parent relations, is still relevant. The family and the school have been, are, and will continue to be the primary educational environments. Their activities must be integrated because their influences overlap. High-quality cooperation between parents and schools supports students' educational success and well-being. The conditions and principles of parental participation in their child's education, based on educational partnership and its benefits, have been identified.

Research findings and their impact on the development of educational sciences: The findings show that parents and schools must cooperate on the basis of educational partnership due to formal and legal requirements and the child's well-being. On the one hand, parental involvement in education is an individual right; on the other hand, it is a social necessity that increases a child's chances of success at school. Furthermore, given contemporary social developments, schools and families cannot fully perform their functions without close cooperation.

Conclusions and/or recommendations: The task of modern education is to prepare children for life in a rapidly changing world. This responsibility lies primarily with schools and families; thus, it is important for these two fundamental environments to work together consistently. This cooperation is a duty and a necessity, as well as an opportunity to support children's educational success. However, certain rules and conditions must be observed in this collaboration. Therefore, it is necessary to educate students, school personnel (beginning at the university level), school leadership, and parents about the value of cooperation and the ability to build partnership-oriented relationships.

Introduction

Polish schools face a variety of challenges today. The overriding value of school education should be to ensure the proper, holistic development of students. Schools must therefore be safe and supportive environments where students have opportunities to prepare for the demands of the labor market, to engage in lifelong learning and self-development, and to cope with constant change and crisis. Parents should be involved in creating a school that provides conditions for students to grow into independent adults because it is essential to integrate the activities of the various entities whose influences intersect (Mazurkiewicz, 2016; Socha-Kołodziej, 1999–2000–2001). The family and the school have been, are, and will continue to be the primary educational environments. Consequently, collaboration between schools and families has long been an area of interest for researchers. The first discussions of this topic appeared at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries (Vegio and Vives). In the 20th and 21st centuries in Poland, scholars such as Helena Radlińska, Mikołaj Winiarski, Aleksander Kamiński, Mieczysław Łobocki, Ryszard Wroczyński, Henryk Smarzyński, Krzysztof Jakubiak, Bogusław Śliwerski, and Maria Mendel, among others, addressed this issue (Olechowska, 2017).

The aim of this article is to present the principles and conditions of parental participation, one of the three key groups engaged in everyday school life and directly involved in their children's educational progress. In pedagogy, it is widely held that high-quality cooperation between parents and schools supports the educational success and well-being of the

youngest generation. Therefore, the following research question was posed: What are the basic conditions and principles of parental participation in educational processes that give students a chance to achieve academic success? The literature analysis method was used.

Cooperation between parents and schools, educational partnership and participation –definitions

In the literature on the relationship between parents and teachers, many terms are used: cooperation, collaboration, partnership, and participation—often as synonyms, even though each carries slightly different shades of meaning. Cooperation is understood as a process in which the parties involved (teachers and parents) actively work together, exchanging information, sharing experiences, and undertaking joint activities to support a child's development and education (Musiał, 2024, p. 128). It is a concept broader than collaboration, which refers to activities carried out jointly to achieve a common goal and is based on mutual trust and loyalty. It involves constructive interaction in which both parties make shared efforts to stimulate and support the child's development and education at every stage of life (Gulczyńska et al., 2020).

According to Ewa Musiał (2024), partnership (in the field of education) refers to the equality or equivalence of the parties—partners working together to achieve goals related to a child's education. All participants take part in dialogue, mutual assistance, and joint decision-making on an equal footing. Mieczysław Łobocki (1985) noted that partnership should be conceived as one of the principles of cooperation between teachers and parents, since both are equally responsible for the child in terms of rights and obligations.

Educational partnership is a model of cooperation (Karbowniczek, 2016; Mendel, 2000) based on joint activity among the family, school, and local community. It is founded on trust, autonomy, respect for the independence of each community, and the development of both the individual and the collective. It involves granting equal rights and responsibilities

to all parties, respecting one another's competencies, treating each other as equals, pursuing a common goal, and sharing mutual responsibility for the task at hand. It is based on equality and reciprocity in relationships and interactions between the parties and comprises three levels:

1. The level of attitude, which involves openness and respect, wisdom and perseverance, understanding and reciprocity, voluntariness, solidarity, integrity, and a recognition of each participant's subjectivity;
2. The level of action, which requires effort and commitment, goodwill, co-decision-making and cooperation, maintaining boundaries of common sense, prudence and tact, pursuing shared goals, jointly seeking solutions in line with expectations and resources, and meeting both individual and community needs;
3. The level of relationships, in which mutual acceptance, authenticity, cooperative communication and dialogue, empathy, willingness to compromise and negotiate, a positive emotional climate, and the pursuit of stable and secure relationships are essential. Partnership is a relationship in which both parties interact and shape the educational process by sharing knowledge, experience, and perspectives (Mendel, 2000). All of this is aimed at increasing the chances of academic success and promoting the mental well-being of children and young people.

The concept of *participation* is described as unclear (Kołodziejczyk, 2011, p. 180). In a narrow sense, it refers to involvement in decision-making processes that affect the future situation of those who make the decisions, while in a broader sense it refers to the planning and implementation of specific policies (Mendel, 2002). Jakub Kołodziejczyk (2011, p. 181) identifies several ways of understanding and practicing participation, "arranged hierarchically, from those accompanied by the lowest level (or lack) of power and responsibility to those with the full range, for example, listening, supporting the presentation of a point of view, taking a point of view into account when making decisions, inclusion in the decision-making process, having the power to make decisions, and taking responsibility."

There are various dimensions of participation. The first is the formal–organizational dimension, which refers to the accepted or imposed conditions that determine the procedures for the participation of different groups in school management. The subjective dimension concerns the identification of groups that are granted participation rights (e.g., teachers, parents, students, the local community), while the objective dimension relates to the specific areas of school functioning within which individuals and groups participate in decision-making. The final dimension is the competence dimension, which determines the extent to which individuals and groups can participate in decision-making based on their rights (Kołodziejczyk, 2011; Mendel, 2002).

The Education System Act (1991, as amended) guarantees parents the right to participate in decisions on fundamental aspects of school functioning. The state's requirements for schools do not include any direct references to parental participation in school processes. However, there are indications of the need for active involvement. In the section on the role of the school or institution in the local community, we find the expectation that "Parents are partners of the school," which includes the following requirements:

1. the school or institution obtains and uses parents' opinions about its work (parents share their opinions about the school and the teaching process; parents' opinions influence the school's activities);
2. parental support in upbringing (the school supports parents in upbringing; parents are informed about their children's development); and
3. parents have a voice in matters concerning the school or institution and participate in activities undertaken (parents participate in activities organized by the school; parents participate in decisions concerning school life) (Regulation of the Minister of National Education, 2009, as amended).

Although the 2009 regulations have been revised, these changes have been evolutionary, and the provisions concerning consultative and

decision-making participation, as well as parental involvement in school activities, have remained unchanged. Thus, parental participation stems chiefly from formal and legal regulations. However, research shows that creating favorable conditions for cooperation between schools and parents in Poland is still in its early stages (Kołodziejczyk et al., 2012; Kołodziejczyk & Walczak, 2021).

Katarzyna Socha-Kołodziej (1999–2000–2001, p. 762), pointing to types of participation by parents and teachers in the joint education and upbringing of children, distinguished between active and passive parental participation. The first type occurs when parents voluntarily engage in school and classroom activities, and the family becomes an environment that supports the child's learning: parents help, explain, and monitor schoolwork. In this case, teachers are involved by parents. The second type refers to situations in which parents are involved by the teacher, and the school becomes the main learning environment. Teachers voluntarily participate in this cooperative process, encouraging parents to take action by providing information and inviting them to participate in decisions about school or class matters.

Parental involvement in everyday school life as a form of participation

Parental involvement in school life is conceived in many ways. In the literature on the subject, it most often refers to parents' participation in educational processes and school experiences, as well as their efforts to support their children in the learning process. Emphasis is placed on parents' agency, along with their subjectivity and partnership in the school-home relationship (Kołodziejczyk & Walczak, 2021). According to Anna Górka-Strzałkowska (2019), involvement indicates identification with a given area, incorporation of it into one's sphere of interest, and demonstrates a strong and lasting motivation to be active, associated with the adoption of shared values and ideals. Full engagement is expressed through a specific way of thinking, experiencing, evaluating, and acting

toward the child, which changes depending on the stage of development. Parental engagement refers to parents' participation in their children's education and aims to support their academic and social success.

In discussing parental involvement, a distinction is made between *involvement* and *engagement*. According to Joanna Kołodziejczyk and Bartłomiej Walczak (2021, p. 50), parental involvement indicates an asymmetrical relationship between the school and parents, in which the school controls the relationship and the flow of information provided to parents. Communication is therefore usually one-way: the school informs parents of its expectations and initiates the situations in which parents participate (e.g., meetings). Parental engagement, by contrast, constitutes a partnership between the school and parents, with communication based on dialogue. It also involves joint activities, with the possibility for cooperation initiatives to come from parents as well. In this model, parents enjoy greater autonomy and influence over their child's education.

Parental involvement in everyday school life is a process that usually begins with parents as passive recipients of information and participants in school events. Over time, they begin to engage in cooperation and dialogue with teachers, forming a partnership through which they can jointly make decisions about their children's education, supporting their development while also developing themselves. Joyce L. Epstein (2001) argues that involvement should be considered from three interrelated perspectives: school, family, and local community, within which partnerships are built. Parents are viewed as important partners for the school, with the capacity to create grassroots initiatives. Epstein developed a synthetic classification of six types of parental involvement in children's education:

- Type I: Parenting – support provided by the school to assist parents in their child's education, along with parents' commitment to creating favorable learning conditions at home;
- Type II: Communicating – communication between the school and parents, including various forms of information exchange and discussions concerning the curriculum and the child's academic progress;

- Type III: Volunteering – parents' voluntary activities within the school;
- Type IV: Learning at home – parents' participation in homework and in supporting their child's learning at home;
- Type V: Decision making – involving parents in school decision-making, including school management processes and conflict resolution;
- Type VI: Collaborating with the community – identifying and integrating local community resources, incorporating the contributions and needs of local businesses and institutions into educational programs, and making the school available to local communities after school hours.

This model is valuable because, on the one hand, it acknowledges multiple areas of parental involvement—from the most basic, the home, to the school and the local community—without which it is practically impossible to raise the youngest generation today, given the rapid socio-cultural changes occurring worldwide and the new challenges that they generate. On the other hand, it emphasizes parental involvement in school life as well as the possibility for parents to take initiative and become active partners, implementing grassroots ideas to increase their child's chances of success.

Parental participation in education – principles, conditions, and benefits

For parental participation in education to be successful, certain rules and conditions that are conducive to cooperation and support the development of an educational partnership must be met. First, it is necessary to identify all the possibilities and resources of those involved in the cooperation, which includes teachers' acceptance of parents as potential advisers and experts, as well as openness to parents' expectations regarding their children's education and respect for their right to co-decision. An important condition for cooperation is viewing parents as allies of the school and teachers and recognizing them as the primary educators of their

children. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the school should serve as a support to the family. It is extremely important to select a variety of traditional (e.g., parent–teacher conferences, lectures) and innovative (e.g., RUN meetings, class blogs, Service Learning, tutoring) forms of collaboration. These should be carefully considered, properly planned (with respect for time), jointly agreed upon, and satisfactory for both communities (Nadolnik, 2014; Zyzik, 2011).

The teacher's role is crucial in processes of cooperation and partnership: teachers are facilitators in creating a culture of collaboration. They are responsible for engaging parents in the educational process and should initiate cooperation, create favorable conditions for its implementation by building an appropriate climate and relationships, and consolidate shared knowledge and experience (Musiał, 2024). At the same time, cooperation between the school and the family requires allowing space for independence, creativity, and initiative on the part of parents. The real influence of parents on the functioning of the school and its outcomes is also emphasized.¹

An important element of success in this area is the school's openness to parents and its willingness to enter into dialogue with them to establish common goals and values, identify areas of mutual interdependence, and recognize shared benefits. This approach leads to the development of a sound and fruitful culture of cooperation (Mendel, 2000). An essential condition is the acceptance by all parties of the norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions that guide cooperation with others: mutual support, the joint search for solutions to shared problems, the collective celebration of successes, and learning from others and through the experiences of others (Tłuściak-Deliowska & Dernowska, 2016). A culture of cooperation is strengthened by adhering to certain principles, such as mutual trust, positive motivation, partnership, unity of action, and active, systematic collaboration (Łobocki, 1985).

¹ Such opportunities arise from the establishment of a School Council, which provides a chance to truly recognise and respect individual and common interests, and allows parents to participate in decision-making and influence the course of everyday school life (Socha-Kołodziej, 1999-2000-2001).

A shared concern for creating a favorable learning environment at school and at home, one that provides positive emotional conditions for acquiring knowledge and skills and in which everyone feels valued and understood, becomes an important goal of joint family and school efforts and a catalyst for healthy parent–teacher relationships. Andragocentrism (an excessive emphasis on adults), which sidelines or minimizes the child's role in these processes, can pose a threat to such relationships. The goal of cooperation is always the child's well-being. It should also be noted that many myths and stereotypes exist between schools and families that disrupt partnership relations. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness and shift the mindset of those involved in cooperation, moving beyond entrenched patterns and stereotypes. The source of such change and the means of overcoming obstacles in this area lie in the knowledge and education of all participants (Mendel, 2000).

The implementation of educational partnership in practice and the specific involvement of parents in education bring measurable results. Through contact with teachers, parents gain more information about their children, which leads to a better understanding of them, increased trust in them, and a reduction in disciplinary measures. It also strengthens parents' sense of agency in their parental role, their sense of security and understanding in interactions with teachers, their parenting skills, and their sense of being important and needed at school. Cooperation also makes parents more likely to seek help in difficult situations. Understanding the mutual expectations of parents and teachers makes it easier to develop a shared vision for the child's education at home and at school.

Teachers, like parents, gain more knowledge about the child, which promotes understanding of the child's situation and facilitates teaching and educational efforts. Cooperation also contributes to a greater sense of security, better understanding of teachers' actions by parents, the ability to adjust educational practices, better responsiveness to children's needs, and the development of their interests. It provides opportunities to obtain parental support in bringing out a student's individual potential, taking joint action in difficult situations, and overcoming educational problems. Moreover, involving parents in school life, including preventive and

compensatory activities, helps them understand what is happening at school and increases their trust in teachers, building a positive atmosphere in the classroom. Cooperation between teachers and parents facilitates the resolution of conflicts and misunderstandings, increases their sense of responsibility toward the student and the class as a whole, and promotes shared responsibility for the educational process. It also gives both groups the opportunity to extend the continuity of their own learning and development.

Children also benefit from this cooperation. Effective collaboration allows them to discover and develop their potential and to better understand their abilities and skills. A positive perception of the parent–teacher relationship enhances the child’s relationship with both parent and teacher. Children become more willing to ask for help, adapt more quickly to new situations, and are more open to new challenges. Such cooperation fosters positive attitudes toward school, a willingness to attend and support it, a sense of being heard and valued. It strengthens concentration, improves learning outcomes, boosts motivation to study and fulfill school responsibilities and contributes to better behavior (Musiał, 2024; Zalewska-Bujak, 2020).

School success of pupils in the context of parental involvement in education

Research shows a clear relationship between students’ educational outcomes and their parents’ cooperation with the school (Mendel, 2000; Musiał, 2024; Zalewska-Bujak, 2020). Good relations between the family and the school create opportunities for teachers and parents to continuously improve as educators responsible for the comprehensive development of students and their satisfaction with learning. Since school and home are the two primary educational environments that most strongly influence the youngest generation, cooperation should begin when the child first enters school and continue regularly throughout the entire period of education. Therefore, the more often parents and teachers work

together—agreeing on the scope and nature of school expectations, as well as on how these expectations are to be met, consulting about the child's progress, and coordinating educational measures—the more beneficial it is for the student's development and academic achievements. Joint activities help develop the student's potential, sustain their cognitive engagement and motivation to learn, and increase their chances of success. Children are also more willing to attend a school where they feel that they have the opportunity to succeed (Szempruch, 2005).

What is academic success? Traditionally, it is defined as meeting the requirements of the education system, which includes acquiring knowledge, developing new skills, and achieving academic competences (Musiak, 2017). In everyday school life, success is measured by grades, exam results, promotion to the next grade, attendance, and participation in competitions and school contests. Success varies depending on the stage of education, the student's characteristics and individual traits, the support provided by the family environment, and the interaction between these two spheres. The school environment is also an important factor.

Another approach describes academic success in objective and subjective terms (Nikel et al., 2024). Objective (subject-specific) academic success occurs when a student is able to meet the expectations set by the school. From this perspective, academic success is characterized by clearly defined educational requirements that focus on the development of knowledge and academic skills. It is also quantifiable (allowing for progress assessment and comparison) and is largely dependent on students' innate abilities and their environmental resources (e.g., family). The most common measure of academic success is the grades that a student receives. Assessing a student's progress enables more effective teaching tailored to their strengths and weaknesses.

The subjective dimension, on the other hand, refers to the student's individual perspective on school and the tasks performed there: how they feel in the school environment and how they perceive it. A defining feature of this form of success is that the student determines what success means for themselves. The effort that a student puts into acquiring knowledge can be an indicator of school success. In this dimension, success

includes developing one's potential and abilities, meeting individual needs, maintaining positive relationships with peers and teachers, and experiencing well-being at school. It takes into account the student's emotions and perceptions in the school setting. Furthermore, success is defined as taking on challenges regardless of the final result; therefore, it can be achieved by students with varying levels of ability. It may also be expressed as overcoming difficulties and experiencing well-being at school.

These two dimensions of school success overlap, so it is important to consider both when working with students. Doing so enables them to develop more fully and derive greater satisfaction from learning (Nikel et al., 2024). The family situation, including parental involvement in education and their influence on the child, plays a significant role in the child's approach to learning. "The atmosphere in the family and the sense of security that it provides largely determine the direction of development and the goals that a child sets for themselves. It is the parents who shape their child's attitude toward acquiring knowledge about the world, teach them independence in action and thinking, and pass on patterns of behavior in difficult situations. (...) A particularly important task for parents is to develop the need to learn" and to support the child in developing motivation to act and a sense of influence over their environment (Ochojska et al., 2017, pp. 236–238).

Conclusion

The contemporary task of the school is to educate individuals in ways that prepare them for life in a rapidly changing world and for creative participation in society. Therefore, schools must become more open to creating conditions that allow students to achieve substantive educational and social outcomes. This applies not only to exceptionally gifted students but also to entirely average ones, because all learners want, and should be able to, achieve academic success commensurate with their resources and abilities (Musiał, 2017). Achieving success helps children

function better in their roles, strengthens their self-esteem and self-worth, increases their motivation to work, and enhances their sense of agency and competence.

Creating an optimal environment for every student to achieve academic success also requires systematic, timely, and transparent cooperation between the family and the school, involving parents in the daily life of the school. A child's potential does not develop automatically; it unfolds in response to environmental stimuli that guide, expand, and, when necessary, set limits. This is why it is so important for these two fundamental educational environments to work together consistently on the basis of educational partnership.

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