

The Impact of Parental Partnership in School Evaluation as a Base for Diagnosis and Improvement – An Experience from Durres High Schools Contexts

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Abstract: Parental participation in school has become a demand of both national and international policies. Different studies show that despite the efforts of education policies for reformation, democratisation and opening the school to function as a open centre the parent's partnership in education in general and school evaluation in particular is low in Albania. The aim of this paper is to discuss parents' considerations on parental partnership in school evaluation. It tries to answer questions such as: What is the parental partnership? How much feel involved parents in school evaluation? Which parents feel more involved? Why? How can be encouraged parents' involvement in school evaluation? The paper is attentive to the psychological factors, while recognizes also the importance of the sociological factors that contribute to involvement of parents at school evaluation. The arguments are based on empirical evidences coming from three public high schools of Durres city. The intervention programs aiming to strengthen the partnership with parents in school evaluation should consider time, resources and the capacities in the specific contexts.

Keywords: open high school, parental partnership, instruction staff, school evaluation, specific context

Introduction

The school evaluation is a thoughtful assessment of the all-inclusive school work. It is intended to be a collaborative process involving: instruction staff, school administration, parents and pupils (Harold Hislop 2010). Researchers substantially agree that parental contribution in school life influences positively on school climate, parents' attitudes towards the school, parents' support for the school, and pupils' educational attainment (Bushi. B, 2011; Pop. D. 2009; Webster-Stratton, C., 2004; Corcoran, J., 2006; Kratochwill, T. R., 2004; McDonald, L., 2006), and based on the particular contexts the entities are required to find appropriate ways to boost the parental partnership.

The parent-school partnership is a long-term relationship which perceives with equal powers both parents and school staff, and allows them to share the risks and benefits. Interdepending on each other can be prevented problems and found solutions for the emerged education problems as a part of everyday routine or during organized evaluations. Theoretically all parents can be involved in ways that make a difference to their children and to the work of the school, and receive appropriate support and encouragement in doing so.

Under the decentralized system, Albanian schools are required to take increased responsibility for planning and managing the development of the services they deliver along with the associated quality improvement procedures (Albania Education Strategy 2004-2015). The schools vary particularly on contexts and how they reach education targets and assess the followed tactics. Students' necessities and abilities are inconsistent, while schools have the duty to adapt and advance, for addressing the emerged education difficulties and maintaining and advancing students' success. Since the Albania Government wants to develop the country up to the point that will enable them to move into the EU and engage with other neighboring countries, there is an urgent need to involve and reflect stakeholders' views on education. Some recent studies have revealed that especially in the case of parents, this is far from being a tangible reality (Bushi. B, 2011; Pop. D. 2009; Musai, B. 2009; Boce, E. 2010) with a paper-based existence.

The objective of the study

Based on public high school contexts experience from Durres city the survey aimed to bring to the focus parents' views and attitudes on how they felt and could be further involved in the public school evaluation.

Methodology

We studied the literature on parents' involvement and referring on them created a questionnaire that contained 64 questions. Were targeted three high schools located in the center area of Durres city, for gathering empirical evidences

from parents of public high school students. In each school were randomly selected two parallels from respectively the 10th, 11th and 12th grades. Within the class were randomly selected equal numbers of male and female students set on benches of different rows. The parents of which were invited to complete the instrument in their family environment.

To develop a knowledge regarding the partnership created between parents and schools the assessment solicited answers from parents who have children in the Gjergj Kastrioti, Leonik Tomeo and Naim Frasheri high schools. In February 2012 were distributed a total of one hundred eighty questionnaires, but only 81,1% were returned within the week. More parents of female children (58.9%) compared to the male peers (41,1%) have replied. Table 1 shows the percentage break down of participants with which the questionnaire is completed as a function of the total.

Table 1. Percentages break down of parents by high school and grade of student.

Hight school name	% of parents within	Grade no			Total
		X	XI	XII	
Gjergj Kastrioti	school	34,5%	32,8%	32,8%	100,0%
	grade of child	43,5%	39,6%	36,5%	39,7%
Leonik Tomeo	school	37,5%	22,5%	40,0%	100,0%
	grade of child	32,6%	18,8%	30,8%	27,4%
Naim Frasheri	school	22,9%	41,7%	35,4%	100,0%
	grade of child	23,9%	41,7%	32,7%	32,9%
Total	school	31,5%	32,9%	35,6%	100,0%
	grade of child	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

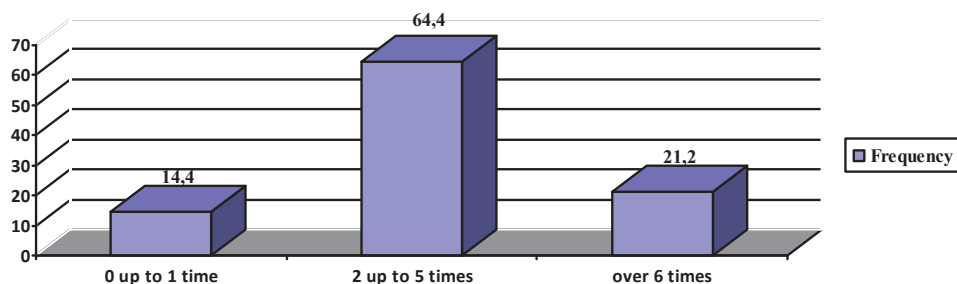
Their experiences were valuable for assessing the reality in the respective school contexts and gathering ideas on how effective and targeted measures can be designed and implemented on the road of ensuring for schools to build real partnership with all the parents.

Results

Based on the data gathered from the questionnaires in 60,3% of the cases have replied the mothers, in 37,7% the fathers and only 2,1% reported to be other people such as sisters and grandmothers. Except of one parent which reported to be of the Egyptian ethnicity, the others were all Albanians. In 95,9% of the cases parents reported to be married, but there are also isolate cases of divorced (1,4%) and widow (2,7%) parents. In terms of education level, the majority of parents who participated had a high school education (63,7%) and university degree (29,5%). When asked for their employment status 70,5% of parents said that were employed or self-employed, 28,1% that were unemployed and 1,3% reported that were retired. Among respondents, the majority looks adapted in Durres city, as they have lived in this area from more than a decade (specifically 35,6% are living from eleven to twenty years and 41,8% from more than twenty years). Almost 6,2% report that have lived in Durres from less than five years, whereas 16,4% reported that have from six to ten years in this city.

Almost all the parents on the focus reported that they feel welcomed in the school (90,5%), but as Figure 1. indicated they gave a mixed picture about the frequency with which they have contacted with the school and demonstrated that the reality is far from consistent communications between family and school.

Figure 1. Frequency of parents contacting the school during the school year



Parents can be directly concerned for the school in general and the students' advancement and attainment in particular especially if their child is having adaptation difficulties when passing from the secondary school to the high school, if child's behaviour or achievements are not as required for successfully finalising the studies or if university studies are seen as an option for the students' future (Bushy. B., 2011; Dervishi. Z., 2002). The Albanian university system creates opportunities for admission in the university to those who are interested and fulfill some criteria, and in this climate almost all parents in the study (95,9%) unanimously agreed for their child to continue the university studies. This approach can be explained with the necessity of the diploma for obtaining a meaningful and well-paid job, but even as a fulfilling of a dream that some parents couldn't achieve for themselves (Dervishi. Z., 2002).

When asked which had generally initiated the contacts with the school for following up the child, about 45,9% of parents in the survey attributed to the school the first step for requesting a meeting, 41,8% said that have initiated the meetings themselves, while 12,3% reported a mixture of both school and their own decisions. Only 0,7% of parents reported that none has informed them. This significant parental "avoidance" to contact the school on their own initiative, can be partially attributed to the fact that they feel not comfortable to return to a place that blames and reminds them of their own failures (Bushy. B., 2011; LaBahn. J. 1995; Brink. C, 1993; Smith. C.1991). In addition the values of independence and individuality, limited resources together with the unclear expectations on what they as parents can crystalize impeding psychosis (Dervishi, 2002). Partially parents agreed that the school conveyed to them understandable (84,2%), believable (78,7) and clear (80,2%) information, which makes evident that simply receiving information does not necessarily help.

We observed that the majority of respondents shared the view that the school communicated with all the parents despite their background (73,3%). The nature of the family structure is restless causing confusion and insecurity. The parents of high school students may be doing the very best that they can, but they are unable to find enough time to complete everything especially if the family has been affected by migration, a decrease in the family incomes, divorce or death in the family (LaBahn. J. 1995; Duncan, 1992; Lewis, 1992; Wanat, 1992). The school, results to be sensitive to parents engagements only for 58,9% of the participants on the focus of this survey.

Most of participants (86,3%) confirmed that they have sufficient knowledge about child's school while 73,3% thought that the high school is in harmony with the education reform. A considerable share of parents believed that the high school has an effective administration (73,3%), well prepared and qualified instruction staff (86,3%), that adopts the instruction to the child (71,9%) and supports high achievements (69,2%). About 78,1% identified that the school curricula gives to the child the required knowledges and 54,1% affirmed that the material resources supported learning, but 55,5% believed in the transparency during the evaluation. With regard to the activities that organizes the school, participants reported that were well organized (66,4%), but when planning for such activities only 58,9% thought that the school considered parents' engagements and agenda. In general, were found high levels of consensus between respondents about the development of child's skills in the school (88,3%) and the good disciplining standard (65,1%). When asked, 41,1% of all the respondents reported that the school infrastructure was adequate while 48,6% agreed that the school was secure. Is marginal the rate of parents that believed that school accomplished students' specific needs (38,4%), treated equally (44,5%) and evaluated in an unbiased level (43,8%). About 47,3% of all the respondents agreed that the school was interested on the child's career and half of this rate was believing that the doctor and the psychological services in the school were effective.

We found that in most cases parents were informed on the school not directly but via the instruction staff (41,5%), the child (30,8%) or by both (9,5%) they, might have a vague idea of what really happens in the school world. Especially if they don't have a great deal of education, can feel that what they may have to offer to the school is unimportant and unappreciated (LaBahn, J. 1995; Dixon, 1992; Vandergrift. J, 1992) or can fear the "storm" of refutation and analyzing from the others (Bushy, 2011). The school policies and staff experiences or approaches for informing parents on various issues, are selective and fit only to some of parents (Pop. D., 2009). All the above can explain why about two third of all the parents reported that they openly speak in the school for the different issues that are object of discussion relating to education.

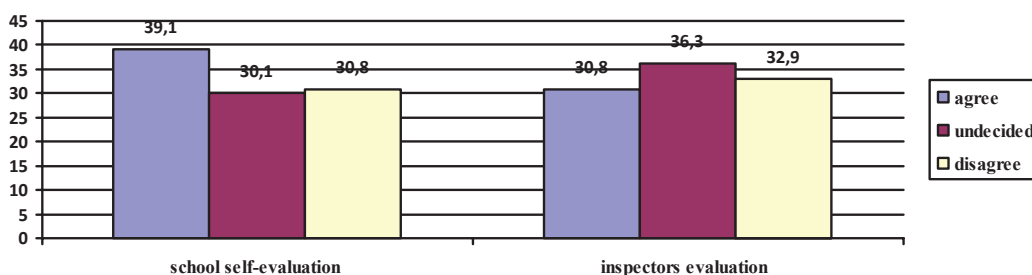
Was higher the rate of the participants who believed that the school helped them to support the child (77,4%), oriented for child's career (73,3%), organized extraschool activities which were congruent with child's talents (66,5%) comparing to those who affirmed that the school reflected child's view (46,5%). Via school staff, peer assistance and school activities parents can better understand and find more appropriate approaches for supporting child's development, and also be signalled on his/her skills or talents. About 72,0% of respondents supported the idea that the school pays attention to the difficult cases, while is lower the rate of those who agreed that the school is based on parents' expertise, is open for improvements on the decision taken and prevents education problems. This data point out us that decisions in the high schools must be conveyed based on a developmental perspective and according to a continuous coherent

approach, which respects specific contexts, cultures and is builded on mutual trust and shared values of parents, students and school staff.

The Law on the preuniversity education no. 7952, dated 06.21.1995 gives priority to the family-school partnership, while the Dispositions of Instructions on public schools approved on 2002, mentioned the rights of parents in the educative process in Albania, but doesn't specify the participation aspects. The aquis communitaire significantly influenced changes on the policies and procedures in the educative institutions. Is evident that parent aren't well informed about reforms, because when asked whether they knew the school the policies and procedures only 57,6% reported knowing them. Further, when examined if the policies and procedures in the school were sustainable and harmonized with each other, participants indicated similar results (respectively 57,5% and 55,5%). The practice of parental involvement in establishing and changing policies and procedures in the school is admitted by only 29,5% of participants, while only 38,3% deny to have been involved in establishing or changing the school policies and procedures. Only 37,0% of all parents confirmed that the school involved them in establishing objectives linked with the education, but according to their perceptions the objectives set were less clear (74,6) than realistic (76,0%).

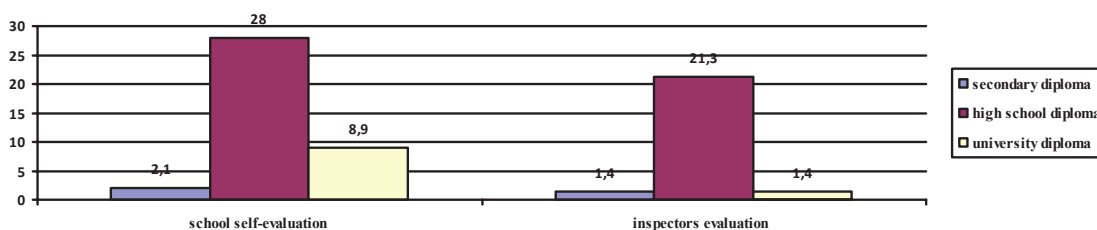
School evaluations are required by law. They provide an assessment of the quality and standards of education in schools, and check whether pupils are achieving as much as they can. As Figure 2 shows respondents were asked to specify their knowledge regarding the school evaluations, and there isn't any significant distinction between the share of parents who reported to be informed about the annual school self-evaluation or the evaluation undertaken from the inspectors.

Figure 2. Parents` satisfaction in relation with the school evaluations



More mothers (21,2%) versus fathers (16,5%) reported to be informed on the school self-evaluation report, in contrast more fathers (23,1%) than mothers (16,5%) reported to be informed on the inspectors evaluation report. Married parents and those having daughters were the most informed in both cases. Parents rate in the case of those reporting to be informed on the high school self-evaluation reports decreased with the increase of the grade of the student (respectively 15,1%, 12,4% and 11,6%), while in the case of the school evaluation undertaken from the inspectors was shifted (11,7% in the 10th, 8,2% in the 11th and 10,9% in the 12th grade). The most supporting on both evaluation reports were the employed parents, compared with their unemployed peers, but in both cases, as presented in Figure 3, dominated those with a high school diploma, followed by those with the university and secondary school degree diploma. The low rate parental participation is also reflected in another survey undertaken with the school principals of eastern europe, where principals of Albania considered parents councils or school boards as bodies which confuse issues of authority and accountability in the school (Pop. D., 2009).

Figure 3. Parent`s information in terms of school evaluations with regard to the education level



With regard to the time from which parents were inhabiting in Durres, the less informed on the school self evaluation and inspectors evaluation, resulted to be those who were living in this city from up to 5 years (respectively 2,1% and 1,4%). While the rate progressively increased from 6 to 10 years (respectively 4,8% and 4,1%), to 11-20 years (respectively 13,7% and 8,9%) and reached its peak with the parents who were living in Durres from over 20 years (respectively 18,5% and 16,4%). Eventhough in the case of the school self-evaluation the values were higher compared to the inspectors' evaluation. Among participants 36,3% responded that their thoughts and expectations were reflected in the school evaluation, 34,3% negated that this has happened, while 29,5% are ranked in between those two bipolar opposite terms. More mothers (20,5%) than fathers (15,0%) reported influence of their ideas and expectations. Perceptions varied a little according to grade level (13,7% in the 10th, 10,3% in the 11th, and 12,4% in the 12th grade). Similar to the case of school self-evaluation the married parents, and those with high school education were the most well informed within the civil status and education level categories. There wasn't any significant gap between parents of female (19,9%) and male (16,5%) high school students. The most influential seem to be the parents which are living in Durres city from over 20 years (17,8%), while the less the newcomers up to 5 years (2,1%). The lack of trust, experience and knowledge can impede the creation of meaningful communication and collaboration with all the parents with regard to school evaluation.

Local and central agencies and institutions are another pillar which are expected to support the school, but only 52,1% of the parents believed that this is the case of their children's school. About 34,3% of participants sustained the idea that the recommendations for improvement are shared with the policy makers in the local and central level, while only 23,9% reported that the school is supported from organizations or businesses for improving the current situation which results complex, relatively adequate in some aspects, but needs immediate interventions in some others.

Parents of high school students have potentials, and are one of the most directly concerned stakeholders about the quality of education in general and the students' advancement and attainment in particular. They are not immune of the challenges which inhibit them to have a stable status quo, but when were asked how they could be more involved in the school dominated those who said that the school should explicitly request more parental involvement, and create premises for equal treatment and reflection of their opinions.

Conclusions and recommendation

Is clear that different school contexts have differences in the way in which the school collaborates with the parents, but didn't reveal to be in the partnership level. Parents were a valuable source which pointed out that the school realities provide lower standards than they expect. The parents' involvement in school evaluation has found critical voices from a significant share of parents, which reported to be uninformed or not considered. Is significant the rate of those who reported that the schools doesn't pay attention parents engagements, expertise and opinions when establishes policies and procedures, or when plans, implements and evaluates interventions regarding his child, the class, the school or larger contexts. All above makes visible that the school is not oriented as required for sharing the power and responsibilities, but still the potentials are promising and persuasive.

In this aspect, the gradual enlarged involvement of parents and education stakeholders in high school evaluation will help to take better decisions, generate support and increase the satisfaction from the school. Improved policies and procedures with the inclusion of all actors and accompanied by adequate financial resources and time devotion are required. Attracting and building capacities of different stakeholders is also imperative for understanding and approaching differently to what is traditionally implemented with regard to parent involvement in high school evaluations. Parents experiences, strengths and necessities are different, as are the tools to make them real partners in the school evaluation. That's why is important for high schools to have a variety of options and opportunities from which parents could choose their level and type of engagement. Frequent events should be planned and carried out for galvanizing hearing, informing and active involvement of stakeholders for building on existing strengths and adapting to diminish limitations. Should be build an open high school in which parents via attending specific subject hours or meetings as observers, can have direct experiences with the school which help them to modify existing assumptions and approaches.

This paper cannot escape to some of the limitations inherent in the applied nonsystematic and non-comprehensive methodology, and that's why we caution you to take the results as preliminary and indicative, rather than definitive the descriptive data generated, emphasizing on the need for further systemic data collection in the area. Notwithstanding the limitations this survey is a good source of information that through parents' experiences might shed light on understanding how the school partners with them. Being aware of the parental alienation in regard to the school evaluation (eventhough not the real dimensions) is important for increasing the quality of education in the high schools and for not pointing the finger towards the other, but understanding that things can change only if we can see the "we" in our thoughts and more importantly in our actions.

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