



Qendra për Arsim e Kosovës
Kosova Education Center

KEC

PARTICIPATION OF PARENTS IN SCHOOL LIFE IN KOSOVO

A ROAD TOWARDS CHANGE

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Executive Summary

The objective of this survey is to better understand the participatory opportunities created by school leadership in Kosovo schools. The survey of school principals investigates the nature of regulation and extent of equitable implementation of parental participation (in decision-making, in extracurricular activities, and in the education of one's own children) in public elementary schools; in relation to school level factors and to the attitudes and beliefs of school principals. In light of the general aim of the initiative, the purpose is to gather evidence in view of providing an enhanced and contextual understanding of the capacities, attitudes, and efforts of school leadership to improve/hinder the participation/engagement of parents in school life.

Methodology

The research methodology is a result of a joint effort of experts from the participating organizations from the Region, as well as of external consultants who managed the overall process. The initial workshop held on January 2008 was followed by intensive consultations resulting with a well prepared framework which guided this research.

The main aim of the survey in Kosovo is to better understand the causes of existing disparities in the quality of education and participatory opportunities. It is comprehensible that measures taken in the level of the education system can provide a general framework to overcome such disparities; however it is not realistic to expect them to impact the attitudes and stereotypes in the school level and thus result in evident improvements. The main question posed in this survey is:

What are the values, attitudes and actions of school principals towards furthering parental involvement in school life?

The survey is focused on the primary and lower secondary school principals in Kosovo. The sample is limited to 539 schools that function as a part of the Kosovo Education System, and is divided into three geographic regions: Center, Southeast and West. The stratification is made based on regions to accurately reflect the regional division of the school population.

Within each respective region representative municipalities were analyzed as well as school population of that region. Meanwhile, the school selection is made randomly following the division of schools into two categories –urban and rural schools. In this manner the error margin is below 5%.

The instrument for completing such a survey is designed in the form of a questionnaire that was completed during the face-to-face interviews with selected school principals. This questionnaire consists of six modules:

1. School background information
2. School-parent communication
3. Opportunities for parents to support school activities
4. School support for parents to help their children in education
5. Parental involvement in school governance
6. General attitudes

In order for the survey results to be more productive in a sense of drawing conclusions on stakeholders' participation in decision making in education we have summarized the questions or the variables of the questionnaire in four broader fields:

- 1) School actions to engage parents in school life,
- 2) School principals' attitudes on the engagement of parents in school life,
- 3) Objective and subjective barriers in enrooting school-parent partnership,
- 4) Best practices of successful parental participation.

Analysis of results

To the best of our knowledge this has been the most comprehensive survey of school principals ever done in Kosovo. This survey targeted 41% of the primary schools of Kosovo where 44.6% of the students are taught and 42.2% teachers are employed. Thus, it is safe to assume that the results of the research can be generalized for the entire population of the Kosovo schools.

Individual communication with parents is a key to parental inclusion in school life. Based on the results of the survey this communication is mainly developed in the direction "school-parent", where a parent is more likely to listen than to express his/her opinion. The fact that 50% of the surveyed schools do not use such research tools to understand parents' opinions/attitudes indicates limited influence of parents to positively impact the school environment through their own attitudes. Meanwhile, based on our experience even in the cases when parental surveys are implemented, data processing and analysis is done superficially and does not always serve its purpose.

About 60% of the surveyed principals have expressed their concern towards the quality of the parents meetings organized by school teachers, whereas 75% confirmed that schools did not have strategies for communication with parents. This leads to identifying an immediate need of setting some norms in communication with parents and also in building capacities of the school personnel to establish an

effective communication to improve overall teaching and learning process. As a barrier for such a communication school principals perceive lack of parents' interest and their insufficient time commitment whereas 54% of the principals consider that teachers do not lack specific skills on work with parents. However, such a conclusion does not correspond to the discontent of principals with the quality of teacher communication with parents.

It can be noticed that there is willingness of the parents to take part in different school activities, however 39.7% of the surveyed principals declare that parents do not sufficiently engage in assisting the teaching process which again emphasizes the need for getting parents closer to schools and therefore building their capacities so they can contribute towards teaching process. Moreover, we observe a decline of the parental financial contributions to the school (in 35.9% of the schools parents do not financially support school activities) which can be a consequence of convenience of the fact that schools are publicly funded, but it can also be a consequence of unfavorable living conditions of different school communities. Indeed, mechanisms for managing financial resources gathered from parents do not offer a guarantee for transparency of the expenditures, therefore there is hesitation to provide such contributions.

Principals also think that parental participation in school life is of great benefit. Thus, only 1.7% of the surveyors answered that parental participation does not impact at all or has a very small impact in improving the overall school environment whereas, other surveyed principals think it impacts the school environment to a large extent or to some extent This is in compliance with the data that 85.6% of the surveyed principals were able to recall successful partnership with parents, most of which were infrastructural projects.

In practice, schools do offer some support for parents towards their parental care for their children. Certainly, this impacts the parents' capacity to supervise students while doing homework and also help them in other extracurricular activities. Meanwhile, school director have a very positive attitude towards the idea to offer such support for parent even though they admit that, because of different reasons, they are not able to do so. For instance, 73.3% of the principals confirm the fact that schools do not offer materials to parents in order to help them provide homework assistance to their children, whereas 71.1% consider such a step to largely impact improvement of learning outcomes. On the other hand, only 3.1% think that it would not have a positive impact on students. However, principals face many obstacles to take such actions and one of the most common one is: lack of resources in the school level and lack of parents' interest.

Surveyed principals have reported a fairly high level of impact of the school councils in governance which through the composite indicator is about 60% of the measure "to a large extent" whereas "to a limited extent" is about 35%. School council actively engages in all the forms of decision making in schools including teaching and extra-curricular activities. However, when principals were asked to offer practical examples of initiatives from the parents' councils they only reported initiatives for improvement of infrastructure, which is makes a strong case that there is a need to build the capacity of parents' councils.

Analysis of principals' responses shows that general impact of parents in schools is average in more than 50% of the Kosovo schools whilst on about 25% school such impact is great. Nevertheless, based on the fact that we have to do with principals' perception we cannot come to a sustainable conclusion about real impact of the parents.

Recommendations

From the above conclusions we can extract few recommendations.

For schools:

1. Schools should develop procedures for meetings with parents, specifying the dynamics, preparation and content of such meetings. Group/thematic meetings should become a practice as well as individual meetings with parents. Teachers should be trained to manage different types of meetings and their use to advance teaching and learning.
2. Schools should engage in raising awareness of parents on their role in the school and should train them to exercise such a role. In that sense they can organize awareness raising campaigns and other related activities to build capacities of the parents on participation.
3. Parents need a greater support from the school side in order to help the students in improve learning outcomes. They should be provided different tools to guide them, whereas, in some cases, informative sessions or training should be organized.
4. Special attention should be paid to building the capacity of the parents' councils and parent representatives in school governing bodies to impact the increase of parental participation in school life.

For governmental sector:

1. To operationalize the measures stipulated in the Strategy for the Development of Pre-University Education in Kosovo 2007-2017 to support parents at the national and other appropriate levels. The Kosovo Education Parents' Council, a body foreseen by the Law should be re-activated and necessary support for its operation should be provided.
2. To continue with financial decentralization to the school level by increasing responsibility of schools for managing their own finances and by creating additional possibilities for financial contributions of parents to schools.
3. To encourage schools improve communication with parents by supporting activities of professional, governmental and non-governmental, institutions in developing manuals and guidelines that help this process.

For non-governmental sector:

1. To work on raising awareness of parents on their role in the school and other levels. As a consequence, awareness raising activities should be organized in the school level as well as other levels such as: municipality, region and country.
2. To work on building the capacities of the parents' associations in all levels in order to help increase the influence of parents in school life. These associations should be trained to work with parents and their representatives in schools in building their capacity to better serve their role and responsibility.
3. To promote good practices of parental inclusion in the school life by creating opportunities to benefit from them.