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COLLABORATION BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND FAMILIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PEDAGOGICAL AND PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS OF PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY PEDAGOGY

ABSTRACT

The empirical study focuses on the collaboration between school institutions and families, specifically addressing the perceived benefits of this collaboration, parents' motivation to engage in cooperation as viewed by pedagogical and professional staff in school institutions, and university students enrolled in full-time preschool and elementary pedagogy programs. It also examines selected risk aspects of ensuring collaboration between school institutions and families. Empirical data were gathered through a survey aimed at mapping the current level of collaboration between school institutions and families. The survey, which involved a convenience sample, was conducted online between September and October 2024. The findings indicate that pedagogical and professional staff in school institutions, as well as university students in both full-time and part-time preschool and elementary pedagogy programs, perceive family-school collaboration as a determinant of children's sense of safety in the school environment, a determinant of children's trust in school institutions, and a determinant of the development of children's social skills, such as fostering cooperation. The study also reveals that school institutions frequently motivate parents to collaborate with their children. According to respondents, risks associated with collaboration include financial constraints, the level of remuneration for activities, and bureaucratic burden.

KEYWORDS: *family, school, cooperation, cooperative competences, motivation, trust, security*

INTRODUCTION

Connecting the systems of school institutions and families through formal and informal cooperation represents one of the basic aspects of prophylaxis in the direction of the socialization of children in school institutions. *The school as a system is created not only as the work of creative and dedicated teachers. It is the product of the cooperation of all those involved – teachers, parents, children, young people and the entire community* (Microsoft and Asociácia S. Kovalikova, n.d., p. 4). School cooperation with parents and the wider community represents one of the five areas of life of *living schools* of the 21st century increases the success of the child in the educational process, for example, a longitudinal study (Miedel, Reynolds, 1999) reports better learning results. Longitudinal research Henderson and Mapp (2002) report benefits such as improved home and school

behaviour, better social skills and adaptation to school, enrollment of children to more demanding academic programs, better attendance at school institutions, etc. In the Slovak Republic, children's success in school institutions is presented mostly through indicators – results from classic subjects and indicators of children's success in improving social skills based on the cooperation of the school institution and the family are not given sufficient attention. Potočárová and Vančo (2012) approached the topic of school and family cooperation from the point of view of factors, while Scholzová's research (2012) was also devoted to it. In connection with the well-being of children in a school institution, the PISA Survey 2015 partially addressed the risks of cooperation between schools and families (OSCD, 2017). The research of Tóblová and the collective (2020) was focused on the cooperation between the family and the school from the point of view of teachers and parents. However, it was intended for the second level of primary and secondary schools. Waszczuk and the collective (2024) carried out research abroad on the topic of cooperation and schools.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the findings relevant to our research, we chose a research problem: Analysis of the perception of cooperation between the school institution and the family from the point of view of pedagogical and professional staff and students of preschool and elementary pedagogy of university studies in the daily form. We aimed to discover how pedagogical and professional employees and students in preschool and elementary pedagogy perceive cooperation between the school institution and the family. In connection with operationalizing this cooperation, we also investigated the approach adopted by pedagogical and professional employees in motivating the parents to cooperate. At the same time, on the part of the educational and experienced staff of the school institution and the students, we investigated which aspects of ensuring the family's cooperation with the school institution can be perceived as risky. To collect empirical data, we used a non-standardized semi-structured questionnaire, which consisted of demographic indicators and model situations from pedagogical practice, to which the respondents expressed their degree

of agreement using a Likert scale (0 – completely disagree, 1 – disagree, 2 – no experience, do not know to express yourself, 3 – agree, 4 – completely agree), and also statements with the possibility of a binary answer. The questionnaire was distributed to participants online. In addition, after filling out the questionnaire, we had a free discussion with the respondents, during which we asked questions from the questionnaire. Respondents could comment on the topic, clarify and develop their own opinions. This way, we tried to ensure triangulation and better understand the respondent's perception of the topic. We processed the obtained empirical data through frequency analysis and univariate statistics.

The basic survey set of respondents consisted of 115 respondents. The criteria for selecting respondents were actively working with pedagogical and professional employees in the school administration and students in the field of preschool elementary pedagogy. The selection of groups of respondents was deliberate, as we were latently interested in the awareness of the groups and the similarities and differences in the perception of the topic. Subsequently, the sample survey group comprised 112 respondents, of which 111 were women, representing 99.1% and one man, representing 0.9%. The average age of the respondents was AM= 29.7 years.

Table 1: *Representation of respondents in terms of location*

Region	Grand Total	
	n	%
Žilinský	71	63,4
Prešovský	23	20,5
Banskobystrický	11	9,8
Košický	7	6,3
Total N	112	100

Legend: *N* – total number of respondents, *n* – representation of respondents, % – relative frequency

Table 2: Representation of respondents in the population in terms of position and age

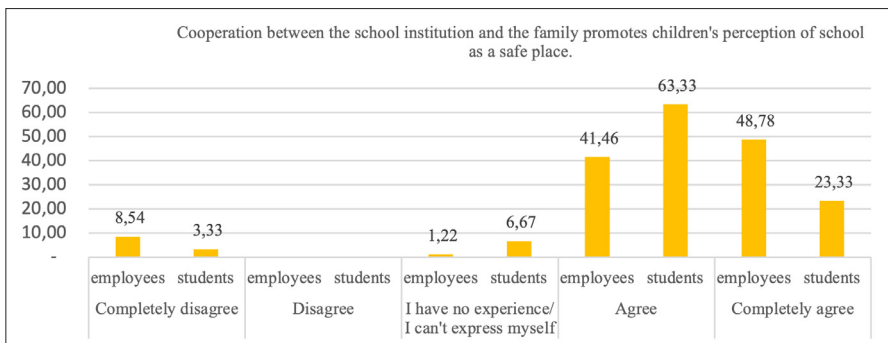
Alternatives	n	AM
Student at university (a full-time form of study)	30	21,0
University student (part-time form of study, extension study)	34	32,3
Teaching Employee/Assistant in Kindergarten	30	30,8
A professional employee in kindergarten	7	38,7
Pedagogical employee/assistant at a primary school of the first level	6	40,0
A pedagogical employee in a children's club	5	32,4
Total N	112	29,7

Legend: *N* – total number of respondents, *n* – representation of respondents, % – relative frequency

EXPLORATORY FINDINGS

In the survey, we investigated whether it is possible to associate the co-operation of parents and the school with the children's perception of the institution as a safe place. Respondents expressed a degree of agreement with the model statements.

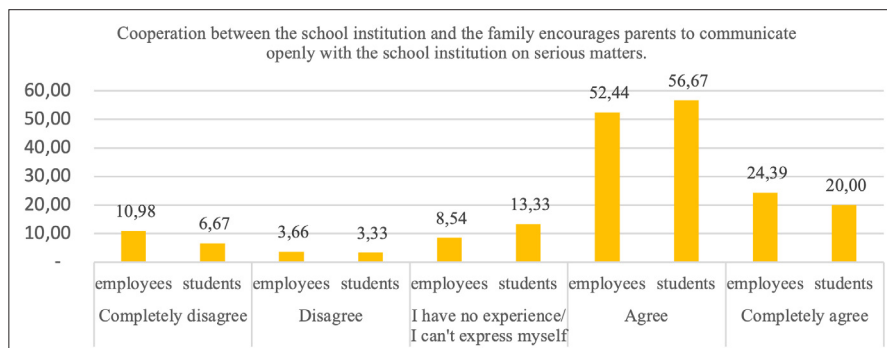
Graph 1: *The level of respondents' agreement with cooperation between the school institution and the family is a determinant supporting the perception of the school institution as a safe place by children of preschool and younger school age. (N=112)*



Based on empirical data, we find that pedagogical and professional staff ($n=40$; 48.78%) express full agreement that cooperation between school institutions supports children's perception of the institution as a safe place. University students in preschool elementary pedagogy ($n=22$; 63.33%) agree with the statement. On the other hand, complete disagreement with the statement is expressed ($n=7$, 8.54%) by respondents from practice and ($n=1$; 3.33%) by students.

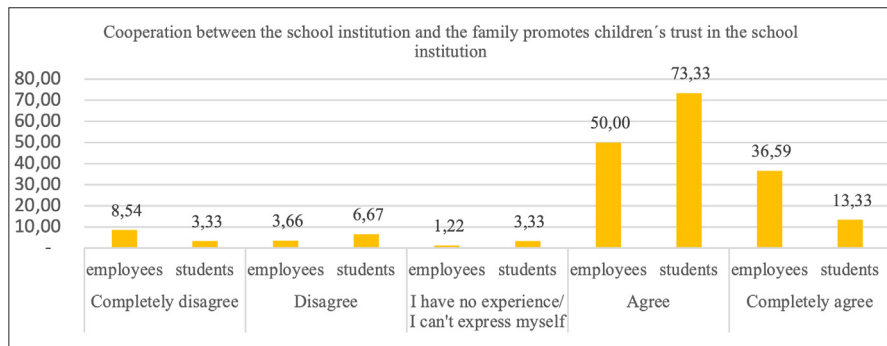
In the survey, we also focused on the association between cooperation between the school institution and parents' communication in difficult situations, as well as the association with children's perception of trust in the school institution.

Graph 2: *Respondents' opinion on cooperation between the school institution and the family as determinants of open communication between parents and the school institution in serious situations. (N=112)*



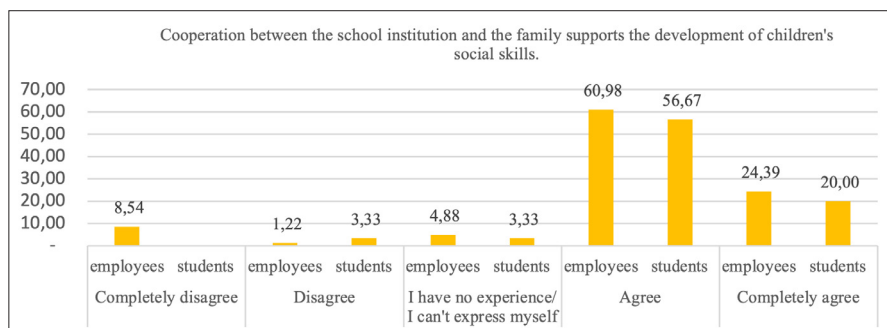
According to empirical data, ($n=43$; 52.44%) of pedagogical and professional employees and ($n=17$; 56.67%) students tend to agree with the statement that the cooperation between the school institution and the family is a determinant of open communication between parents and the school institution in serious situations. At the same time, ($n=20$; 24.39%) of respondents from practice and ($n=6$; 20.00%) of students express full agreement with the statement. On the other hand, complete disagreement with the statement was expressed by ($n=9$; 10.98%) respondents from practice and ($n=2$; 6.67%) by students.

Graph 3: Respondents' opinion on cooperation between the school institution and the family as determinants of trust between children and the school institution. (N=112)



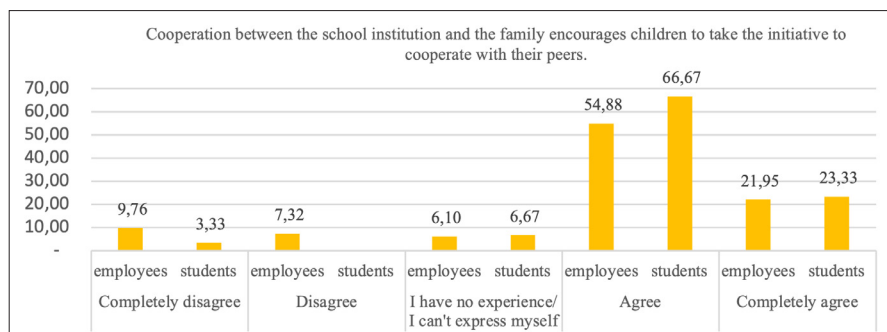
From the empirical data, we also find that (n=41; 50.00%) of pedagogical and professional employees from practice and students (n=22; 73.33%) express the opinion that they are more likely to agree with the cooperation between the school institution and the family as a determinant of trust between children and the school institution. On the other hand, complete disagreement with the statement is expressed (n=7, 8.54%) by respondents from practice and (n=1; 3.33%) by students.

Graph 4: Respondents' opinion on the cooperation between the school institution and the family as determinants of children's social skills development. (N=112)



Empirical data indicate that as many as (n=50; 60.98%) of pedagogical and professional employees and (n=22; 56.67%) of students tend to agree with the opinion about the cooperation of the school institution and the family as a determinant of the development of children's social skills, and at the same time (n=20; 24.39%) of pedagogical and professional employees and (n=6; 20.00%) students tend to agree with the opinion completely. We also find that (n=7; 8.54%) of pedagogical and professional employees tend to disagree with the statement completely.

Graph 5: *Respondents' opinion on the cooperation between the school institution and the family as determinants of children's initiative to cooperate. (N=112)*

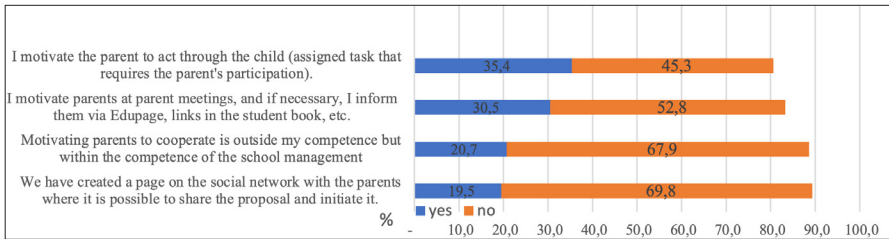


Based on empirical data, we find that (n=45; 54.88%) of pedagogical and professional employees and (n=20; 66.67%) of students tend to agree with the opinion that the cooperation of the school institution and the family is a determinant of children's initiative to cooperate, while (n=18; 21.95%) of pedagogical and professional employees and (n=7; 23.33%) students tend to agree with the statement completely.

Complete disagreement with the statement was expressed by (n=8; 9.76%) of pedagogical and professional employees and (n=1; 3.33%) by students.

In the survey, we also monitored the association of cooperation and motivation of parents to cooperate on the part of the school institution.

Graph 6: *Awareness and attitude of pedagogical staff in a school institution regarding parents' motivation to cooperate. (N=53)*



Legend: *expression of values in relative abundance %*

Based on the empirical data obtained, we find that (n=29; 35.4%) of respondents motivate the parent to cooperate with the child. We also find that the possibility of motivating a parent at parent-teacher meetings or Edupage is used (n=25; 30.5%) by pedagogical employees, and similarly, the possibility of motivating a parent through the social side is used (n=16; 19.5%) by participants. The positive finding is that (n=36; 67.9%) of respondents take over the competence to motivate the parent to cooperate. It is significant to find that as many as (n=46; 86.8%) of respondents perceive the absence of an initiative to cooperate on the part of parents, while a pedagogical employee takes it over.

Following the motivation, we were also interested in which attributes of cooperation between parents and the school institution respondents perceive as potentially risky that could represent a barrier. We asked all participants the question about the perceived risks of cooperation between the school institution and the family (N=112), so in order to determine the consistency of the answers, whether the results were not influenced by the number of respondents in the groups, we carried out a Chi-square test. At the same time, in this way, we wanted to latently determine the perception trend of pedagogical, professional employees and students regarding perceived risks.

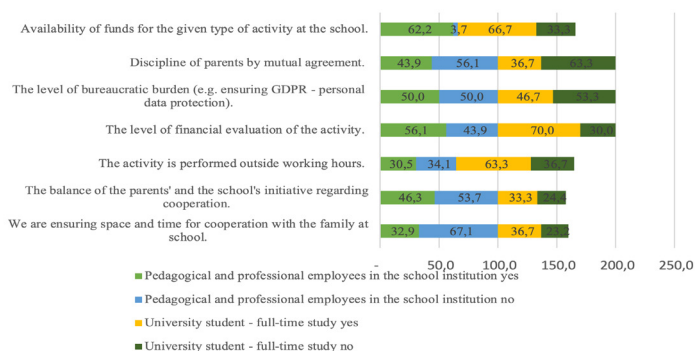
Table 3: *Comparative table of responses of respondents of several groups about questions focused on the perception of risks of cooperation between a school institution and a family. (N=112)*

Alternatives	yes		no		dof
	Chi- test	p	Chi- test	p	
Providing space and time for cooperation between the school institution and parents.	5,23	0,39	2,72	0,74	5
Balance the initiative of parents and the school institution in cooperation.	2,25	0,81	1,7	0,89	5
Performing an activity outside working hours.	2,74	0,74	2,61	0,76	5
The level of financial remuneration of the activity.	0,88	0,97	1,3	0,93	5
The level of bureaucratic burden (e.g., GDPR).	1,5	0,91	1,45	0,92	5
Discipline of parents by mutual agreement.	2,53	0,77	1,78	0,88	5
Availability of funds for a given type of activity at the school.	0,31	0,99	0,54	0,99	5

Legend: significance level $p \leq 0.05$; DOF – degrees of freedom

Based on the chi-square test, we find no statistically significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies in either of the responses within the groups at the significance level of $p \leq 0.05$. We can conclude that the respondents' responses were relatively consistent and were not influenced by the number of respondents in the groups. We also find that the perception of potential risks of cooperation between a school institution and a family is analogous across differentiated respondent groups.

Graph 7: *Perceived risk aspects of ensuring cooperation between the school institution and the family from the respondents' perspective. (N=112; 30 university students (full time) and 82 pedagogical and professional employees in a school institution)*



Legend: Observed values are in %

Based on empirical data, we find that for (n=51; 62.2%) pedagogical and professional employees in a school institution and (n=20; 66.7%) university students (full-time), the main risk of cooperation between the school institution and the family is the availability of funds. Subsequently, (n=46; 56.1%) of pedagogical and professional employees and (n=21; 70%) of students identified the level of financial evaluation of activities as risky. Furthermore, for (n=41; 50%) of pedagogical and professional employees, the risk of cooperation is the level of bureaucratic burden, but at the same time, for (n=41; 50%) of pedagogical and professional employees, it is not perceived as risky. It is perceived as a risk (n=14; 46.7%) by full-time university students. On the other hand, parents' discipline after mutual agreement with the school institution is not perceived as risky by (n=46; 56.1%) pedagogical and professional staff and (n=19; 63.3%) university students (full-time).

DISCUSSION

In our survey, we found that the family's cooperation with the school institution is perceived by pedagogical and professional employees and university students in the field of preschool elementary pedagogy in a daily form as beneficial for children from several points of view. Cooperation between the school institution and the family is associated with the child's perception of the school institution as a safe place, with the opinion completely agreed (n=40; 48.78%) of pedagogical and professional staff from practice, and also with the statement agreed (n=22; 63.33%) of university students of preschool elementary pedagogy. The association of cooperation between families and the school environment in the context of children's safe perception of school institutions has yet to be investigated. Currently, it is possible to focus on the given area in connection with the concept of well-being, the subject of interest of which is the emotional and social dimension of the safety of children and young. Adolescents were investigated – parental knowledge and school connectedness were significant predictors of adolescent internalizing and externalizing problems (Bacikova-Sleskova, Barbierik & Gajdoš, 2024). The well-being of preschool and younger students in school institutions has

to be investigated. Poláková (2023) carried out a survey, which focused on the issue of safety in the school environment from the parents' perspective. The survey group of 207 respondents was made up of parents of children in elementary school (84.1%) and parents of children in kindergarten (18.4%), and according to the findings, parents (n=76; 36.7%) considered their child's school to be safe. In the survey, we also investigated the degree of agreement with the statement about cooperation between the school institution and the family as a determinant of trust between children and the school institution. The pedagogical and professional staff from practice (n=41/82; 50.00%) and (n=22; 73.33%) students expressed the opinion that they rather agree with the opinion that the cooperation between the school institution and the family represents a positive determinant – it is associated with children's trust with the school institution. *The relationship between family and school is a complex mechanism, the good functioning of which is conditioned by trust. It turns out that the principle of operation of this mechanism is the participation of parents in school affairs. As part of the participation of parents in the life of the school, the thesis is very often accepted that it should be based on a partnership basis, that is, parents and teachers, the school and the family should be considered partners* (Majerčíková, 2011, p. 24).

Following on from the findings about the cooperation between the school institution and the family as a determinant of trust between children and the school institution, we also present a finding about the cooperation between the school institution and the family as a determinant of open communication between parents and the school institution in serious situations. A total of (n=43; 52.44%) teaching and professional staff and (n=17; 56.67%) students tended to agree rather, at the same time, (n=20; 24.39%) respondents from practice and (n= 6; 20.00%) of the students expressed complete agreement with the statement. Pedagogical and professional employees expressed an additional opinion that their ability to communicate difficult conversations effectively is proportional to the relationship built with parents and parents' trust in the school institution. In the adaptation period, female teachers, for example, expressed their fear of opening deeper conversations with parents they do not know well, as they cannot estimate what they can and cannot afford to communicate. Wiegerová and colleagues (2024), in research focused

on the resilience of teaching staff in elementary schools and kindergartens, clarify that teachers can solve difficult life situations if they have developed protective competence, which they naturally acquire through many experiences. We add that this is a non-transferable competence. In the conditions of the Slovak Republic, we encounter the possibility of a parental assistant whose role is to motivate parents to cooperate with the school, motivate parents to solve educational or educational problems and, according to Ďuríková and Kubánová (2023), also communicate sensitive topics with parents. For practical reasons, we state that teachers have the opportunity to develop the ability to build trusting relationships through courses and programs. In the Slovak Republic, the Family Academy o.z. Currently organizes courses focused on family and education. (Hanusová, 2021) Abroad, for example, the Virtual lab school program is dedicated to the field (Virtual lab school, n.d.).

In connection with the partnership between the school institution and the family, we also present a finding on the perception of the risks of cooperation between the school institution and the family (see chart no. 8). As many as (n=44; 53.7%) pedagogical and professional staff, also for (n=20; 24.2%) students, the balance of the initiative of parents and the school to cooperate does not represent a risk, and therefore the respondents perceive that the initiative is balanced. On the other hand, (n=38; 43.9%) teaching and professional staff and (n=10; 33.3%) students perceive the balance of initiative of parents and the school institution for cooperation as risky. However, the finding was that up to (n=46; 86.8%) respondents perceived an absent initiative to cooperate on the part of the parents, while the pedagogical employee took the initiative. The parents' initiative to cooperate with the school institution is individual and can be associated with various barriers. For example, according to the PISA measurement aimed at determining the level of parental involvement, student performance and their satisfaction with life, up to (36%; AM=18%) of parents from the participating countries stated the inability to leave work as the most common hindering factor, further according to 33% of parents, time meeting unsatisfactory (OSCD, 2017). Our survey indicates that 30.53% (n=28) of pedagogical and professional employees do not see a risk in engaging in cooperative activities outside of working hours; it latently follows that the settings are flexible and accommodating to provide time for a parent even at

this time. Theoretically, the respondents' perception may be more related to the responsiveness and discipline of the parents. Of the (N=112) respondents, (56.1%) of pedagogical and professional employees and (63.3%) of students do not perceive disciplining parents by mutual agreement as risky. For students (n=19; 63.3%) who perceive the risk of carrying out cooperation outside of working hours, the attitude is associated with the perception of the financial evaluation of such activities, which they also identified as risky (n=21; 70.0%).

PISA further states that (17%; AM= 18%) parents do not know how to get involved in school activities. At the same time, 13% of parents think their participation in school activities is irrelevant to their child's development (OSCD, 2017). Analogous justifications for non-cooperation were also expressed by our pedagogical and professional staff from practice when they mentioned their experience with parents exhibiting ipsocentric behaviour, regardless of the variety and number of activities offered for their involvement. In this way, according to the theory of ecological systems, two systems are formed in which different processes take place in parallel; that is, the family builds a closed border, is limited to its contents and processes, and the energy of the school institution does not have the opportunity to intervene and follow up on the processes of its internal environment. A separate approach, where a consistent environment is absent, may represent a prerequisite for a weakened sense of security in the child, or ideas about the meaning of actions in favor of the school institution. In our survey, we also dealt with the awareness and approach of pedagogical and professional staff in the school institution regarding parents' motivation to cooperate. Based on the obtained empirical data, we find that (n=29; 35.4%) respondents motivate the parent to cooperate with the child. In the survey, we also find that the opportunity to motivate the parent at parent meetings or through the digital platform Edupage is used by (n=25; 30.5%) pedagogical employees, and similarly, the opportunity to motivate the parent via the social page is used by (n=16; 19.5%) participants. Positive is the finding that the respondents (n=36; 67.9%) take over the competence to motivate the parent to cooperate and do not transfer the responsibility to the school management.

Based on the facts found, it can be deduced that pedagogical and professional employees express enough initiative and friendliness towards parents. In the research, Toblová and the team (2020) confirmed the hypothesis (H11)

that teachers are more interested in cooperation than parents; this follows from the profession of teachers, while for parents, the interest in cooperation is spontaneous. Already, Potočárová and Vančo (2012) pointed to the need for a paradigm shift in the perception of parents towards cooperation with the school institution, from the traditional model of cooperation where the parent is in the position of *client-recipient of the service* to the *parent as partner* model. A partnership involves a commitment to specific common goals and their pursuit through dialogue. At the same time, the partnership relationship is determined by reciprocal behaviour and the equal distribution of the responsibilities of the interested parties in matters. We agree with the opinion of Jablonský (2008, p.43), which specifies the quality of ongoing processes of cooperation between actors: *The cooperative motive induces behavior that brings benefit and benefit to all participants. The act of cooperation is not only a manifestation of good will and an empathetic interpersonal relationship, but is a consequence of knowing the necessity to cooperate.* Homolová (2022) also emphasizes the importance of cooperation, where children interact with each other and solve tasks based on the exchange of information, knowledge, and skills. This way of working promotes social bonds between children and the development of teamwork and specific professional skills, which can serve as a model for cooperation at the school and family levels. Based on the findings, we express the thesis on a theoretical level that the cooperation between the school institution and the family in the Slovak Republic is realized at the level of the adaptation model (receipt of service to actors – parents) with unique initiatives characterizing the democratic model (partnership parent – school institution). The creation, maintenance and development of cooperation between families and school institutions based on external guidance and monitoring indicators from official documents implies activity at the level of adaptation. The democratic model implies an attitude and activation based on an intrinsic motive – the perception of value. The given area needs to be explored and specified.

In addition to specific findings regarding the relationship quality between parents and the school institution, we also focused on associations of the perception of cooperation between parents and the school institution with the behaviour of children of preschool and younger school age. In a study, Coleman and Hoffer (1987) attributed the improvement of students' social

skills to the relationship between families and schools, which together create a functional community based on shared values. We were interested in this particular association and asked the respondents about their opinion on the cooperation between the school institution and the family as a determinant of children's social skills development. According to our findings, (n=50; 60.98%) of teaching and professional staff and (n=22; 56.67%) students tend to agree with the opinion about the cooperation between the school institution and the family as a determinant of the development of children's social skills and at the same time (n=20; 24.39%) of teaching and professional staff and (n=6; 20.00%) students tend to agree with the opinion completely. According to Tóblóvá and the collective (2020), effective cooperation can positively affect student behaviour, school relationships, teachers, and other students. Collaboration between family and school helps to ensure that children's development is comprehensive, including academic, emotional and social aspects.

One of the social skills is the cooperation of children in a school institution. According to the research data (n=45; 54.88%) of pedagogical and professional staff and (n=20; 66.67%), students tend to agree with the opinion that the cooperation of the school institution and the family is a determinant of children's initiative to cooperate, whereas (n=18; 21.95%) teaching and professional staff and (n=7; 23.33%) students tend to agree with the statement completely. This positive trend can be explained based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the zone of proximal development, according to which the behaviour of more capable actors (older authority) intentionally or unintentionally models the behaviour of a less capable, experienced person – a child, who directs and regulates his activity in a given experience under the influence of authority. The experience of cooperation between parents and the school institution is indirectly reflected in the mental attitude of children, who initiate or do not cooperate with their peers based on this. At the same time, a child's experience in preschool and at a younger school age is crucial in shaping the perception of cooperation as a value.

The child's experience with the participation of his parent and the school institution determines the child's attitude toward the institution. Based on this, the child's cooperation with other persons (peer, assistant, educator and teacher) can either be perceived as pro forma, i.e. something that is

expected of him, or implemented based on an internalized attitude – *Haltung* (Eichsteller, 2010), when an individual directs his actions based on moral conviction. Concerning cooperation initiatives, we add that the presence of real possibilities for cooperation determines the trend of cooperation between the school institution and the family. Real possibilities can be realized if the time allowance is reserved for developing cooperation. The time investment, in turn, depends on setting the mentality of the environment and prioritization. In his research, Karabacak (2021) states that the education of values must be supported by integration into teaching and family participation. The criterion for integrating value is the space for contact with value and repeated experience with value, based on which the experience is evaluated and integrated as value. Cultivating cooperation is expressly determined by the physical experience of the parties involved. It follows that if we strive for parents to show the desired behaviour, it is necessary for them to experience it within the school community and decide on it. The number of perceived and lived experiences of cooperation between the school institution and families among university students in the field of preschool and elementary pedagogy partly represent the basis of the paradigm being formed against the background of educational reality. From our survey and reflection, questions arise for further scientific research and practical intervention: What is the frequency of the repeated experience of cooperation between parents and the school institution? What indicators characterize the cooperation between parents and the school institution? What is the quality of the cooperation? In connection with the idea of Potočárová and Vančo (2012) about the possibility of expanding the competence of parents, we consider what is the perception of their position on the part of the parent and the school institution in the direction of co-creating the child's school environment. What emancipatory initiatives does the parent express with the school institution in the direction of the state establishment to expand the space for the possibility of deeper cooperation between these two institutions?

CONCLUSION

Parents' active involvement and participation are the main indicators of the functional cooperation of the school institution with the community. From the point of view of the child's socialization, it is appropriate that the two key institutions, the family and the school institution, representing the micro-environment and the meso-environment, assume a partnership relationship and do not fulfil only the pro-forma purpose of contact. It is essential to support and maintain the cooperation of families with the school institution, as based on its functionality, the child perceives how systemic relations work in the society in which he develops. In an empirical study, we present the findings that for pedagogical and professional employees in school institutions, as well as students of preschool elementary pedagogy in the daily form, cooperation between the school institution and the family represents a prerequisite for the perceived safety of the school institution by children, it also represents a prerequisite for children's trust towards the school institution. In addition, the cooperation of parents with the school institution is a prerequisite for developing children's social skills, such as cooperation between peers. In the school institution, the family is motivated to cooperate most often through the children, the Edupage platform, and primarily based on the initiative of the pedagogical and professional staff. On the other hand, for the respondents, the risk of cooperation between the family and the school institution is represented by the financial area, bureaucratic burden, or the performance of activities outside working hours.

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