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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS WITH BEHAVIORAL DIFFICULTIES⁴³

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Introduction

The cooperation of all participants in the educational process provides the basis for inclusive schooling. Teachers' inclusive beliefs are significant predictors of teaching practices with students with behavioral disorders (Sunko *et al.*, 2021), while teacher-parent cooperation and partnership are important elements of inclusive education. Parents' involvement in the school's work encourages students' academic endeavors and limits challenging behaviors. Families and schools work together to recognize students' needs, desires, and talents. When cooperation between families and schools increases, students feel more confident to fulfil their potential. Research indicates that parental participation in children's education and relational engagement

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with schools support academic performance, reduce behavioral problems, and foster students' dedication to learning (Houri *et al.*, 2019; Boonk *et al.*, 2018).

According to Houri and colleagues (2019), trust, communication, and respect are key elements of parental involvement in schools that positively correlate with student academic performance. Parents who express high confidence in their child's teacher are more inclined to participate in school-related activities. Direct teacher-parent contact increases parental participation by boosting parental trust, while simultaneously emphasizing that not all forms of parental involvement positively impact academic achievement. Boonk and colleagues (2018) note that for parents with high expectations, there is a more consistently positive relationship between parental participation and students' academic achievement. Different factors influence school engagement among parents of high school students with emotional/behavioral difficulties (Carlson *et al.*, 2020). There is a recognized need for increased child supportiveness and ways of improving family engagement processes. In communication and collaboration with school staff, it is necessary to emphasize student strengths and participate in the individualized education planning process. Overall, studies have found "a small to moderate, and practically meaningful, relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement" (Fan & Chan, 2001: 1).

Teachers rely on professional judgment to operationalize inclusive instruction and monitor student response to inclusive instructional practices (McKenna *et al.*, 2021). In an effort to improve student academic prospects, the education policy emphasizes the benefits of using research-based practices. A recent study found that schools that used tiered behavior support systems for at least three years had higher student achievement in mathematics (Kim *et al.*, 2018).

Research Problem

Recent studies have identified a relationship between parental involvement and the school performance of students with behavioral difficulties. Participation in parent-teacher meetings is merely an element of the needed parental engagement in dealing with children with behavioral difficulties. Similarly, school grades provide only a baseline for further exploration of the school performance of students with behavioral difficulties.

Research Method

This paper is a part of a larger research project describing the data collection method (Vlah & Grbic, 2019). In 125 elementary schools in Croatia, classroom teachers from the first to eighth grade were asked to identify one to three students whom they observed to have behavioral difficulties during class, recess, and free activities. Teacher participation in data collection was voluntary and anonymous. Data were collected for 1,331 students with behavioral difficulties, 87% of whom were boys. School performance was measured in the overall student grades (from insufficient to excellent). Parental involvement was measured as the regularity of participation in parent-teacher meetings and rated by classroom teachers on a nominal scale of three degrees, with “no”, “yes”, and “I am not sure” as possible responses. Data were analyzed using frequencies in contingency tables with an insight into chi-square tests of relationships between the observed variables.

Results

As presented in Table 1, out of 1,331 students, there were 26 (1.9%) unsatisfactory, 97 (7.3%) sufficient, 520 (39.0%) good, 521 (39.2%) very good, and 167 (12.5%), excellent students, according to the reports of their classroom teachers. Classroom teachers also reported that the parents of 912 (68.5%) students regularly came to parent-teacher meetings, and the parents of 232 (17.4%) students did not. They were unsure about the regularity of participation for the parents of 187 (14%) students.

There were proportionally more students with insufficient, sufficient, and good results among students with behavioral difficulties whose parents did not regularly attend parent-teacher conferences. At the same time, there were proportionally more very good and excellent students among students with behavioral difficulties whose parents regularly attended parent-teacher conferences. The association between the regularity of parents' attendance at meetings and the overall academic success of students was statistically significant ($\chi^2(8,1331)=136.713; p<.001$).

Table 1. *Contingency Table of Relations Between the Regularity of Parents' Attendance at Meetings and Students' Overall Academic Success*

Academic Success	Parents Regularly Attend Parent-Teacher Meetings			
	No	Yes	I am not sure	Total
Insufficient	12 46.2%	11 42.3%	3 11.5%	26 1.9%
Sufficient	34 35.1%	30 30.9%	33 34.0%	97 7.3%
Good	116 22.3%	321 61.7%	83 16.0%	520 39.0%
Very Good	55 10.6%	409 78.5%	57 10.9%	521 39.1%
Excellent	15 9.0%	141 84.4%	11 6.6%	167 12.5%
Total	232 17.4%	912 68.5%	187 14.0%	1331 100.0%

Conclusions and Implications

Different stakeholders take responsibility for establishing successful collaborations and providing different strategies for including families in the process of educating children with behavioral disorders and improving their academic prospects. At the education policy level, a possible solution can be found in tiered behavior support systems that require the involvement of parents in the schooling of their children. At the research level, there is little research to inform decision-making when planning inclusive instruction for students with behavioral disorders. Future research should strive to gain insight into relationships between SES variables and the variables of parental engagement and school performance observed here to better understand the need for additional social and educational support for students with behavioral difficulties.

Keywords: elementary schools in Croatia, parent-teacher meetings, students with behavioral difficulties, school performance.

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