

Expanding Parental Involvement in Education: How social media and online Communication affect the Family-School relationship

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Abstract:

Developing parental involvement in the educational process has been repeatedly proposed as a tool for imparting human values to the children beyond solely improving academic outcomes, thus becoming part and parcel of school as well as parental cultures. Parents' adequate involvement and participation and their cooperation with the school and education staff also help mitigate the behavioral problems and dilemmas that children may encounter at school and raises their academic achievement. This paper includes study that explores the extent of the growth and expansion of Social Media and online Communication this new form of communication between family and school, its paths and potentials and pros and cons from the perspectives of parents and educators, with the aim of producing recommendations that help both. The research could count on the participation of 103 parents and 105 educators from Arab schools in Israel.

I. Introduction

During the last two decades, the involvement of parents in the education of their children has garnered extensive attention and research in the field of educational studies. This can be attributed to several reasons, chief among which is the positive association between parental engagement and children's academic achievements, as demonstrated by empirical findings. Studies have also shown that the positive implication of parental engagement extends beyond curricular programs. Parents' involvement in their children's extracurricular programs fosters family cohesion and fortifies their ties to their children[1].

Following the plethora of studies that demonstrate the positive implications for parental involvement on parents, children and schools alike, educational institutions have, unsurprisingly, attempted to find variegated ways to increase their communication with parents and parental engagement with the school. Parental involvement is not limited to attending school meetings, visiting the school to receive their children's report cards, or attending some extracurricular activities, as was previously the case. Rather, such engagement has grown and expanded to keep pace with new technology, remote communication, and social media, with parents and schools trying to "outdo" each other, in a sense. The outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic has indirectly expanded the scope of online parent-educator communication since the lockdown forced the children to learn from home, thus limiting the opportunities for in-person meetings between parents and educators. Amid such shifting reality, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. It is necessary to evaluate this type of communication, to determine its effectiveness, and to come up with recommendations that increase the positive relationship between the family and the school, and this is what this research shows.

II. The Engagement and Involvement of Parents in the Educational Institution (the school)

Parents and educators are the most influential actors on a child's life during the primary stages of her/his education. The role of the approaches proposed by parents or by schools, through educators, in children's lives, education, personalities, and behavior cannot be underestimated. Yet, several studies have noted that the first learning occurs rather at home and is more important than that which occurs at school[2]. This learning is influenced by parents' cultural, educational, and social status and could either have positive or negative impact on the child. Due to these aforementioned variables, the influence tends to fluctuate among the different families so the collaboration between parents and educators can help bridge the gaps that arise from the children's backgrounds. Such collaboration, mutually supported by parents and educators, can also improve the children's academic outcomes and personality. A successful school is, therefore, one where a positive relationship is formed between students, parents, and the education staff[3, 4].

III. The Types and models of Parental Involvement

According to the framework proposed by Joyce Epstein[3], the types and forms of parental involvement in their children's educational process can be divided into six types:

- 1. Parenting:** Establishing a healthy home environment that supports and advances the child's learning by providing the child with the necessary psychological and emotional conditioning, healthcare, good nutrition, upbringing, the development of behavior, values, and ethics, advice and awareness to the importance of learning, among others. Thus, parenting equips children for their academic lives and shapes their behavior and motivation to learn, contributing to their future involvement in the academic life.
- 2. Communication:** The process of communication between the educator and the parent with the aim of obtaining information about the pupil's academic outcome, behavior, academic performance, interests and preferences, among other issues related the student's academic life. This communication may occur during parental visits to school and open days or through phone calls, correspondences, and notes. Communication should be a two-way traffic wherein the school provides the parents with information about the student's outcome and behavior in the classroom while the parent provides the school with information about the child's personality, interests, preferences, and homework performance.
- 3. Volunteering:** The voluntary participation of parents in school activities that require parental collaboration and support at the behest of the school. Activities may be extracurricular and the parental support may come in the form of volunteering, contributing expertise, or material aid.
- 4. Learning at home:** Parental pedagogical support for children by following up on their studies, helping with assignments and homework, revisions and preparations, and all other afterschool requirements. It is important to maintain harmony and coordination between the expectations and teaching methods of the school on the one hand, and the additional support provided by the parents on the other. Parents can also receive instruction regarding the most effective methods and strategies to use while tutoring their children at home, ways of dealing with problems and dilemmas that children may encounter during their studies, and getting acquainted with school curricula and pedagogical programs.

5. Decision making: Involving parents in the decision-making process at school through joining the parents council, school board, and other school-related bodies for parents.

6. Collaboration with the community: Building a collaborative relationship between family, school, and community in different spheres. As part of the local community, parents should contribute to buttressing the relationship between the community and the school, its staff and its students.

The model suggested by Epstein entails various forms of partnership where there is room for most possibilities and potentialities of communication between families and schools in the best interest of the students.

Another model, proposed by Goos and his colleagues[5], focuses on parents' contribution to the education of their children at home through learning tasks that are not related to the formal curriculum directly. This model is predicated on the notion that learning should not be restricted to the formal curriculum taught to the children at school. Rather, horizons must be expanded so as to enable children to perform different activities and hobbies and express personal preferences with the help of parents, in a family environment that offers a supportive climate for learning where parents supervise the education of their children. Support is necessary on two levels: academically, parents are expected to help children with their homework and other school requirements; personally, they are expected to help children to develop their hobbies and skills in dialogue, discussion, critical thinking, reading, problem-solving, among other skills. The second level, of course, supports the educational process albeit indirectly. Based on this model, children have the chance to practice at home what they had learned at school.

Halgunseth and his colleagues[6], meanwhile, stress the importance of involving parents in the decisions that affect their children at school, granting parents an active role in the decision-making process. This model reinforces the reciprocal, ongoing, and profound communication between parents and the school with the aim of cooperating, conveying and sharing information in the best interest of the child. Based on this model, parents should be involved in school and voluntary activities to introduce the education staff to the parents, to understand the social and cultural background of the students, and to integrate and take advantage of this newfound acquaintance in the learning process at school and to articulate it in other activities, tasks and homework. Among its priorities and primary objectives, the school should, according to this model, emphasize reinforcing collaboration and training and equipping the education staff to implement this process effectively and professionally.

While these three models differ in certain aspects, they clearly share common objectives as seen from different angles. This illustrates that parental involvement and partnership with schools can be achieved through different means in order to increase their efficiency and positive impact, complementing the educational process.

IV. Technology, Social Media and Online communication, Advantages and Disadvantages

The technological development that has defined the last two decades, especially in the sphere of remote communication, has significantly altered the ways people communicate. Some argue that it has changed societies for the better, reducing geographical, ethnic, class, and political distances, making communication swifter and more accessible. Those who interact virtually get a sense of closeness to one another and are better informed about the outside world. (The outside world, in this context, is the world of the school and

the students.) Others claim that online communication has adversely affected human relations, diminishing their intimacy, entrenching cultural, ethnic, class disparities and furthering alienation and solitude[7].

Most virtual communications take place through text messages, emails, or Facebook and are expressed through words or symbols. Symbols tend to be vague and potentially confusing, especially in the absence of body language and facial expression, making this form of communication poorer than face-to-face contact. Online communication also lacks the physical presence of the interlocutors and does not allow effective listening, willingness to understand others and awareness and responsiveness to their presence. Online communication also erases the boundaries between the public and the private, between personal and public contact, and carries some intimate and sensitive content from the private to the public sphere. Yet, online communication enables people to convey short content easily and promptly and to share updates regarding important events and occasions[8].

In light of these positive and negative influences, online communication can be assessed according to the lines of communication. Some can be assessed as aggressive, containing offensive or obscene language that may stem from lack of consideration of the social and current situation and the fact that interlocutors could hide their real identities and write behind pseudonyms. At times, short messages can be used to harm the other intentionally, including the school, its rules, other parents, or the educator. The nature of online communication, where content, including sensitive and improper content, may be conveyed so quickly and without being monitored, makes such harm more prevalent. On the other hand, smooth, free, and effective communication between the interlocutors overlooks social differences, permits free, private, and equal communication, and allows the sender time to think before sending her response or answer; it also allows the sender to edit her response and to carefully chose the words she wants to use. In sum, online communication is a double-edged sword.

As far as the communication between parents and educators is concerned, online communication has similar advantages and disadvantages. Online communication may become a new and effective tool when used for long periods. Extensive use familiarizes parents and educators with intelligible and clear symbols in their conversations, outlines clear rules and guidelines for communication, and requires parents and schools to monitor the chat and to respond carefully, maturely, and professionally before sending any update. If negative updates are to be shared, it is important to start the chat on a positive note, to choose a good timing and a proper way to convey any negative message, and parents are required to treat those messages patiently and to communicate positively with the educators in order to achieve the desired objectives. They should also comply with the rules and guidelines regarding the ways, time, and approaches of the communication[9].

In an age of speed and work, online communication has helped busy parents communicate with schools more easily and to follow up on their children's studies and to help them more effectively, studies show. Typically, children's trust in the system grows when the relationship between their parents and teachers is strong and when the parents are fully aware to what is going on at school[10].

V. Parental Involvement and Partnership with schools in the Age of Online Communication

Research into the field of the relationship between education and online communication, rather than in-person communication, remains at its early stages. This belies the frequent use of online communication between parents in recent years through different

platforms such as email, the official webpage of the school, the school's official Facebook page, the parents' Facebook page, WhatsApp and Viber groups. These tools have been heavily relied upon for communication between parents, schools, education staff, and children, particularly following the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic. Used properly and correctly, online communication may enhance the partnership between parents and schools and increase the involvement of parents in their children's education.

Their scarcity notwithstanding, studies conducted on this issue stress that email is one of the oldest and most important tools of online communication between schools and parents. This tool leads to quick communication between parents and educators and to exchange messages and information on the student and even to help children with their education and behavior. According to studies, emails are most often sent to update parents with negative information about their children whilst conveying the messages in a supportive manner[11]. Yet, Thompson has also noted, in a 2009 study, that emails might lead to misunderstanding, create tensions between parents and educators, and cross the boundaries of positive and purposeful dialogue between the two parties[12].

Another tool for online communication is the school's official webpage. This tool is distinguished by a form of public communication whose purpose is to convey public and comprehensive information rather than specific and individual ones for individual parents. The school's official webpage has proven more effective in conveying clear and consistent guidelines and does not require discussion or dialogue nor does it seek to lead to a prompt change in the student's behavior or to inform an individual parent and give them a specific update. Individual updates for individual parents about their children are reserved for emails[13].

Online programs, known as LMS (Learning Management System), provide an additional platform for communication between parents and educators. They contain personal information and updates for the students and their parents, like grades updates on classes, syllabus, tuition payments, and other school-related commitments[14].

But new social media outlets like Facebook and WhatsApp are the most accessible communication tools for parents and educators. They are popular among parents because they are available 24/7 and have the option of individual and group chats. They allow interlocutors to send text messages, audio messages, PDF files, pictures, video and audio recordings, etc. These tools allow for fast and direct interaction, offer a space for dialogue, replies and comments. These new social media tools are user-friendly, free-of-charge, can be downloaded on mobile phones, and only require a working internet connection[15].

While the frequency of the use of these tools varies across schools and parents, their use has significantly increased, particularly following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which propelled schools to look for alternative means of communication during the lockdown.

VI. Data and Methodology

Research Objectives:

This study explores the different types and platforms of online communication between parents and schools and the extent of their use. It also examines the advantages and disadvantages of online communication from parents' and educators' perspectives, presenting their recommendations. In this context, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Is the communication between schools and parents conducted through online and social media platforms?

2. What are the online and social media platforms commonly used for communication between parents and schools?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of online and social media communication?
4. Based on their respective experiences, what are the recommendations of parents and educators regarding online communication?

By answering these questions from the perspectives of parents and educators, we shall offer a list of recommendations that combine the conclusions of rigorous academic research with those brought up by the different groups that participated in the research. This is ultimately aimed at elevating the level of online communication between parents and schools and increasing parental involvement and partnership in their children's educational process.

VI1. Data Collection Tools

The study adopts a computerized questionnaire that combines closed-ended questions regarding school information, and the social media and online communication tools they use, with open-ended questions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of communication through these platforms, and the participants' recommendations. The questionnaires were filled anonymously to ensure the confidentiality and honesty of the answers. The questionnaire was designed by Google Forms, to target the largest possible sample of parents. It was sent through different social media platforms and the document contained a full and comprehensive explanation of the study, its objectives, and its uses.

VI2. The research Sample

The research sample includes 103 parents from Arab cities and villages, whose children study either in public or in private schools under the umbrella of the Arab Education System in Israel. It also includes 105 teachers who work in the same system.

VI3- Data Collection and Analysis:

The questionnaire was published via Google Forms and circulated through social media platforms with the help of members of different Parents' Councils at different schools, who passed the questionnaire to other parents. It was also circulated on WhatsApp groups for teachers and on Facebook pages. Once the window for receiving responses closed in March 2022, the system recorded 103 questionnaires completed by parents and 105 questionnaires completed by teachers.

The study adopts a quantitative and qualitative approach. Whereas the quantitative analysis was reserved for closed-ended questions (the number of respondents to the questionnaire, the location of the school and its type [public or private] and the existence – or lack thereof – of online communication, the qualitative analysis focused on the open-ended questions. It analyzed the written text and content and the major themes in each of the answers to the open-ended questions.

VI4- Presentation and Analysis of Research Findings

The findings will be presented according to the order of the questions in the questionnaire. They will be analyzed directly after each open-ended questionnaire for both groups of participants, the parents and the educators. This will allow us to grasp the convergences and divergences between the two.

General information about the area and type of the schools to which the parents belong and where their children study:

The parents who participated in the research hail from 38 different Arab villages and cities (including mixed cities like Haifa and Jaffa). All schools are Arab and all the students

and educators are also Arab. The educators who participated in the research hail from 41 Arabi villages and cities (including mixed cities) from the Naqab/Negev in the South to the upper Galilee in the north.

48.5% of the children of the parents who answered the questionnaire study at private schools while 36.5% study at public schools affiliated with the local and municipal councils, and 3% study at special education schools. The rest of the participants did not specify the type of school where their children study, ticking on the box "other" in the questionnaire.

The educators are divided as follows:

59% of the educators teach in public schools affiliated with local and municipal councils, while the rest did not specify the type of school, ticking the option "other" in their responses on the questionnaire.

Years of experience

49.1% of the educators who participated in the research had over 10 years of teaching experience, 17.5% of the teachers had 5-10 years of experience, and 33.3% had 3-5 years of teaching experience.

Educators' familiarity with the ethics of using online communication platforms with the parents:

59.6% of the educators who participated in the research have never taken part in any workshop about the ethics of using online communication tools with parents while the rest participated at least in one such workshop. This finding is a cause for concern because the majority of educators use online communication extensively without any solid basis for using these tools and for the ethics of their use.

Availability of comprehensive and mandatory instructions and guidelines at the school that regulate online communication between the education staff and parents:

63.2% of the educators stated that their schools did provide them with instructions but these instructions were neither comprehensive nor mandatory. 8.8% of the educators said that they did not receive any instructions from these schools on this issue at all.

Communication between parents and schools through online and social media platforms

95.1% of the parents who participated in the research responded in the affirmative to this question. They communicate with the school via one or more social media/online platform like email, the school's official webpage, and social media outlets such as WhatsApp, Viber, or Facebook. 9.1% responded that communication occurs through in-person meetings, written correspondences, or the student's diary. 9.1% of the parents said that there is absolutely no communication between them and school on any medium, and Only 1.1% ticked the option "other" but did not specify the method of communication. As far as educators are concerned, 93% of them answered in the affirmative to this question. 3.5% of the educators said that they communicate with the parents through in-person meetings, written correspondences, or through the student's diary. 3.5% of the educators said that they do not communicate with the parents in any medium at all.

The answers reveal that the overwhelming majority of the learning community communicates with the school through one or more online/social media platform, and those who answered this question in the affirmative continued to answer the following questions in the questionnaire.

The types and outlets of online and social media communication between parents and the school:

(It should be noted that participants were allowed to tick more than one box, i.e. more than one online platform, explaining why the percentages we get exceed 100%. More than 50% of the parents stated that they use more than one online tool to communicate with the school.)

Parents' responses are as follows:

- 66.3% of the parents who participated in the questionnaire are members of WhatsApp groups created by the class educator to communicate with the parents. These groups permit conversation and comments.
- 13.9% of the parents are members of WhatsApp or Viber groups that include the parents, the educator and a member of the school's administration.
- 14.9% of the parents communicate through emails sent either to the whole class or to individual parents.
- 25.7% of the parents communicate through the school or the class's Facebook page. The page is open for comments.
- 9.9% of the parents communicate with the school or the educator through Facebook page for the school or the class, but the page is not open for comments.
- 26.7% of the parents communicate with the school or with the class educator through the school's official webpage that contains news, updates, and adverts.
- 22.8% of the parents said that they communicate with the school through Noble or other online learning platforms to check their children's grades, inbox, and assignments.
- 3% ticked the box "other."

The educators responded as follows:

- 49.1% of the educators communicate with the parents via a WhatsApp or Viber group where conversations and comments are allowed.
- 32.7% of the educators communicate with parents via a WhatsApp or a Viber group where conversations are not permitted, and only important messages are sent by the educator.
- 27.3% of the educators communicate with the parents via a WhatsApp or a Viber group that also includes one member of the school's administration. The group is open for conversations and comments.
- 32.7% of the educators communicate with parents through individual WhatsApp chats, rather than group chats.
- 7.3% of the educators communicate with parents through emails or through the school's official webpage or Facebook page, either in messages sent to the whole class or through individual messages. Comments are allowed.
- 7.3% of the educators communicate with parents through school adds and announcements on the school's official webpage or learning platform. They do not communicate with the parents individually.

The aforementioned answers reveal the most popular communication tool is the WhatsApp group for the parents and the class educator. WhatsApp is an accessible application that most parents have on their phones and can use at any time. It also allows parents to send and receive text and audio messages and receive replies quickly. WhatsApp chats also allow holding conversations. Educators' answers also show that some educators create WhatsApp groups where they are the only ones who can send updates and where parents cannot respond or comment. Nearly one-third of the educators hold individual WhatsApp chats with specific parents away from the WhatsApp group[15]. The percentage of groups that include a member of the school's administration is lower. The second most used online communication too is the class Facebook group, which is open for comments, followed by online learning platforms lie

Noble. Perhaps Facebook groups and online learning platforms are not as commonly used as WhatsApp groups because they are much more general and inclusive, limiting direct and personal contact. The public nature of these platforms, where comments and replies can be seen by everyone, compel parents and educators alike to use them less frequently. Only a small percentage of schools communicate with parents through Facebook pages closed for comments. This can be attributed to the school's willingness to provide parents with space and freedom of expression and to the mutual trust that create a fertile ground for dialogue, conversation, and discussion.

The influence of online and social media communication on strengthening and reinforcing the partnership between parents and schools:

The parents' responses are as follows:

- 78.9% of the parents who answered the research think that online communication has a positive effect on their constructive relationship and partnership with the school.
- 15.9% of the parents were uncertain or suspicious about the efficacy of online communication and its role in solidifying the relationship and partnership between parents and schools.
- The rest of the parents (5.9% of those who participated in the research) think that online communication does not have a positive effect on the relationship and partnership between parents and schools.

The educators' responses are as follows:

- 67.3% of the educators who participated in the research maintain that online and social media communication has a positive effect on their relationship and partnership with parents.
- 27% of the educators were uncertain or suspicious about the efficacy of online and social media communication in solidifying the relationship and partnership with parents.
- 5.5% responded that they do not think online communication has a positive effect on the relationship and partnership with parents.

The results of this question reaffirm the position of Reference [8]: Online communication mediums may become effective and new tools when used for a long period of time, familiarizing the parents and the school with clear and mutually intelligible symbols. When communication is based on clear rules and guidelines for the two parties, it becomes more effective in fostering and solidifying the relationship and partnership. We did notice, however, that the percentage of uncertain respondents are higher among educators than that among parents: more educators are uncertain or suspicious of the effectiveness of online communication on enhancing their relationship with the parents.

The disadvantages of online and social media communication

This was an open-ended question, where parents and educators were asked to explain and specify the disadvantages and adverse effects insofar as those exist. Their answers will be divided into major bullet points that capture the bulk of the concerns.

1. Lack of clarity and intelligibility of the message; the communication is bereft of emotional and human contact or the direct personal relation with the educator. Emotional interaction is a factor that parents need in their relationship with educators

Some parents raised the issue that written messages they receive from the educators are vague, causing confusion, misunderstanding and tension. (Educators did not raise this problem.) Parents added that text messages are bereft of emotional contact that parents need in order to understand the message more clearly. Parents also added that they prefer audio contact or audio calls to text messages, because audio calls, according to them, are more efficient and imply that educators are more serious. Parents said that

notifying them only through text messages and online tools may be insufficient especially when the issue at stake is sensitive. Some parents mentioned that the information may be jumbled and some information do not reach them at all because the excessive activity of parents in these groups. Some participants said that the information be too general and routine. Others said that text messages are not sufficient and unclear because it lacks the body language that help convey the message better. Some parents said that online communication comes at the expense of in-person contact to the extent that some parents do not even recognize the face of their children's teachers.

2. Giving a platform for overtly critical remarks that may be expressed improperly and paving the way for raising personal and private issues (which are obviously off-topic):

The other disadvantage that was frequently mentioned by educators and parents concerns the nature of online communication. It offers the space and the opportunity for some to raise overtly critical remarks but in an improper manner; it also allows some to raise sensitive, personal, private, and even embarrassing content that should not be shared publicly with all groups members. Here is a compilation of some of the answers given by participants under this concern:

- "The groups turn into a platform for criticism or even insulting a certain teacher; conversations between parents about topics that do not concern the class there are private and personal issues that should not be discussed publicly before everyone."
- "Some parents and group members level unconstructive criticism. We note bias towards some students at the expense of others by sharing too many pictures of them."
- "These groups might embarrass some parents on certain occasions."
- "Sometimes, there parents who take advantage of these groups to form alliances either with or against the teacher."
- "Communication via WhatsApp, particularly in open groups, may lead to discussion, but may creep into negative territory. These groups strip the teacher of her privacy and free time because she is always required to be responsive."

3. Misusing online communication platforms and straying from their primary objective

Online and social media platforms are designated by schools and educational institutions to be used for educational purposes and to be used effectively. But some answers reveal that there is a tendency to stray from these purely educational purposes and devote them for unrelated goals. Parents and educators also regretted that such scenario is unavoidable. What follows is a selection of quotes from the participants' answers:

- "Sometimes, the teacher's personal phone number or the phone"
- "Some parents intervene excessively in the decision of the teachers or the administration"
- "Some participants stray from the rules of the group and do not comply with them."
- "There are too many messages sometimes for not justification and no important notifications only because some parents want to talk."
- "Some parents stray from the group's objective, too many surplus comments, jokes, morning and evening messages."
- "Some parents tend to go off-topic."

4. The overdependency of some students on these groups to the extent that they do not write down assignment instructions at class

Online communication that allows interlocutors to share pictures, text messages and audio messages, fills the gaps left behind by some students' recklessness. This makes

students overdependent on these groups. This problem was particularly highlighted by parents, many of whom said that their children depend too much on these groups. Only a quarter of the educators addressed this concern. To quote some of the comments:

- “unfortunately, some students do not know the time of their next exam if it were not for the online group or page. This increased their dependency on their parents.”
- Photocopying other students’ notebooks or taking a screenshot of what the teachers write on the board allowed students to abandon their responsibilities. The first question you see on parents’ WhatsApp groups is: what are the assignments for today? This basically shakes the child’s confidence. The students do not concentrate at class because they know that they can get whatever they want very easily through the groups.”
- “The students can count on the fact that all the assignments and times of exams are available on the learning platforms like Noble, so they write nothing on their diary and notebook. They dependent on us parents to know their homework.”
- “Children became much more dependent on their parents and less responsible.”

5. Reducing the in-person meetings with the educator and limiting the personal relationship between parent and educator:

According to some parents, online communication legitimizes the school’s decisions to cut down the number of in-person and face-to-face meetings with parents. Educators expressed a similar concern: for them online communication allows some parents to evade in-person meetings with educators, even when the educator requests their attendance. Here are some of their responses:

- “Among the disadvantages of online communication is that it limits the in-person communication between the parents and the teachers.”
- “Parents limit their visits to the school and do not agree to come, restricting their relationship with the teacher to online communication.”
- “Direct personal contact with the educator is overlooked in favor of online communication. Some parents do not even recognize the teachers if they pass them by on the street.”
- “The personal, direct, and individual relationship between parent and educator has stopped. No individual or particular treatment is allotted to each student according to his needs.”

Sifting through the answers provided by the participants and the disadvantages they mentioned, we can divide the adverse effects of online communication into two main categories. The first category pertains to the content of the message, the way its conveyed and received, the approach it contains, and the quality and boundaries of discussion or conversation that the message entails or leads to. The second category pertains to the concern that online communication limits and distances direct human relationships, eliminating any intimacy between the educator, the student, and the parent, distancing the student from the school, and making the student dependent on his parents. In this sense online communication adversely affects the relationship on two levels: the educational level, because it makes students overdependent on WhatsApp groups and their parents and negligent of their own responsibilities; and on the personal level, because it reduces the intimacy and interpersonal relationship between parents and educators, making the relationship lukewarm and formal[7]. The two levels are intertwined.

The responses also confirm the view of Reference [8] that text messages are basically symbols, essentially vague and confusing because it lacks facial expressions and body language. One cannot listen to a text message and it does not entail any form of a physical presence. It is unsurprising, then, that many parents stressed that some messages may be

misunderstood and that the conversation may creep into unwanted territory. Parents and teachers agreed on this because the main objective of the communication is educational and should have clear rules and conditions. Participants also stressed that online communication may erase the boundaries between the public and the private.

6. Invading the educators' privacy and disrespecting them

Many educators expressed their discontent with parents who communicate with them in unreasonable hours. Most educators said that parents do not know the proper time to call or communicate, and they think that the educator is supposed to be accessible and responsive 24/7. Some educators say that this makes them feel that their privacy had been invaded and gives them the impression that the parent wants to transform the relationship with the reeducator into a relationship of friendship, thus damaging the "aura" of the educator and reducing his or her strictness. Almost 90% of the educators who participated in this research stressed this concern, as illustrated by the following quotes from their answers:

- "Yes, there is absolutely no privacy. Online communication like WhatsApp allows parents to contact me whenever they want, including outside my working hours."
- This form of communication has damaged the aura of the teacher.
- Some parents want to turn the relation between the parent and the teacher into friendship, and this is annoying."

The advantages of online communication between parents and educators

This, too, was an open-ended question, where the participants were asked to provide explanations and examples and specify the advantages of online communication insofar as these exist. They were also asked to offer examples. The answers will be divided into major themes as follows:

1. Constant, accessible, and regular updates and capacity to follow up remotely

The most frequently cited advantage of online communication focused on the fact that this form of communication allows parents to know at any given time what is going on at school with their children and to constantly update them on what the children take at class, supported by pictures, from activities to class work and education methods. This gives the parents the perception that their children are safe and under control without having to exhaust themselves and their children with constant questioning. Online communication allows the educators to update the parents regularly, increasing the possibility of cooperation and collaboration. Undoubtedly, this also increases the potential of the children to succeed because their parents are constantly updated and know that happens with the, and thus can provide them with the help they need and receive the necessary instructions from the educator. The following quotes from the parents' answers in the questionnaire illustrate this:

- "I'm now better informed about my son's situation at school, the activities, and what he has to do."
- "The Parents can follow up on their child's studies through Noble."
- "I'm now better informed about my child's situation at school and get to know things that he did not disclose to me."
- "Of course, this makes me better informed about the level of my son, his assignments, anything new at school, and to know all of this quickly."
- "This [online communication] exposes me to the world of my son and or daughter indirectly and encourages them to share their academic life with me."
- "I'm regularly updated and informed and the quick replies and updates help me provide my child with the support and instructions he needs."

- "It increases the cooperation of parents and improves the student's academic outcome."

2. Facilitating the communication between working parents and educators:

Many parents encountered obstacles in communicating with educators because they work and do not have the time off to attend meetings with the teachers. The intention to communicate is there, but their work has prevented them. Educators also said that they could not reach out to working parents, but online communication resolved this difficulty and left no excuses for the working parents. This advantage is illustrated by the following quotes from the answers provided by the participants, the educators and the parents:

- "Online communication makes things easier because it is not always feasible for me to go to school and attend meetings."

- "" I cannot go to school during the teacher's office hours because I work so online communication solves this problem."

- "Of course, online communication has many advantages, especially for me as a working mother. I can know if there are changes like the end of classes to pick them up, their syllabus, or what the class learned on days when my child has a leave of absence. A

- It makes it easier for me to approach parents especially because working parents cannot come to school. A

- ĀI send notes to the parents even when they are at their workplace, and this requires them to interact and collaborate with the educator. A

3. Strengthening the relationship among parents and between parents and educators

This advantage was singled out by parents. The intensity of communication through online and social media tools has apparently solidified the relationship between two seemingly distant worlds, that of the school and that of home. The constant updates and discussions either among parents themselves or between parents and educators made them closer to one another, based on the common thread that they all have, the classroom or the school where their children study. It is also interesting that many parents alluded to the fact that online communication has created a stronger bond among parents themselves, making them collaborate and cooperate for the best interest of their children. This is illustrated by the following quotes from the answers of the participants:

- "Online communication allowed me to interact with other parents and introduced me to their views and thoughts."

- Online communication supports the joint partnership between, the parents, the education staff, and the school administration."

- It creates a space for parents to know what goes on at school, and to create a human bond between parents, children, and educators."

- "Some parents do not only ask the educators for help or instructions, but approach other parents, and communication is usually supportive and fruitful."

- "It strengthens the relationship between parents and teachers, and among parents themselves, which is positively reflected in the relationship among the classmates. These groups help us collaborate and if there is something missing or if the children did not understand something, we can help each other via this group."

- "It reinforces the constructive relationship between the parent and the educator."

As noted earlier, the results of studies regarding the advantages and disadvantages and the prevalent assumptions about this issue tend to diverge and fluctuate. This divergence and fluctuation are manifested in the participants' answers. On the one hand, parents believe that online communication may be unintelligible and confusing and makes the relationship between the parents and educators lukewarm because it lacks emotions. On

the other hand, some parents believe that its accessibility and speed strengthen the relationships and create intimate bonds among the interlocutors. While some parents think that this form of communication increases the overdependency of the students (and even the dependency of their parents), others believe that it actually supports the educational process and allows parent to supervise and follow the studies of their children regularly. These contradictory answers reinforce the notion that online communication has divergent influences that can also be contradictory[9, 15].

Observations and General Recommendations by Parents and Educators Who Participated in the Research

Most of the parents and educators who participated in the study added concluding remarks and recommendations to improved joints online communication and did not limit their comments to answering the questions that were listed in the questionnaire. This testifies to the importance of this issue for parents and educators and the importance of expressing their opinions and views and suggesting their recommendations. The conclusions proposed by the parents and educators are also divided along major themes and will be presented according to the answers and suggestions of the participants. The most frequently suggested recommendations, and the common recommendations suggested parents and educators, will be presented first.

- Combining in-person meetings with online communications: Parents and educators should meet on a number of occasions every year, and this should be combined with online communication. Online communication should not be the exclusive channel through which parents and schools seek to reinforce their relationship;
- The relationship between parents and schools should also be strengthened through the Parents' Committee, t limited to remote communication.
- Building the capacity of the educator to manage the WhatsApp group and avoiding unnecessary and off-topic conversations on the group;
- Laying out clear rules and guidelines for the use of online communication tools in order to avoid confusion and in order to fulfill the desired objectives behind establishing these groups. (This recommendation was raised repeatedly by parents and educators.)
- Most educators stressed the importance of respecting the educator's time when sending questions, complying with proper conduct, and adopting a proper approach in the correspondence.
- Educators stressed the need for creating a tool for remote communication in which the educator's personal phone number remains confidential and the limits the time of sending messages and questions and controlling the issues that are raised.
- Educators demanded that the school administration should establish guidelines for proper online communication These rules should be respected and should be mandatory, forming something akin to a contract between the interlocutors.

VII. Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This research sought to shed light on the importance of parental involvement and partnership with the school towards supporting children's education. It described the objectives of parental involvement, as shown by studies, and elucidated the influence of parental involvement on strengthening the relationship with the education staff, improving the academic outcomes and achievement of the children, and developing the social, ethical, and human skills of the children[1, 7, 16]. In this context, the research

focused specifically on the online communication between parents and schools through the new social media and digital tools, due to the prevalence of these technologies' in our lives in general, and their prevalence in the communication between parents and schools in particular. This use has grown exponentially following the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic. The research explored the use of online communication tools from the perspectives of parents and educators. The sample chosen from this research's target audience, which is socially and geographically diverse, shows that participants use at least one tool of digital or social media communication between parents and schools, linking the world of the parents with that of their children and educators at school.

There were clear disagreements among the participants with regard to the advantages and disadvantages of online communication and social media tools and their effect on the relationship of parents and schools. This disagreement resulted in contradictory responses to questions about the efficacy of online communication tools and whether they are successful in achieving their desired objectives.

Differences, disagreements, and disparities in the responses are not only legitimate but are also supported by the findings of previous academic studies and research. Those studies showed that online communication is a double-edged sword, so to speak. Its improper use can turn it into a genuine obstacle while its correct and proper use can transform it into a force that supports and incentivizes positive communication and partnership. Based on the results of this research, the analysis of the answers of the participants and the results of previous studies, it is important to treat this "sword" with utmost caution. As an educational tool, online communication must be studiously and carefully examined and considered in service of the educational process and to create a constructive relationship between parents, schools, and students. Despite the disadvantages that were revealed and highlighted by the participants, the very participants, parents and educators alike, expressed their enthusiasm and willingness to use online communication positively. They realize, it seems, that such communication is unavoidable in our age and time. The results of the research and recommendations of the participants encourage us to rethink the rules that should guide the use of online communication, its paths, perils, and potentials. Such rethinking is necessary if we are to make sure that online communication achieves its objective of solidifying the relationship between parents and schools and supporting and advancing the interests of students and their education. Based on the results of the research and the recommendations suggested by the participants, we shall conclude this research by offering our own recommendations:

1. Integrating direct interpersonal relationship and virtual communication: It is critical to combine the two forms of communication to handle the concerns of the students, particularly around dilemmas and sensitive issues the student may encounter. These demand individual and specific examination, discussion, and treatment, charged with emotional sensibility, listening, mutual understanding, and empathy. This necessary atmosphere of human empathy, intimacy, and understanding cannot be substituted by digital communication and social media.

2. Paving the way for online communication between parents and schools via one tool at least and ensuring the choice of the most adequate tool for achieving the desired objective: If the objective is to send and receiving updates and passing information without discussion, the school should choose the most suitable online medium for achieving this purpose. If the objective is to take joint decisions and recommendations through dialogue, a different medium should be chosen. Thus, each school or educational institution should determine the objectives of online communication before choosing the

adequate medium for achieving this objective. It is essential, though, not to turn online communication tools into “surveillance camera” that reveals to parents all that transpires at school or a chain that restricts teachers and students. Further, online communication should not become a way for students to abdicate their responsibilities and a justification to abandon their concentration at class.

3. Once the objectives of online communication are determined and the suitable mediums for achieving the objective chosen, a set of rules, guidelines, ethics, and instructions for proper communication via text messages, written comments, and other virtual communication forms, should be defined. We also recommend stipulating unified conditions of use, ethics, and instructions for all educational institutions, or at least for all the groups in the same educational institution.

4. Training the education staff to use and moderate online communication outlets in accordance with the adopted rules and guidelines. Thus, the education staff can play the role of a mediator and facilitator of the dialogue and conversations with the parents, pass the messages in a proper manner whilst avoiding misunderstanding, confusion, and unnecessary off-topic chats and conversations. This will also ensure an effective moderation of the chat within the permitted hours and according to the desired objective.

5. Holding an in-person meeting in which parents are prepared and instructed on the use of online communication with the help of the education staff at the school. Such a meeting will help manage the parents’ expectations from online communication, explain to them the rules, ethics, and guidelines of using online communication and ramifications of any noncompliance with the rules and guidelines.

To conclude, this study has explored online and digital communication between parents and schools, focusing on the perspectives of parents and educators. We suggest expanding the scope of the research to include the perspectives of the administrative staffs at schools, their expectations and their approaches.

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