



Senka D. Slijepčević¹,
Slađana N. Zuković,
Dušica D. Stojadinović

University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy, Novi Sad, Serbia

Original
research paper

Paper received: Aug 6 2021
Paper accepted: Feb 15 2022
Article Published: Jul 12 2022

Parental Involvement in Their Children's Education during Covid-19 Pandemic

Extended summary

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has caused global changes that reflect on our daily lives. One of those changes is related to an extensive and rapid digitalisation of educational activities. In the Republic of Serbia the state of emergency was in effect from March to May 2020 and in this period educational institutions were closed and classes on all levels of education were conducted online. Teachers, students, and parents were not adequately prepared for this abrupt change which demanded shifts in their roles in the educational process. The reality of education during Covid-19 showed that an intensive collaboration with parents is required, which is why parental involvement in the educational process of distance learning presents one of the priority research questions.

Parental involvement, viewed as a combination of commitment and active participation in children's education, is found to be correlated with academic achievement, student motivation, academic self-efficacy, as well as social development of children. With the outbreak of Covid-19 virus and transition to distance education it seems that parents exhibit additional concern and interest for their children's education. According to the research, parental involvement usually refers to activities such as explanation of assignments and contents, checking the completed tasks, and to a lesser extent to providing direct help in solving assignments. Some research show that parents were hesitant to accept the role of co-educators and that they reported the following problems: time management, technical difficulties, maintaining children's motivation, lack of pedagogical knowledge, etc.

Starting from the importance of examining parental involvement in distance learning of their children, the aim of this research is examining students' assessment of parental involve-

¹ senkaslijepcevic@ff.uns.ac.rs

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ment in distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. For the purposes of this research a questionnaire with closed-type questions and an assessment scale were designed. The closed-type questions were used to collect the demographic data (students' gender, grade, place of living, average grade at the end of semester, family structure, and parents' employment status and manner of work), as well as the information about students' general satisfaction with distance learning (possible answers were: I'm satisfied; I'm partially satisfied; I'm not satisfied). The five-point assessment scale consisted of 8 statements where children expressed their level of agreement with the statements about parental involvement. Using factor analysis, it was determined that the scale had two-factor structure with one of the factors examining participants' perception of the presence of *parental supervision* and the other the presence of *direct assistance by the parent(s)*. The sample of the research consisted of 505 students of the sixth, seventh and eighth grades of elementary schools in the Republic of Serbia and the data was collected using Google forms in the period from April to May 2020.

The results have shown that parental involvement is perceived as moderate by the participants and that parental supervision is more present in comparison to direct assistance. Also, the results have shown that students of the lower grades and with a lower average grade perceive parental involvement as more present. Parental supervision seems to be more present when children have worse average grades and in the families from rural environments. On the other hand, the results have shown that direct assistance as a form of parental involvement is significantly more present with mothers who are either not employed or are working from home. When it comes to fathers, the analysis did not identify statistically significant differences, which indicates that fathers provided the same level of support and assistance to children during distance learning, regardless of their employment status or work situation.

The research results have also shown that a small percentage of students (10.1%) stated that they are satisfied with distance learning. Considering the connection between parental involvement and general satisfaction of students with distance learning, it was found that students whose parents are providing more direct assistance during learning process are generally more satisfied with distance learning. However, it is important to consider the moderating role of the grade that student attends in the relationship between providing direct assistance during learning process and students' satisfaction with distance learning. Namely, it was found that in students of higher grades, direct help from parents contributes to a lower satisfaction with distance learning.

This research, although with some limitations like having an unrepresentative sample, and examination of this problem being based solely on students' perceptions, provides some insight into parental involvement in the process of distance learning. The obtained results provide an opportunity for observing parental involvement affirmatively, at least through a prism of the fact that during the pandemic crisis parents tried to approach this challenging role, for which they were insufficiently prepared, responsibly and with dedication. It is possible to conclude that parents are potentially an important resource that could contribute to the efficacy of distance learning, which implies that it is necessary to empower parents in this area.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, distance learning, parental involvement, student satisfaction

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