

## PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS COOPERATION WITH TEACHERS UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES CAUSED BY THE PANDEMIC

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### Abstract

The aim of this article was to determine and consider the attitudes of parents towards cooperation with teachers during the *SARS-CoV2* pandemic. The sample included 110 parents of primary school students from the territory of the Republic of Serbia. We used a descriptive-analytical method. We also used surveying and scaling techniques, and we created a special instrument based on tangential literature for the purposes of this research. The research was conducted electronically, and the data was processed in the SPSS program. The obtained results show that mothers cooperated with teachers more often than fathers, and that the most common forms of cooperation were telephone conversations, and messaging via mobile applications. Unlike fathers, mothers believe that frequent cooperation is very important during the process of children's formal education. The obstacles to cooperation during the pandemic cited by parents are: the impossibility of visiting schools and teachers; the lack of face-to-face communication, as well as the lack of advisory conversations with the teacher; the lack of adequate technological equipment and appropriate applications mediating the communication between parents and teachers; and insufficiently developed technological skills. The findings of this empirical research can motivate scholars to embark on future research that could more thoroughly consider the different forms of cooperation and communication between parents and teachers during unstable circumstances and conditions.

**Key words:** parents, teachers, primary school, cooperation, pandemic.

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## СТАВОВИ РОДИТЕЉА ПРЕМА САРАДЊИ СА НАСТАВНИЦИМА У ОКОЛНОСТИМА УЗРОКОВАНИМ ПАНДЕМИЈОМ

### Апстракт

Циљ рада је да се утврде и сагледају ставови родитеља према сарадњи са наставницима током пандемије *SARS-CoV2*. Узорак је обухватио 110 родитеља ученика нижих разреда основних школа на територији Републике Србије. Користили смо дескриптивно-аналитичку методу. Такође, користили смо технике анкетирања и скалирања, а на основу тангентне литературе смо креирали инструмент за потребе овог истраживања. Истраживање је спроведено електронским путем и подаци су обрађени у програму SPSS. Добијени резултати показују да су мајке чешће сарађивале са наставницима од очева, и да су најзаступљенији облици сарадње били телефонски позиви и размена порука путем мобилних апликација. За разлику од очева, мајке сматрају да је учестала сарадња веома важна током формалног образовања деце. Родитељи као препреке сарадњи током пандемије наводе: немогућност да се посеће школе и наставници; недостатак комуникације лицем у лице, као и недостатак саветодавних разговора са наставником; недовољну опремљеност савременом технологијом и одговарајућим апликацијама за контакт са наставницима; и недовољно развијене вештине за коришћење технологије. Налази овог емпиријског истраживања могу мотивисати истраживаче да у будућности темељније размотре и сагледају различите облике сарадње и комуникације између родитеља и наставника током неустаљених околности и услова.

**Кључне речи:** родитељи, наставници, основна школа, сарадња, пандемија.

### INTRODUCTION

The changes in the social context caused by the pandemic were reflected in a negative social climate and people's growing concerns; consequently, parents' involvement in the process of institutional upbringing and education through cooperation and communication between teachers and parents was one of the challenges emerging from this climate. During the pandemic "in Serbia, a combination of classroom education and distance education has taken place" (Stojković & Jelić, 2021, p. 240). Contemporary parents encountered another novelty – participation in children's distance learning. It was necessary to harmonise professional obligations and requirements, i.e. staying at work or working from home, and an active involvement in children's education and online learning. Distance learning implies that students learn at home (Randjelović et al., 2022), where in addition to performing daily duties, parents also have to provide their children assistance in learning and, to a certain extent, take on the role of a teacher at home (Slovaček & Čosić, 2020). Thus, the education of children during the pandemic required additional parental involvement in home learning, and the process of learning and performing children's school assignments. The pandemic further aggravated and burdened parents with additional demands and tasks stemming from school

activities. Throughout history, families have encountered many problems and obstacles, and each family has differed in the way in which it overcame current obstacles and problems (Vaux & Asay, 2019). Thus, the family was faced with the global problem known as the *SARS-CoV2* virus pandemic and, on their own, parents sought to reconcile all commitments during the pandemic with the need to dedicate themselves to learning and their children. In order to help contain the spread of the virus, many countries closed educational institutions (Olić Ninković & Adamov, 2022). Due to the danger posed by the virus, all school activities, including the cooperation of parents and teachers, became remote. A systemic review of the cooperation between the family and the school implies and requires that the contributions of all the participants in the process (teachers, parents and students), alongside their attitudes and thoughts, be considered with focus on a two-way, functional and successful mutual relationship (Polovina, 2007). Many authors state that the cooperation of the family and the school, as well as the involvement of parents, leads to the positive progress of the child (Epstein, 2008; Matejević & Jovanović, 2017; Sušan Gregović, 2018; Milanović, 2021a), which is why it is necessary for the cooperation and communication of parents and teachers to be frequent even in sudden and unforeseen circumstances. The reason for this is the parents' first encounter with this way of working, which focused on the students' learning from home. This, in turn, made the role of parents more and more complex and demanding, and the support teachers and schools provide to parents and families in this context is indispensable:

In the period of the pandemic and the changed work in schools, parents were a factor that largely determined the success of children's attendance, and the general involvement of children in school life. The impression is that the relationship between parents and teachers has never been in focus as it was during the pandemic.

(Popović-Čitić et al., 2021, p. 11)

Thus, parents were key actors and facilitators in engaging children in the processes of distance learning, and mastering materials and content. The cooperation process allows the work, commitment, motivation and development of the child to be monitored through assistance and guidance (Ilić, 2010). The family and the school are very important systems for a child, and it is very important that a quality relationship and a commitment to building partnerships exist between them (Matejević & Jovanović, 2017). Therefore, the parent and the teacher must be partners who agree and work together to overcome obstacles and achieve the desired results with the child. In order for the cooperation between parents and teachers to be successful, it must be based on the principles of openness, trust, gradualness, two-way communication, and diversity (Pavlović

Breneselović & Krnjaja, 2017). These principles are the basis of good cooperation, and effective communication is essential for the development of that process:

The model of partnership between family and school puts the student in the center of interest. Cooperation enables us to always know what and how a student works, when and why he needs help and how far the results of his work reach.

(Čatić & Karajbić, 2010, p. 180)

As the authors point out, the cooperation of parents and teachers empowers the child by putting him in the focus of interest, which provides them help and attention. In this way, the child feels safe and care-free, as well as motivated to learn, acquire new knowledge, improve skills and become better in the school and extracurricular environment.

The results of the research conducted by Garbe et al. (2020) showed that parents agreed with the closure of schools during the pandemic, and that they were very satisfied with the schools' help and support, but that there were certain obstacles that parents face in the distance learning process. The results obtained by the research conducted by Badea and Tudorache (2021) showed that teachers tried to maintain good cooperation with families, but that some of the obstacles were a lack of proper technical equipment and poor digital competencies, as well as parents' reluctance. The results of the research conducted by Bocoş and Marin (2022) showed that teachers and parents were satisfied with the quality of the cooperation and communication during the pandemic. Also, the results of the research conducted by Jones and Forster (2021) showed the schools' great efforts in maintaining cooperation and good communication with the families of students during the pandemic and the period of schools' closure. Research conducted by Soltero-González and Gillanders (2021) found that low-income parents collaborated with teachers and supported children in learning at home.

Based on all that has been read above, cooperation between teachers and parents is the key to student success in both the unchanged social context and the social context shaped by the *SARS-CoV2* pandemic. Therefore, the aim of this research is to examine parents' attitudes towards the quality of their cooperation with teachers during the pandemic.

## METHODOLOGY

Considering the many difficulties that education was faced with during the pandemic, as well as the enormous importance of the impact of cooperation and communication between parents and teachers on children's development, the problem of this research is the manner in which parents assess the quality of their cooperation with teacher in the social

context changed by the pandemic. Considering the numerous research papers that focus on online teaching during the pandemic, it is necessary to consider both the parents' satisfaction with and attitudes towards the quality of their cooperation with the teacher during this unusual and unexpected situation which left its mark worldwide.

The subject of this research is the cooperation between parents and teachers during the pandemic. The aim of this paper is to determine and consider parents' attitudes towards cooperation with teachers during the *SARS-CoV2* pandemic.

The research tasks are as follows:

- Determine the attitudes of parents towards the relevance of cooperation with teachers in the social context changed by the pandemic;
- Examine forms of cooperation with the teacher during the pandemic;
- Determine how often parents came into contact with the teacher during distance learning;
- Analyse how parents evaluate communication with teachers during a pandemic;
- Examine whether parents perceive the existence of an obstacle in cooperation with teachers.
- Investigate whether there are statistically significant differences in terms of obstacles in the process of cooperation with teachers during the pandemic, in relation to gender, and the parents' level of education and place of residence;
- Examine the obstacles parents have noticed during cooperation with teachers.

Although the distance education process is accompanied by numerous obstacles, we started with the assumption that parents' attitudes towards cooperation with teachers are positively oriented. In this research, we applied a descriptive-analytical method. The technique of surveying and scaling was also used. A survey questionnaire with a Likert-type assessment scale was the applied research instrument. Based on tangential literature, an instrument was created for the purposes of this research. The questions in the instrument were formulated in the form of closed, combined and open questions. The questions were clearly formulated and directed towards the set research aim. The instrument included questions related to the sociodemographic characteristics of parents (gender, level of education, number of children in the family, and place of residence), and questions directed at parents' attitudes towards cooperation with teachers during the pandemic crisis. This empirical research was realised by filling in the electronic form of the online survey questionnaire. We processed the obtained data in the statistical package SPSS. We applied the determination of frequencies (*f*) and percentages (%), and the

calculation of arithmetic mean (M) and standard deviation (SD), and calculated the chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ).

The sample of our research consists of 110 parents of children in the lower grades of primary schools in the Republic of Serbia. Out of the total number of parents who participated in the study, 70 were mothers and 40 were fathers.

*Table 1. Structure of respondents*

Variables		f	%
Gender	Male	40	36.4
	Female	70	63.6
Level of education	Primary school	15	13.6
	High school	59	53.7
	Faculty	36	32.7
Number of children in the family	One child	30	27.3
	Two children	44	40
	Three children	17	15.4
	More than three children	19	17.3
Place of residence	City	52	47.3
	Suburb	25	22.7
	Village	33	30

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Considering the great importance of cooperation between parents and teachers, the first research task was to determine parents' attitudes towards the relevance of cooperation with teachers in the social context changed by the pandemic. Parents were offered a five-point Likert-type assessment scale.

*Table 2. Parents' agreement with claims about the importance of cooperation between parents and teachers in a changed social context*

	M	SD
Frequent cooperation with the teacher is very important during formal education.	4.32	0.986
During the pandemic, I realized that the job of a teacher is very complex and demanding.	4.85	0.354
During the pandemic, I became aware of the importance of the partnership between parents and teachers for the positive development of the child.	4.55	0.699

When we look at the results presented in Table 2, we can see that parents are very appreciative of the claims aimed at the importance of cooperation between parents and teachers. Parents notice the great contribu-

tion that cooperation with the teacher has in the process of formal education. Also, mothers stated that they fully agreed and agreed with the mentioned item more often than fathers. Furthermore, the parents showed high agreement with the item stating that, during the pandemic, they became more aware of the importance of cooperating with the teacher, and they estimate that the job of a teacher is very complex and demanding. The results of the research conducted by Demir & Demir (2021) show that parents' awareness of children's education has increased, and that they better understand the value of primary school teachers.

The next research task we were guided by was to examine the forms of cooperation with the teacher during the pandemic. Parents' responses were as follows: 55.5% of the parents cited telephone calls as the most common form of communication with teachers during the pandemic; 31.8% of the parents stated that the exchange of messages via mobile applications was their most common form of communication with teachers (Viber, Whatsapp); 9.1% of the parents cited communication via email as the most common; and only 3.6% of the parents cited online meetings. According to the above answers, we can conclude that the most present form of cooperation between parents and teachers during the pandemic were phone calls and messaging via mobile applications. Exchanging emails and holding online meetings were not commonly present forms of cooperation. Thus, we can observe that teachers and parents adhered to certain recommended protection measures and maintained remote contact. Phone calls, text messages, and emails are important factors in building and maintaining partnerships (Epstein et al., 2018). The results of the research conducted by Pek and Mee (2020) show that the communication between teachers and parents was realised through social networks, phone calls and message. The benefits of modern information and communication technologies have been crucial for students, parents and teachers in this changed context.

In addition to the most common forms of cooperation, we tried to determine how often parents came into contact with teachers during distance education. We received the following answers: 20% of the parents said that they received information from teachers every day; 34.5% of the parents said that they communicated with teachers two to three times during the week; 18.2% of the parents said that they were in contact with teachers once a month; and 27.3% of the parents said that they were in contact with teachers several times a month. The presented answers show that about a third of the parents stated that they contacted the teacher two to three times during the week. The parents explained this choice of answer by saying that they had positive feedback from the teacher whenever there was need to contact them, and that daily contact with the teacher was not always necessary because the information provided was clear.

We asked the parents if they cooperated with teachers more often during the pandemic. To calculate whether there is a statistical significance in terms of more frequent cooperation with the teacher during the pandemic in relation to the parents' gender, we used the parameter chi-square test.

*Table 3. Statistical significance in terms of more frequent cooperation with teachers during the pandemic with regard to the gender of parents*

$\chi^2$	df	p
22.068	4	0.000

Table 3 shows the calculated value of the chi-square and, based on the presented values, we can notice that there are statistically significant differences between parents of different genders. Mothers believe that cooperation with teachers during the pandemic was more frequent to a greater extent than fathers. Parents state that they had numerous questions about distance learning and teaching, ways of implementing classes, and materials that they did not know how to explain to the child and that they ultimately addressed teachers with. For these reasons, parents believe that cooperation was more frequent. A situation that affected teachers, students and parents required many answers. Teachers are actors with whom parents most often interact, so it was expected that they would ask them a number of questions when faced with the uncertainty of the pandemic. From the attached findings, we see that teachers were willing and ready to cooperate, which is an extremely important condition for building trust and partnership with parents. The involvement of teachers in providing information, guidelines and instructions is of great help to parents attempting to manoeuvre the entire situation, and correctly respond to all requests and tasks.

Communication is an extremely important factor in successful cooperation, so our next research task was to analyse how parents evaluated communication with teachers during the pandemic. Parents claimed that teachers responded regularly to messages and calls ( $M = 4.56$ ;  $SD = 0.796$ ), that teachers had understanding and patience for many questions posed by parents ( $M = 4.65$ ;  $SD = 0.783$ ), that teachers provided parents assistance in explaining certain lessons to children and in overcoming certain barriers in accessing the various educational platforms used during distance learning ( $M = 4.69$ ;  $SD = 0.502$ ), and that communication was high quality, two-way and direct ( $M = 4.90$ ;  $SD = 0.301$ ). Parents' attitudes are positively oriented towards the quality of communication with teachers during the pandemic, which confirms our hypothesis. The results of the research conducted by Komnenović & Milanović (2021) show that students praise teachers for their patience, calmness, and desire to explain



the material during online classes, which points towards the fact that the teachers' work is highly evaluated by both parents and students.

Education faced many problems during the pandemic, so we wanted to examine whether parents perceived any obstacles in the process of cooperation with teachers. Of the total number of participants, 74.5% of the parents said that they believe that there were obstacles in the process of cooperation, while 25.5% of the parents reported that there were no obstacles. These findings show that a large number of parents encountered obstacles, created by the pandemic, in the process of establishing and maintaining cooperation during educational work. We also wanted to investigate whether there are statistically significant differences regarding obstacles in the process of cooperation with teachers during the pandemic, in relation to the parents' gender, level of education and place of residence.

*Table 4. Statistical significance regarding the existence of obstacles in the process of cooperation with teachers during the pandemic, with regard to gender, level of education and place of residence of parents*

	$\chi^2$	df	p
Were there any obstacles in the process of cooperation with the teacher during the pandemic, considering the gender of the parents.	9.625	1	0.002
Were there any obstacles in the process of cooperation with the teacher during the pandemic, given the level of education of the parents.	14.744	2	0.001
Were there any obstacles in the process of cooperation with the teacher during the pandemic, considering the place of residence of the parents.	2.926	2	0.232

The results of chi-square, presented in Table 4, show that there are statistically significant differences between parents of different genders. Mothers estimated that obstacles existed more often than fathers, which can be explained by the fact that mothers are more often involved in the process of cooperation with teachers. Also, there is a statistically significant difference between parents with different levels of education. Most parents with a high school degree reported that there were obstacles in cooperation. The calculated chi-square showed that there are no statistically significant differences regarding the existence of obstacles in the process of cooperation with the teacher in relation to the parents' place of residence. When asked what obstacles they noticed, the parents reported the following: the impossibility of visiting schools and teachers; a lack face-to-face communication, as well as a lack of counselling conversations with the school teacher; and a lack of proper technical equipment and appropriate applications for contact with teachers, as well as insuffi-

ciently developed technical skills. So, these are just some of the problems parents encountered and were not prepared for. Therefore, it was not at all easy to adapt to the innovations brought about by the pandemic. We noticed that a large percentage of parents reported that there were obstacles in the process of cooperation with teachers. Certainly, this socially unfavourable situation brought the parents into a state of confusion. Face-to-face contact and communication are compensated by collaboration through modern technology. Parents missed interacting with the teacher in a real environment. Counselling conversations are of great importance for the cooperation between parents and the school. If the relationship with the teacher is positively built and filled with trust, parents are presented with a greater number of opportunities to ask for help and share their problems with the teacher:

Counseling does not mean giving ready-made advice to solve a specific problem, but establishing a positive emotional climate and such interpersonal relationships that help the user of counseling in personal maturation and progress.

(Zuković, 2016, p. 111)

Therefore, the counselling process is very sensitive and requires a degree of professionalism from teachers working with parents. Some of the mentioned obstacles were aimed at the parents' lack of proper technical equipment and digital competences, which resulted in the inability to get in touch with the teacher and follow current events and teaching activities to a satisfying degree. The study conducted by Anwar et al. (2020) shows that students also encounter barriers in terms of technical equipment and computer literacy, while the results of the study conducted by Jovanović and Dimitrijević (2021) show that teachers perceive the following obstacles in conducting distance learning: evaluation obstacles, organisational-administrative obstacles, and material-technical obstacles. The results of the research conducted by Maksimović et al. (2021) show that the disadvantages of online teaching mentioned by teachers are: modest technical capabilities, difficulties that follow the verification of students' knowledge, teachers' lack of friendship and teamwork, students' lack of motivation to perform school duties, and students copying, or cheating, during tests. Distance education can be an obstacle for students with developmental disabilities, so the results of the study conducted by Milanović (2021b) indicate that the parents of students with intellectual disabilities reported that they had problems helping their children complete their school duties at home, but that cooperation with teachers was exceptionally good, and that they provided a lot of help and support. We noticed that teachers, students and parents all faced obstacles during the education process at the time of the pandemic. The support of teachers

and the school, and the active participation of parents are factors necessary for one to be able to overcome the aforementioned obstacles and look for the most favourable solutions in the given situation.

### *CONCLUSION*

With this empirical work, we wanted to look at parents' attitudes towards cooperation with teachers in the social context changed by the *SARS-CoV2* pandemic. The results of our research show the quite positive attitudes of parents towards cooperation with teachers. The parents reported that the teachers were very willing to cooperate, and that the communication was of high quality. As schools were closed and all school activities were carried out online, it was expected that the most common forms of cooperation would prove to be phone calls and messaging via mobile applications (Viber and Whatsapp), while communication via email would prove to be very rare. The obtained findings show that holding online parent meetings was not a frequent form of cooperation at all, because attention was mainly focused on individual conversations with parents. In addition to being dedicated to parents and regularly providing them with necessary information and support, teachers needed to organise occasional online parent meetings. These meetings would help parents share their problems, discuss the barriers they encountered, exchange experiences, and help each other in a difficult new situation. Certainly, the entire process of distance education was a challenge for all parents, and joint meetings could help them feel that they are not alone in difficult situations, and that other parents also encountered obstacles in different segments of online education and upbringing. The parents believe that teachers were very dedicated during the pandemic, and that communication was very good, two-way and immediate. These findings point towards the teachers' great commitment to their vocation, and their exceptional professional approach to working with both students and parents. As obstacles, parents cited the inability to visit the school, the lack of face-to-face communication with the teacher, the lack of counselling sessions, and the lack of proper technical equipment and digital skills necessary to actively access all applications that required parental involvement in school activities. As far as physical visits to the school and face-to-face communication are concerned, they were not feasible due to the spread of the virus and the preventive measures put in place. Accordingly, the advantages of this research are reflected in the consideration of cooperation between parents and teachers in a social context new to all actors in the educational process. To this we can add that the strengths of this work are reflected in the choice of respondents, which included parents of children in the lower grades of primary school, because the research sample comprehensively shows the evaluation of cooperation during the pandemic.

The shortcoming of this research can be said to be the small sample of respondents - future research could focus on a sample with a larger number of respondents, which would include both parents of children in lower grades and parents of children in higher grades of elementary school. In this way, the difference in the views and attitudes of the parents of children belonging to these two groups could be observed, and potential improvements could be made in the segment of cooperation and partnership between the family and the school. The conducted research can motivate researchers to direct future research towards the examination of the quality of communication between parents and teachers during the pandemic, as well as the examination of teachers' views on the quality of cooperation with parents during the pandemic crisis. Additionally, future research could focus on encouraging and motivating parents to apply contemporary information and communication technologies for the purpose of exchanging ideas and building a partnership with the school.

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## СТАВОВИ РОДИТЕЉА ПРЕМА САРАДЊИ СА НАСТАВНИЦИМА У ОКОЛНОСТИМА УЗРОКОВАНИМ ПАНДЕМИЈОМ

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### Резиме

Непредвиђене околности проузроковане пандемијом SARS-CoV2 поставиле су наставнике и родитеље у нове улоге, и у складу са тим циљ овог истраживања био је да се утврде и сагледају ставови родитеља према сарадњи са наставницима током пандемије SARS-CoV2. Коришћени су дескриптивно-аналитичка метода, као и технике анкетања и скалирања. Анкетни упитник са скалом процене креиран је за потребе овог истраживања на основу тангентне литературе. Истраживање је реализовано електронским путем. Добијени подаци обрађени су у статистичком пакету SPSS. Узорак истраживања обухватио је 110 родитеља ученика нижих разреда основне школе. У истраживању је учествовало 70 мајки и 40 очева. Резултати истраживања показују да су родитељи током пандемије постали свеснији значаја сарадње са наставником, те процењују и да је посао наставника веома комплексан и захтеван. Процес комуникације и сарадње одвијао се путем савремене технологије и мобилних апликација. Најчесталији облици сарадње били су телефонски позиви и размена порука путем мобилних апликација. Добијени резултати показују да више мајки него очева сматра да је сарадња са наставником током пандемије била учесталија. Родитељи наводе да су имали бројна питања за наставнике, па из тих разлога сматрају да је због новонастале ситуације сарадња била учесталија. Такође, родитељи процењују да је комуникација са наставницима била веома ефикасна, квалитетна и позитивна, и истучу изузетно ангажовање наставника у целокупном педагошком

раду. Чак 74.5% родитеља сматра да је било препрека сарадњи, при чему су мајке чешће него очеви процењивале да препреке постоје. Резултати овог емпиријског истраживања могу мотивисати истраживаче да у будућности темељније размотре и сагледају различите облике сарадње и комуникације између родитеља и наставника током неустаљених околности и услова, као и да сагледају ставове наставника о квалитету комуникације и сарадње са родитељима у овим измењеним околностима.