

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL WITH FAMILIES: A KINDERGARTEN CASE

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Abstract

Communication with children and their families is essential in early childhood education. Children's learning and development is fostered when communication with parents and family is actively maintained (Ka Hikitia, 2008). Increasingly, families get familiar with technologies such as email, Skype, and social networking sites such as Facebook , Twitter since these are the 'cultural tools' used to keep in touch with extended family and friends (Rogoff 2003) . Today's teachers are increasingly turning to digital technologies to make communication with parents easier, faster and more current. Social-media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, are helping teachers keep parents and other community members informed. Teachers are encouraged to go where the parents are and many parents are already on Facebook, so it is easier to communicate with them on a platform with which they are already familiar. Facebook allows the teachers to share class news and information with the parents of their students. Studies have also demonstrated that parental involvement and engagement with what is being learned in the classroom can have positive effects on a child's learning (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003).

The aim of this study is to understand the parents' opinions about teachers' use of social media as a communication tool in a kindergarten class. The study group consisted of 52 parents in a public kindergarten in Istanbul. Data was collected with structured interview method. The demographic characteristics showed that parents were mostly working females around 35-40 years of age. According to the results , communicating with parents through social has positive effects on family participation and parents are happy to be involved in school activities.

Keywords: Preschool education, family participation, social media, communication

1. Introduction

Early childhood in human life span is defined as the period from birth to eight years old and this period lay the foundation for all that is to come in future years. Early childhood education can play a critical and vital role during this developmental period. The cognitive, emotional, social and physical development of young children has a direct effect on their overall development and on the adult they will become. That is why education of young children is so important to maximize their future well-being (Unesco, 2010).

In the early childhood years, the home– school relationship refers to the formal and informal connections between families and their young children’s educational settings. Both participation in preschool based activities and regular communication between families and teachers are related to young children’s outcomes (Marcon, 1999).

‘The family seems to be the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the child’s development. Without family involvement, intervention is likely to be unsuccessful, and what few effects are achieved are likely to disappear once the intervention is discontinued’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1974).

Not only do strong home–school relationships matter for children’s outcomes during the early childhood years, but the benefits persist over time. For example, family involvement activities such as keeping in touch with a teacher, volunteering in the classroom and attending school activities were related to children’s promotion after kindergarten into the first grade (Mantizicopoulos, P., 2003).

The Harvard Family Research Project defines educational involvement of families as activities that parents conduct at home and in early childhood settings to directly or indirectly support their child's learning. Involvement at the preschool level has a number of lifelong benefits, such as establishing the importance of education and developing a network of helpful connections. Establishing a social network is one benefit of parental involvement that should not be underestimated. Kids are apt to become friends with parents who are on a friendly basis. Social connections between children provide security when transitions, such as elementary school occur. (Kreider, 2002) Studies have also demonstrated that parental involvement and engagement with what is being learned in the classroom can have positive effects on a child’s learning (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003).

Two-way communication between families and kindergarten teachers is the first step toward improving family involvement in education. Children's learning and development is fostered when communication with parents and family is actively maintained (Ka Hikitia, 2008) Although face-to-face conversations may be preferable, the schedules of modern families, and of providers themselves, often make this difficult. To effectively communicate with families, all of the “new” communications channels through which parents can be reached. Increasingly, families get familiar with technologies such as email, Skype, and social networking sites such as Facebook , Twitter since these are the 'cultural tools' used to keep in touch with extended family and friends (Rogoff, 2003; Rideout, 2014).

2. Methodology

This study is a qualitative study to understand the the parents’ opinions about the classroom teacher’s use of social media as a communication tool in a kindergarten class. The study group consisted of 52 parents in a public kindergarten in Istanbul Data was collected through structured interview method where the questionnaire is developed by the researcher. Basic research questions are:

1. Which technological tools and social media applications are mostly used by the parents?
2. What are the parents' social media preferences for involvement in classroom activities?
3. What are the social media activities parents like most in classroom involvement?
4. What are the effects of social media usage on parents and their children?

3. Results

According to the demographic results, parents of the study group (75 are mothers) are mostly university graduates, mostly between age 31-40 and mostly working mothers.

Table 1- Technological tools used by parents (%)

Communication tools	Parents use		Parents do not use		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Laptop	22	42,3	30	57,7	52	100
Desktop	23	44,2	23	44,2	52	100
Tablet	27	51,9	25	48,1	52	100
Smart phone	47	90,4	5	9,6	52	100

Table 2- Social media programs used by parents (%)

Programs	Parents use		Parents do not use		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Facebook	51	98.1	1	1.9	52	100
Twitter	23	44.2	29	55.8	52	100
Instagram	24	46.2	28	53,8	52	100
Linkedin	19	36.5	33	63,5	52	100
Vine	1	1.9	51	98,1	52	100
Pinterest	3	5.8	49	94.2	52	100

Table 3- Programs parents prefer to use for classroom participation (%)

Programs	Parents use		Parents do not use		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Facebook	51	98,1	1	1,9	52	100
Twitter	6	11,5	46	88,5	52	100
Instagram	4	7,7	48	92,3	52	100

Table 4- Social media activities most liked by parents

Activities	N	Average
Photographs of children taken during an in- class activity	52	8,55
Photographs and videos shot by other parents	52	4,69
Videos about the subject of the week	52	6,30
Information sharing about the in-class activities	52	7,94
News about the school/class	52	7,19
Ideas for at home activities	52	5,9
Useful links	52	5,57
Ideas for outdoor activities for family	52	5,67
Recommendations for books, magazines	52	4,5
Other	52	1,21

Table 5- Activities of parents after sharing social media inputs with their children

Activites	f	%
Conversation with my child after looking at photos of in class activities	46	88,5
Watching the videos together	36	69.2
Applying the suggested ideas for activities at home	30	57,7
Applying the suggested family outdoor activities	25	48,1
Studying the subject of the day/ week of curriculum	26	50
Getting the recommended books, magazines and reading them together	35	67,3
Other	2	3.8

To summarize the results of this study, one important effect of using social media in family involvement is to reinforce classroom learning for extended benefit. Another important effect is on the social aspect of the family. When parents spend time with their children reviewing their school activities, they learn more about their children's capabilities, skills and knowledge and share quality time together to strengthen the parent-child connection. The parents involved in the study were pleased with the applications of social media. This study is a pilot study and further research is needed to expand the research questions.

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