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## Parents' perception regarding the concerns, competencies and perspectives of involvement in non-formal activities

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**Abstract.** This study aims to assess the perception of parents of primary school children about the concerns they have, the knowledge they have about their child's skills. Starting from the educational and socializing function of the family (Jabbarova, 2020; Syamsuddin, 2021), we formulated the following research questions: What type of problems does a 7-11 years old child have to confront? According to parents, which are the necessary abilities a 7-11 year old child has to possess? How much do children participate in non-formal activities in their spare time? 62 participants completed a semi-structured questionnaire and participated in 10 interviews. The results reveal particularities of the reality of family life, such as the reduced time spent by parents with their children, the concern of parents for the time spent by the child in the online environment. Parents also reported the lack of interdisciplinary, non-formal, attractive programs and projects for children. The results indicate the focus of parents in the formation of memory skills and critical thinking and less on academic skills. Parents express concerns about spending their child's time online but are confident that they can still handle this. The study actually describes some parents worried about many aspects of a child's life, however they are not involved in parenting programs.

**Keywords.** parents, nonformal activities, projects, children, competences

### Introduction

Non-formal education is considered a segment of lifelong learning and the involvement of children in such activities is the responsibility of the parent and leads to positive results in terms of training social skills, professional, etc. (Bogavac, Đukić, 2017; Fentein et al., 2008; Protasevich, 2011; Baumrind, 1978, Horowitz & Bronte-Tinkew, 2007).). It represents an optimal framework for early childhood development and is crucial in educating those excluded from formal education systems (Britto Oketch, Weisner, 2014). Today the values and content of non-formal education are too well known, the vast majority associating them with innovative activities carried out outside the formal education system; in the early 60s and 70s, this type of activity was especially concerned with the continuing education of adults. Non-formal education in the form of science camps increases motivation and interest in the natural sciences, but generally has a positive impact on children's social and emotional skills (Halonen & Aksela, 2018).

Starting from the premise that the parent has the responsibility to involve the child in non-formal activities, Bogavac & Đukić (2017) identified in a study their involvement, as follows: less than 20% of learners are constantly informed about parental education, below 10%

talk to a specialist about their child's education and only 10% of parents are students at a parents' school. The author was interested in discovering the expectations of parents from these non-formal activities: about 80% of students expect the involvement of children in non-formal activities to improve the school life of the child and about 60% expect to harmonize the requirements of school and parents to children. Taking place in the form of a process and integrating knowledge in the form of a system (Kedrayate, 2012), non-formal education is flexible, focused on learning, based on the environment, anchored in reality and even in the life of the community. Of course, involvement with the child in various non-formal activities is conditioned by the time they spend together. But there are other barriers that prevent the participation of parents and children in these types of activities: according to a study by Berardi (2009) along with the time factor, adds the financial factor (limited financial resources) and lack of information about such projects. However, parents appreciate that their role in involving non-formal activities with the child and school is important.

A constant and widespread concern of parents is the time spent on social networks by their children. Romanian parents, sometimes busy with two jobs, have resorted to outsourcing educational services, and usually enroll their child in after school centers; the interval of over 8 hours in acres does not have access to the child can be used by him and in the virtual space or simply by accessing different sites outside the control of the parents. In a 1985 study, Furman & Buhrmester assessed the qualities of fifth-graders' relationships with their mothers; the study is not necessarily relevant in this context but it argues the need for children to connect to social networks using Weis's (1974) theory. According to the theory, individuals seek in their relationships social dispositions and specific support. If the relationship with the mother (along with that of friends) is so strong, she can mediate the child's willingness to spend a certain amount of time (considered healthy) using social networks. When parents trust their ability to influence the child in order to use the internet effectively, moderately (Shin, 2015), they are less interested in updating their internet knowledge. The study suggests diversifying parenting strategies to mediate their children's intrusive consumption and encouraging them.

In an earlier study, (Bryant, Zick, 1996) shows that the time spent by the mother with children decreases if the mother is active in the labor market, and as she gets involved in professional activities she will carry out with her child or domestic activities. Cooksey & Fondell (1996) draw attention to the correlation between the activities that fathers have but their children and their academic results, but suggest that father's time does not mediate the effects of family structure on children's grades. There are serious discrepancies between the observations and perceptions that parents have about their children's needs and choices and those expressed by them (Morgan et al., 2002). There are, indeed (although not the subject of our analysis) situations in which children's voices, ie support and involve in decision-making regarding the child not to be made in his own interest (Dixon-Woods et al., 1999).

Although a major concern for parents seems to be the time the child spends on social networks, parents do not have online child protection strategies by purchasing special software to be able to censor certain searches (Hansen, 1998).

### **Research purpose**

Parents and the environment they provide within the family system are the main influencing factors in the development of skills specific to a certain age category (Baumrind, 1991; Kagan, 1999; Maccoby, 1994). We do not neglect at all, the importance of the factor of formal education, we believe, in fact, that the whole path of a child is conditioned by the extent to which the parents perceive their needs or what he/she should know how to do, be able to think, etc. The purpose of this study is to describe parents' perceptions of some important issues

related to their 7-11 year old child's competencies, concerns and worries, and their involvement in non-formal activities. This quick scan conducted in an educational institution is part of a broader research that aims to assess the educating role of parents and their abilities to generate socially competent children.

### Research question

What type of problems does a 7-11 years old child have to confront? Who does the child spend time with after class? According to parents, which are the necessary abilities a 7-11 year old child has to possess?

How much do children participate in non-formal activities in their spare time?

### Research methodology

The approach of this research in this paper was a complex one as it involved the collection of data through a questionnaire and through interviews that supplemented the information provided by the questionnaire with qualitative data. 62 parents were part of the study, of which 6 were involved in interviews. The questionnaire applied to parents revealed data on: how the children spend their free time, entities that should deal with the development of certain skills of the child, the child's participation in certain extracurricular / non-formal activities, willingness to get involved in design, organization and carrying out non-formal activities in the formal space, etc.

### Participants

The participants in this study are represented by the parents of primary school children from the educational institution of which the experimental sample is part. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied which indicates the following regarding the distribution of the parents:

Tabel nr.1. *The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test regarding the distribution*

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		Copil_in_clas a
N		62
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	Mean	3.0161
	Std. Deviation	.81967
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.224
	Positive	.215
	Negative	-.224
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.761
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.004

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

Given that  $p = 0.004$  shows that the data of the variable are normally distributed, ie the number of respondent parents who have a child in the second and third grade are normally distributed.

Regarding the identification variables, we found that out of the total of 62 parents who completed the questionnaire, the gender distribution was significantly higher for females (83%) compared to males (17%);

- The age distribution of the respondent parents is 14% aged between 25-34 years, 40% aged between 35-44 years, 27% of the parents are aged between 45-54 years, and 9% of the parents are aged between 55-65 years old;

- Regarding the monthly income of the respondents 14% have a single income less than or equal to the minimum income per economy, 33% have two incomes less than or equal to the minimum income per economy, and 53% have incomes higher than the minimum wage per economy, of which 12% have a single income and 41% have two incomes above the minimum wage;
- Regarding the graduated studies, 3% of the participants graduated only grades V-VIII, 10% graduated vocational school, 14% graduated only high school, 71% have a bachelor's or master's degree and 2% completed their doctoral studies;
- Regarding the number of children in the care of parents, 26% have only one child in care, 45% have 2 children, 21% have 3 children and 8% have more than 3 children;
- Compared to the time spent with their children, 16% of parents spend less than an hour a day with their children, 36% spend one or two hours, 30% of parents spend between 2 and 4 hours a day in school activities and 18% spend more than 4 hours a day at home with their children. There is a symmetrical distribution of percentages on minimum time and maximum time spent together parent-child. However, if we are to refer to the respondents 'maximum concern about the problems to which children are exposed, the question of whether the parents' time spent can be correlated with their care regarding the child's exposure to technology sources and communication information arises ;

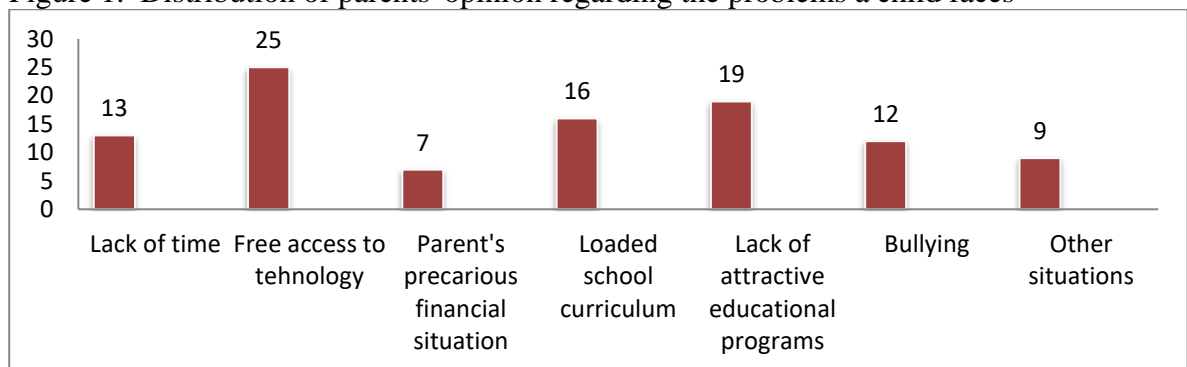
## Results

### 1. What type of problems does a 7-11 years old child have to confront?

Countless classic and current studies demonstrate the connection between a child's success prospects and the structure and quality of family relationships; strictly speaking, a socially and emotionally competent parent will raise a child with the same characteristics (McLanahan, Sandefur, 1994; Weaver et al., 2020)

The item regarding the distribution of parents' opinion related to problems faced by a child between the ages of 07-11 years, reads as follows:

Figure 1. Distribution of parents' opinion regarding the problems a child faces



As can be seen, most respondent parents (25%) worry about the influence of children's free access to sources of communication technologies and information (Leggett, 2013, Shaib, Jimoh & Adekunle 2020).

*".. as much as I doubt and worry about what my child does and what sites he opens ... I also trust that the education we give him protects him from various temptations ... On the other hand we are aware that our thinking may be wrong.. "*

*"..Our biggest concern is that we spend very little time with the child ... we try to compensate through quality time spent together ... however, he spends so much time in our absence .."*

In descending order of the imminent problematic situations faced by a child aged 8-12, we mention: the lack of educational programs, interesting for children that keep them concerned and engaged, 19%, school curriculum and home tasks, which require the maximum attention of the child, 16%, the lack quality time spent with their parents 13%, bullying by colleagues or friends, which affects in the short and long term emotional development of the child, and which, according to statistics, is increasingly present in school, even in primary school, 12%, and in terms of poor financial situation of parents, 9% of respondents believe that there are other situations that can represent a problem for a child (parental conflicts, divorce, death of one parent, parents gone abroad, lack of friendships, excessive protection of parents), and 7% of the respondents consider it problematic for children. A constant in the perception of many parents is their perception about the weak attractiveness of active programs, the lack of non-formal, modern activities to capture the child: "today's children are different, easily bored, no longer respond to old methods of teaching and approaches ... and many teachers have not left the old patterns. In this way they do not manage to keep them interested at all .."

### **2. Who does the child spend time with after class?**

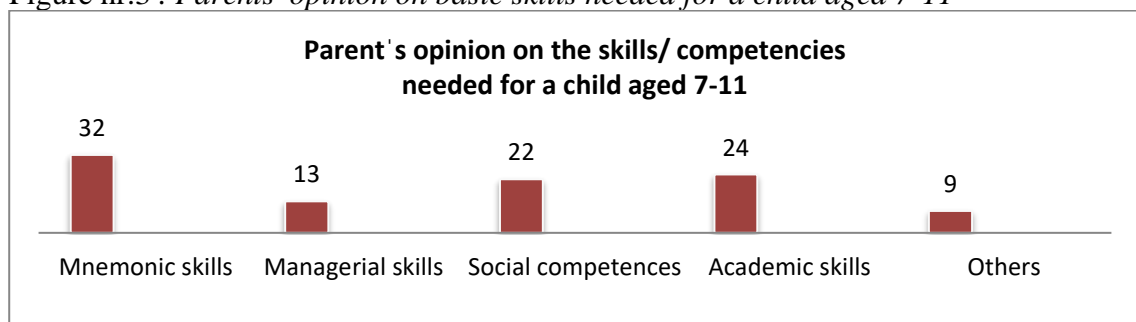
The variable on the supervision of the child after school ends reveals that most children spend the afternoon alone at home (33%), or in the care of one of the grandparents (29%), 17% of the children are under the supervision of a parent during the day and 11% of children are in the care of a nanny. Not surprisingly, the entities that should be most involved in raising and educating the child between the ages of 7-11 are the parents, the school, the circle of friends, the local community.

In the Romanian society, the involvement of grandparents / extended family in the care / supervision of the grandchild is a frequent practice and agreed by the parents; this form of care has a moderating role between well-being and stress factors (Gerard, Landry-Meyer, Roe, 2006; Bowers, Myers, 1999) and children cared for by grandparents have better behavioural and adaptive functioning than children cared for in outside the home or by nannies (Harnett, Dawe, Russell, 2012).

### **3. According to parents, which are the necessary abilities a 7-11 year old child has to possess?**

Another variable analyzes the parents' opinion regarding the basic abilities / skills / competences necessary for a child between the ages of 7-11. In this regard, the answers of the respondent parents is given in the figure below:

Figure nr.3 . Parents' opinion on basic skills needed for a child aged 7-11



This analysis is particularly important because it provides us with information on the importance given by parents to the need to learn social skills in children aged 7-11. The position of the parents towards the subject of social competences is not accidental, considering the very weak emphasis that is placed even in the school for the formation of this competence; the teachers themselves signalled the need for training in this regard, the development of educational policies, a learning framework, resources, curriculum to facilitate the formation of social and emotional skills (Ignat, Clipa, Rusu, 2011).

- We can notice that the respondent parents place the need to exercise this competence in the child's life in a middle area. It is interesting to note that mnemonic skills are gaining ground over academic skills. We can conclude that parents give more importance to developmental skills in terms of critical thinking, the ability to solve problematic situations, skills that the child needs throughout his personal development, but why not professional, academic. Regarding the development of managerial skills, at least at this time, parents give it less importance.

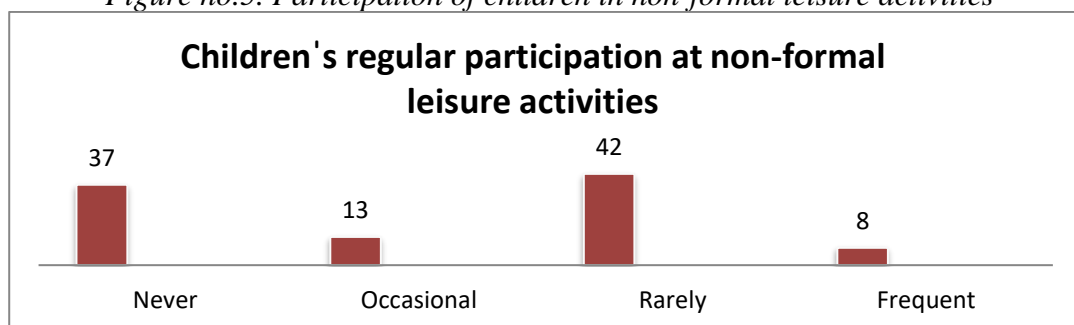
- - Regarding the variables corresponding to the item that provides us with data on informing the respondent parents about the offer of non-formal educational activities carried out in the educational institution, we noticed their dissatisfaction. However, the question is the cause of the lack of information: timid popularization of these activities by teachers, the communication channel obstructed even by the student, the disinterest of parents, the superficial treatment of these activities, or even the total lack of these activities in educational institutions.

- Parents' willingness to get involved in the design, organization and conduct of non-formal activities, the majority of parents (39%) stated that they can only occasionally get involved, another significant part of parents expressed their categorical refusal to get involved (22%), another significant part of the parents considered that this question could not be stated at the time of completing the questionnaire, and 14% of the parents were available for involvement in these activities.

#### 4. To what extent do children participate in informal leisure activities?

Another significant item for our research refers to the regular participation of children in extracurricular / non-formal activities, in their free time.

*Figure no.5. Participation of children in non-formal leisure activities*



It is noted that most students do not participate at all or do very rarely in non-formal educational activities outside the school curriculum. These results correlated with the item on the monthly earnings of parents compared to the minimum economy wage, may suggest that this low frequency of participation in non-formal activities outside the school, does not reveal a positive correlation. A very small number of students in the educational institution of which the experimental sample is part, regularly participate in such activities (13% occasionally and 8% frequently).

### **5. How comfortable does the child feel around his classmates?**

Another question in the questionnaire addressed to parents, which is of major significance for our research, refers to the opinion of parents on the comfort of the child around his colleagues. The results obtained by the parents' response can be influenced by their subjectivism, by the openness of the child who shares or does not share his feelings in the student community, by the image that the parent created about his own child, about his popularity. Strictly analysing the responses of the respondent parents, we concluded that most parents consider that their child feels comfortable around colleagues, and a very small number of respondent parents consider that their child is not at all comfortable around children.

### **Discussions**

Knowing the characteristics of the parental model most frequently encountered in Romania facilitates the understanding of the results of this study. The extended family is involved in raising the child or supervising them when parents are missing is a valuable feature and resource for parents and children alike. Parents, sometimes engaged in two jobs, spend less and less time with their children. This does not make them less responsible or indifferent to their needs; however, their absence matters. Their most important concerns, namely the child's time playing or being connected online, the lack of educational programs to stimulate it are just two of the concerns of parents around the world. Parents are also aware that their child experiences bullying, that many dimensions of his personality are not covered by educational programs.

However, *"we go from inertia forward, we hope that things will settle down somehow ... and amazingly, we trust that the child will signal when he is going through difficult times."*

What are the specific competencies of the age of 7-11 years according to the surveyed parents? It seems that parents are more interested in developing their children's transversal skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking, being less focused on professional / academic skills. Perhaps this tendency of theirs is not accidental considering the complexity of life, the more and more serious imperative that he feels every day to solve and identify solutions to the more and more varied problems of life. The interviews confirmed this fact and suggested a very strong trust in the educational institutions that have the responsibility of developing academic competencies.

Parents' willingness to get involved in the design, organization and conduct of non-formal activities, the majority of parents (39%) stated that they can only occasionally get involved, another significant part of parents expressed their categorical refusal to get involved (22%) , another significant part of the parents considered that this question could not be stated at the time of completing the questionnaire, and 14% of the parents were available for involvement in these activities.

### **Conclusions**

The concerns of the group of parents under study are argued and they reflect some dysfunctions of the educational system but also social. It is absolutely necessary to increase the number of day centers that carry out non-formal activities, of joint parent-child programs and projects facilitated by the school.

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