

EXPLORATORY STUDY ON TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ABOUT MOTHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN NURSERY AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS

ESTUDIO EXPLORATORIO SOBRE LA PERCEPCIÓN DEL PROFESORADO
ACERCA DE LA PARTICIPACIÓN DE LAS MADRES EN LOS CENTROS
ESCOLARES DE EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL Y PRIMARIA

ESTUDO EXPLORATÓRIO SOBRE A PERCEPÇÃO DE PROFESSORES SOBRE
A PARTICIPAÇÃO DE MÃES EM CRECHES E ESCOLAS PRIMÁRIAS

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ABSTRACT: Research shows that families' involvement in schools promotes children's educational quality; it is also a parents' right according to the Spanish educational legislation. Therefore, it should be promoted from the schools and the teachers. The objective of this research is to analyze nursery and primary school teachers' perception of the typology of mothers' involvement activities in schools as well as their difficulties on this regard. In addition, differences between these two educational stages and between urban and rural areas were analysed. This is an exploratory study, given its limited sample size composed of 78 teachers working in nursery and primary schools in urban and rural settings. The *Scale on Relationships between Schools and Families* (Martínez-González, 1994) was used to gather information; it is made up of items with four point Likert scale answers. Descriptive and comparative data analyses were carried out. The results indicate that, according to teachers, mothers participate more in activities organized by the school, than in those organized by the families themselves through the Parents' Association at School. They do it more frequently and in more diverse ways in rural than in urban areas, according to the teachers. In primary schools they participate significantly more in parents-teachers meetings than in nursery. Regarding the difficulties to participate, teachers perceive they are mainly associated with the working hours of the families and those of the schools. No significant differences were found between the two educational stages in this regard; however, differences do exist between urban and rural

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	<p>settings, with the former showing greater difficulties. In rural areas there are greater transport limitations to the school. From these results, actions to improve mothers' involvement in schools were suggested.</p>
<p>PALABRAS CLAVE: Profesorado Madres Participación Dificultades Educación Infantil Educación Primaria Ámbito Rural y Urbano</p>	<p>RESUMEN: La participación de las familias en los centros escolares constituye un elemento facilitador de la calidad educativa que reciben los menores; es también un derecho recogido en la legislación educativa española. Por ello, ha de ser promovida desde el contexto escolar, actuando el profesorado como agente clave en su dinamización. El objetivo de esta investigación es conocer la percepción del profesorado de Educación Infantil y de Educación Primaria sobre la tipología de actividades de participación de las madres en los centros escolares, así como sobre sus dificultades. Se analizan, además, diferencias entre las etapas educativas mencionadas y entre zonas urbanas y rurales. Se trata de un estudio exploratorio, dado el limitado tamaño de la muestra, configurada por 78 docentes de estas etapas educativas, que imparten docencia en centros públicos rurales y urbanos. El instrumento de recogida de información es la <i>Escala de Relaciones entre Centros Docentes y Familias</i> (Martínez-González, 1994), compuesta por ítems con respuesta en escala Likert de cuatro alternativas. Los análisis descriptivos y comparativos de grupos efectuados indican que, según el profesorado, las madres participan más en actividades programadas por el centro, que en aquellas organizadas por las propias familias en Asociaciones de Madres y Padres. Lo hacen con más frecuencia y en actividades más diversas en centros rurales que en urbanos. En Educación Primaria, participan significativamente más en reuniones tutoriales que en Educación Infantil. Respecto a las dificultades para participar, el profesorado las percibe asociadas fundamentalmente a los horarios laborales de las familias y de los centros. A este respecto, no se detectan diferencias significativas entre las etapas educativas; pero sí entre centros urbanos y rurales, con mayores dificultades en los primeros. En las zonas rurales existen mayores limitaciones de transporte hasta el centro escolar. De los resultados obtenidos se derivan sugerencias de mejora.</p>
<p>PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Professores Mães Participação Dificuldades Educação Infantil Educação Primária Ambiente Rural e Urbano</p>	<p>RESUMO: A participação das famílias nas escolas é um elemento que facilita a qualidade educacional que as crianças recebem; Eles também fazem parte da legislação educacional espanhola. Para isso, deve ser promovido a partir do contexto escolar, com o professor atuando como um agente-chave em seu dinamismo. O objetivo desta pesquisa é compreender a percepção do professor de educação infantil e ensino fundamental sobre a tipologia de atividades para a participação de crianças nas escolas, bem como suas dificuldades. Além disso, são analisados, diferenciando as etapas educacionais mencionadas e as áreas urbanas e rurais. Trata-se de um estudo exploratório, dado o tamanho limitado do edifício, configurado por 78 professores dessas etapas educacionais, que lecionam em centros públicos rurais e urbanos. A ferramenta para coletar informações sobre a Escala de Relacionamento entre Centros de Ensino e Famílias (Martínez-González, 1994) consiste em itens com uma resposta da escala Likert de quatro alternativas. As análises descritivas e comparativas dos grupos realizados indicam que, segundo a professora, as mulheres participam de atividades planejadas pelo centro, organizadas pelas famílias nas Associações de Mães e Pais. Hacke com mais frequência e diversidade nos centros rurais do que nos urbanos. No ensino fundamental, participo significativamente mais de reuniões de tutoria do que na educação infantil. Quanto às dificuldades de participação, o professor percebe a associação fundamentalmente com o horário de trabalho das famílias e dos centros. Nesse sentido, não há diferenças significativas entre as etapas educacionais; mas entre centros urbanos e rurais, com maiores dificuldades no primeiro. Nas áreas rurais, existem limitações significativas de transporte para a escola. Sugestões para melhoria são derivadas dos resultados obtidos.</p>

1. Introduction

Families' involvement in schools and their collaboration with teachers regarding the education of children is still a topic of discussion at the present time (Vallespir & Morey, 2019). Even when legislation in this area exists in Spain since 1970 (general education and educational reform funding law (14/1970, 4 august), the effective progresses to promote collaboration are actually scarce. The successive educational standards to the latest improvement quality of education organic law (8/2013, 9 December) have continued to insist on this need. Simultaneously, several researches

have been published focusing on the different ways that families have in order to participate in schools (Epstein, 2001; Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2014), the obstacles encountered to do so (Rodríguez-Ruiz, Martínez-González, & Rodrigo, 2016) or the perceptions of the different agents involved on that matter (Andrés & Giró, 2016; Garreta, 2008; Madrid, Saracostti, Reiningger & Hernández, 2019).

The advisability of this involvement is also highlighted in the ecological model of human development by Bronfenbrenner (1987), which considers that microsystems as home and school share the common goal of contributing to the comprehensive

training of children and adolescents in every area of development (Oliva & Palacios, 2000). This collaboration is relevant nowadays, given that the challenges that school must face are diverse and complex, including broader issues than just academic competences; for instance, bullying prevention (Albadalejo, 2011) or the promotion of positive relationships for coexistence (Calvo, 2003). Likewise, family deals with new demands such as work-life balance or single parenthood (Álvarez-Blanco & Martínez-González, 2017). Thus, this analysis leads to the appropriateness of promoting a trusting relationship and mutual recognition between both educational agents (Förster & Rojas-Barahona, 2014; Palomares, 2015), as well as a joint responsibility (partnership) that will benefit children and their learning, motivation and school performance (Epstein *et al.*, 2018; Leo, Wilcox & Lawson, 2019; Rodríguez-Ruiz, Álvarez-Blanco, Martínez-González & Epstein, 2019).

This approach of educational co-responsibility is particularly important regarding nursery schools (Batle, Hernández & Mir, 2009), which require frequent communication between teachers and families; specially mothers, since they are the ones coming to schools regularly (Valdés, Martín & Sánchez, 2009), and also the usual responsible for the education and rearing of children (Pacheco, Rodríguez & García, 2013). In general, relations between mothers and schools in this stage are fluid and continuous. Therefore, early education stands out as the quintessential educational stage to encourage this relationship through involvement and communication (Castro & García-Ruiz, 2013). The ease in relations partially spreads to the early years of primary education (Valdés *et al.*, 2009), but tends to decline, even disappear, in secondary education (Rodríguez-Ruiz *et al.*, 2016).

Expectations are generated regarding how schools and families can mutually support in order to promote learning and personal development of children and adolescents (Alamolhoda, 2020; Redding, 2006). In this respect, Epstein (2001) focused on the need of establishing bidirectional channels for communication, bolstering family processes for rearing children, facilitating joint decision-making and working with organizations in the community. Several studies also show that there are difficulties for that collaboration to be frequent and successful (Timberly, Wise, Kelley & Skiba, 2016; Vallespir-Soler, Rincón & Morrey-López, 2016). Even so, schools and teachers are expected to lead the way in order to foster collaboration with families in the educational process and academic learning of their children (Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Garbacz, Herman, Thompson & Reinke, 2017; Martínez-González, Álvarez

& Pérez, 2014). Among their efforts, we highlight the initiatives to facilitate families' involvement in schools.

1.1. *Involvement of families in schools*

According to diverse studies conducted (Batle *et al.*, 2009; Castro & García-Ruiz, 2013; Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2014), families' involvement in nursery and primary schools – especially mothers –, is positive from the perspective of teachers, although the frequency could be improved (Madrid *et al.*, 2019). These results lead to the idea of considering teachers as motivators for this participation (Andrés & Giró, 2016; Epstein, 2005; Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Vallespir & Morey, 2019) displaying a proactive attitude through different initiatives and activities (López & Paniagua, 2012). Hence, it is worth analyzing the perception of the teaching staff regarding this matter.

Some studies state that teachers noted higher participation from families in activities promoted by Mothers and Fathers' Association compared to other events organized by the school, pointing out these collaborations as key elements in the invigoration of the relationship between school and families (Ceballos-Vacas, Rodríguez-Ruiz & Martínez-González, 2019; Epstein, Jung & Sheldon, 2019). Other findings obtained by García-Bacete (2006) show little participation of families in schools: although in this study 96% of mothers of children in primary schools believe their collaboration with the educational centers is very significant, only 5,5% actually participate in activities, from the perspective of teachers. In a nationwide study by Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (2014), the analysis of the aspects related to low family involvement exposes that around one third of the surveyed families presents a lack of interest in an actual participation, in line with the outcomes of the research conducted at international level by Perälä-Littunen & Leena-Böök (2019); also that one fifth points out a weak dissemination of information as the main cause. Another possible reason is the scarce culture of participation in schools and the different perspectives on the role that schools and families should play (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Leo *et al.*, 2019; Martínez-González, Pérez-Herrero & Rodríguez-Ruiz, 2005).

Regardless the perspective, investigations suggest that participation has a positive impact on students regarding academic performance, school adjustment and attitudes towards learning and behavior (Eptstein, 2001; Eptstein *et al.*, 2018; Castro & García-Ruiz, 2013). Besides, positive effects also extend to families, enhancing expectations of children and attitudes towards

schools and teachers, actively engaging in the monitoring of school tasks and, in consequence, positively influencing academic development of children (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2009). All this clearly demonstrates the relevance of the topic addressed in the present study.

1.2. Obstacles for families' involvement

Partnership between families and schools is not easy to achieve, given contextual and organizational differences, the various approaches that both agents may have on education and involvement or even other reasons (Leo *et al.*, 2019; Timberly *et al.*, 2016). Among the factors preventing families from participation in schools, Christenson, Rounds & Franklin (1992) also highlight the typology of family, the characteristics of the educational center and its context and school stage of children. The school stage is also cited by Parra, García-Sanz, Gomáriz & Hernández-Prados (2014) and by Martínez-González *et al.* (2005), indicating that the lowest the school stage where the kid belongs is, the highest the degree of family involvement. In parallel, factors related to family context such as working hours or child or elderly care (Consejo Escolar, 2015; Rodríguez-Ruiz *et al.*, 2016) are elements limiting participation. Maganto, Bartau & Etxeberria (2004) consider as the main obstacle the difficulties in the balance of family and school hours, especially in cases of families where both parents work outside home. This working situation affects many families and brings to light an inappropriate social organization for reconciling public and private times (Morán & Cruz, 2011); this has an impact, among other aspects, in a poor involvement and participation of families in schools.

Domínguez (2010) & Rodríguez-Ruiz (2012) argue that the geographical context and the size of the population where the school is can difficult the relation with the families, statement that is also pointed out in other case studies such as the research conducted by Leo *et al.*, (2019). In this respect, Flecha, Padrós y Puigdemívol (2003) indicate that in smaller communities as rural settings, the relationship is more frequent and every agent is willing to collaborate, idea shared by Epstein & Sheldon (2002). This aspect is a boost in itself for rural settings according to Llevot & Garreta (2008, p. 94), who describe it as “a dynamic relationship between school and town”, enabling frequency and intensity of relationships. Noting other investigation undertaken on teachers' approach, Castro & García-Ruiz (2013) state that family members themselves hinder participation displaying attitudes or behaviors that sometimes surpass the limits stipulated by current legislation.

Martín, Pérez & Álvarez (2007) show that families relinquish their educational responsibilities on the school institution, hampering their relationship and assuming, according to Egger, Lehmann & Straumann (2015), a role closer to customer instead of contributor. On the other hand, Río (2010) underlines the weariness of teachers due to a low response from families to quarterly meetings, callings, notifications or dates, which is finally associated with a lack of interest (Madrid *et al.*, 2019), although we also should consider that external factors can limit the involvement of both parents as well (Fernández-Freire, Rodríguez-Ruiz & Martínez-González, 2019).

It follows that in the relationship between schools and families both parts are likely to find obstacles and feel fear and uncertainty that, at times, can impede collaboration. Nonetheless, we might expect the development of initiatives organized by schools and teachers in order to promote collaboration (Andrés & Giró, 2016; Fernández-Freire *et al.*, 2019; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Rodríguez-Ruiz *et al.*, 2019). This requires, among other aspects, availability of information, proper attitudes and useful tools (Vallespir & Morey, 2019), as well as knowing the approach of teachers regarding this matter.

With the aim of deepening in the latter aspect, this study discusses an exploratory analysis on teachers' perception about the typology of activities that engage mothers of students in Nursery and Primary Education in public schools in Asturias. We also analyze all the impediments identified. More specifically, these questions are addressed comparing both educational stages abovementioned and their rural or urban settings, seeking to identify needs enabling schools to organize actions promoting family involvement. We focus on mothers, given that they are usually the ones involved with the rearing and education of children in these stages.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The present study surveyed 78 teachers from 30 different public educational centers located in urban and rural settings in the principality of Asturias, 67% belonging to nursery education and 33% to primary education. We used a purposive non-probabilistic sample; a representative population random sampling was not possible to perform. Even when the number of participants is limited, we consider that the outcome obtained can shed light on the expected trend regarding the topic analyzed from an exploratory perspective.

We chose to select public educational centers given that they gather a higher variability of family situations and options for family involvement compared to charter or private schools; also, public schools are the most widespread typology of school in rural areas in Asturias (Sociedad Asturiana de Estudios Económicos e Industriales, 2017). The geographical distribution of centers locates 61.5% of the sample in urban areas (13 schools) and 38.5% in rural areas (17 schools); these figures are proportional to population distribution of public educational centers in Asturias. Regarding gender, the sample significantly displays more female teachers (81%) than male teachers (19%), reflecting the national trend that points out a larger presence of women in this career regarding nursery and primary education stages (Sánchez, 2011). Considering the stages, primary education represents 67% of the sample, while nursery education represents 33%. Virtually half of participants have little or some teaching experience; 28% claim to have “between 1 and 5 years”, 19% “between 6 and 10 years”, and 8% “between 11 and 15 years” of experience, comparing to only 26% claiming to have significant experience, “over 25 years”.

2.2. Instrument and procedure

Data collection was conducted following *family-school relationship trust scale, del partnership for school success program (USA)* (Adams & Christenson, 2000), adapted to Spanish by Martínez-González (1996) and configured for teachers. This instrument includes items which enable the analysis of teachers' perception on families' involvement in educational centers, considering, among other variables: 1) typology of participation activities and 2) difficulties to engage in participation. The first variable explores diverse activities developed in educational centers presenting participation of families, and consists of 5 items related to: 1) general meeting for parents convened by the school, 2) individual mentoring meeting, 3) meeting convened by mothers and fathers' association (AMPA), 4) learning activities for families as lectures, conferences, workshops, etc. And 5) recreational, cultural or sport activities. The second variable tackles the aspects which limit families' involvement, including 8 items: 1) work schedule, 2) school hours, 3) children or elderly care, 4) school transport, 5) lack of interest in participation, 6) absence of specific invitation to the events, 7) negative attitude towards the school and 8) negative experiences in the current school or other centers. The answers follow the four point Likert scale: 1- *never*, 2- *sometimes*, 3- *most of the times* and 4- *always*. In order to implement the

instrument, 35 public educational centers in Asturias, both in rural and urban settings, were contacted with the aim of requesting authorization to the management team to apply the surveys. We achieved a positive answer from 85% of the educational centers contacted (30 schools). Subsequently, via e-mail or phone, the teacher staff was asked to fill the questionnaire, which was adapted to online application (*google-doc*) in order to facilitate its access from any location, particularly from remote rural areas, away from major population centers. The degree of confidence, obtained by Cronbach's alpha, reaches 94%, figure considered excellent according to George & Mallery (2003).

2.3. Data analysis

Statistical analyses used descriptive and comparative techniques regarding two independent groups using student's t test, considering the reduced size of the sample and the exploratory nature of the study, the educational stage (nursery and primary education) and the geographical location of the school (urban or rural area). A previous analysis was performed investigating whether the items respect criteria of adjustment to the normal curve determining asymmetry and kurtosis, considering values [-1; +1] (Frias Navarro, Llobell, & García Pérez, 2000). Every analysis considered the condition of uniformity of the variances (Levene's test). When the difference between groups were significant, we calculated an effect size using partial eta square (r^2) through a univariate general linear model; the outcome on the effect size has been interpreted according to the following criteria (Cohen, 1969): negligible if $r^2 < .01$, low if $.01 < r^2 < .09$, medium if $.09 < r^2 < .25$ and high if $r^2 > .25$. When we found items that did not meet criteria of adjustment to the normal curve, the Mann-Whitney u test was used to compare both groups, given that it is very useful while considering limited samples and exploratory studies. The results were processed using spss.22 statistics.

3. Results

The presentation of the results is divided in two sections, considering each one of the analysis variables specified.

3.1. Teachers' perception on the typology of participatory activities according to educational stages and urban or rural settings

The descriptive exploratory analyses, performed via calculation of frequencies and percentage and measures of central tendency and variability,

show that generally, considering the reduced size of the sample, the teachers that participated in this study consider that mothers participate most of the times or always in: 1) general meetings for parents convened by the school (80%, N = 52; M = 3.12, DT = .61); 2) at least one individual mentoring meeting destined to deal with aspects on their kids (80.3%, N = 53; M = 3.2, DT = .74); and 3) recreational, cultural or sport activities (74.3%, N = 52; M = 3.01, DT = .77). However, other participation modalities present scant presence of mothers, such as meetings convened by Mothers and Fathers' Association (AMPA), (79.6% of cases the answer was never or sometimes; N = 43; M = 2.20, DT=0.78), and learning

activities for families as lectures, conferences, workshops (77.6% of cases the answer was never or sometimes; N = 45; M = 2.09, DT = 0.81).

Regarding the differences of mothers' involvement according to the educational stage that their children are (table 1), the outcome only showed a significant contrast in modality "at least one individual mentoring meeting destined to deal with aspects on their kids"; in this respect, the teachers working on Primary Education perceive a higher frequency of mothers going to schools because of this reason when compared to Nursery Education teachers, considering high this way the size of the effect ($t_{(53)} = -2.642$; $p = .013$; $R^2 = .330$).

Table 1. Average and standard deviations and differences found according to teachers' perception on mothers' involvement in educational centers regarding educational stages and geographical contexts

According educational stages		N	Media (DT)	t (I-P)	p	R ²
Attending school at least at one individual mentoring meeting with the tutor destined to deal with aspects on their kids	I	21	3.29	-2.642	.013	.330
	P	41	3.60			
According to geographical context of the school		N	Media (DT)	t (U-R)	p	R ²
Attending school to a meeting convened by Mothers and Fathers' Association	U	35	2.06	-2.709	.009	.337
	R	26	2.69			
Attending school to a lecture, conference or workshop destined to parents	U	37	1.95	-2.652	.010	.324
	R	29	2.41			
Attending school to special events as parties, cultural or sport activities, etc.	U	43	2.91	-2.443	.017	.282
	R	31	3.42			

P-Primary Education, I-Nursery School
 U-Urban contexto, R-Rural context

Regarding the differences related to the geographical context of the school, the results identified significant differences noting a higher involvement of mothers in rural schools compared to urban settings in the following items: 1) attending a meeting convened by Mothers and Fathers' Association (AMPA) presents a high size of the effect ($t_{(52)} = -2.709$; $p = .009$; $R^2 = .337$); 2) attending learning activities for families as lectures, conferences, workshops also presents a high size of the effect ($t_{(56)} = -2.652$; $p = .010$; $R^2 = .324$) and 3) recreational, cultural or sport activities and workshops also presents a high size of the effect ($t_{(68)} = -2.443$; $p = .017$; $R^2 = .282$).

3.2. Teachers' perception on the difficulties for participation according to educational stages and rural or urban settings

Regarding the difficulties for participation, the exploratory analysis indicates that in general teachers consider that mothers do not present significant problems to engage with the school. The values of arithmetic averages are located in the options *never* or *sometimes* in difficulties associated to "feeling uncomfortable at school" (98.7%, N = 74; M = 1.23, DT=0.45), "school transport" (97.3%, N = 73; M = 1.27, DT = 0.50), "having negative experiences at school" (100%, N = 79; M = 1.32, DT =

0.46), “absence of specific invitation to the events at school” (93.5%, $N = 72$; $M = 1.31$, $DT = 0.67$), “lack of interest in participation” (90.4%, $N = 66$; $M = 1.73$, $DT = 0.71$), “child or elderly care” (81.6%, $N = 62$; $M = 1.93$, $DT = 0.66$), and “school hours” (71.6%, $N = 53$; $M = 2.05$, $DT = 0.92$).

Nonetheless, other aspects analyzed such as mothers’ working hours handicap family engagement, according to teachers’ perception (between *most of the times* and *always*: 66.2%, $N = 49$; $M = 2.87$, $DT = 0.76$).

On the other hand, it is also worth mentioning that a relevant percentage of teachers highlight difficulties owing to school hours (28.4%, $N = 21$) and child or elderly care (18.4%, $N = 14$).

The result of the comparison of groups (table 2) indicate that the educational stage in which the teachers work does not suggest major differences

in their perception of the difficulties found by mothers when engaging with schools; that is to say, influencing factors are similar in both educational stages (Nursery and Primary Education).

Concerning the differences caused by geographical context of the school, the results showed higher differences in urban areas rather than in rural settings according to the difficulties associated to working hours ($t_{(72)} = 4.021$; $p = .000$; $R^2 = .428$), and school hours ($t_{(72)} = 2.282$; $p = .025$; $R^2 = .253$); both presenting a high size of the effect. On the other hand, the Mann-Whitney U test also identifies significant differences in the difficulties related to school transport ($z = -2.866$; $p = .004$); in this case, higher in rural settings than in urban areas. However, we should bear in mind that 97.3% of teachers do not perceive this as a difficulty (choosing answers *never* or *hardly ever*).

Table 2. Average and standard deviations and differences found according to teachers’ perception on the difficulties that mothers find to engage with schools regarding geographical contexts

		N	Media (DT)	t (I-P)	p	R ²
The difficulties found are due to working hours	U	45	3.04	4.021	.000	.428
	R	29	2.38			
The difficulties found are due to school hours	U	44	2.25	2.282	.025	.253
	R	30	1.77			
				Z (U Mann_Whitney)		
The difficulties found are due to transport to school	U	45	1.18	-2.866	.004	
	R	30	1.40			

U-Urban context, R-Rural context.

4. Discussion

National and international diverse researches state that collaboration between families and educational centers contributes to enhance academic progress of the students, dynamics of coexistence at schools and educational quality (Epstein, Jung & Sheldon, 2019; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2014; Rodríguez-Ruiz et al., 2019). The present exploratory study has been conducted with the aim of increasing knowledge on possible factors affecting this collaboration and families’ involvement in schools. Using the data collected from a reduced size of teachers from Nursery and Primary Education working in public schools in Asturias, we intended to identify the trend

perceived by teachers regarding the typology of activities that achieve mothers’ involvement and the possible difficulties that arise; we also analyze differences according to the educational stage of children and the geographical setting where schools are located.

The outcome obtained indicate that the sample of teachers in this study considers that mothers participate *most of the times* or *always* in the school, attending general organizational meetings convened by the school and individual mentoring meetings, where personal and academic aspects of children are discussed. Likewise, teachers note a frequent participation in cultural events organized by the school such as celebrations, sport competitions or other similar activities. The other types of activities, the activities

promoted by Mothers and Fathers' Association or the information and learning activities for families as lectures, conferences and workshops destined to parents, present a low participation according to teachers. It follows that initiatives fostered by schools and teachers have a larger convening power than other activities convened by parents themselves. The results, however, are not always shared by other researches, for instance the study performed by Gutiérrez (2010), where teachers noted that Mothers and Fathers' Association was essential to promote families' involvement. This is because mothers place a high value in the school institution and the academic and cultural aspects which directly affect their children than in other general or collective topics destined to parents, not to children, such as workshops, talks, etc. (García-Bacete, 2006; Ministerio de Educación Cultura y Deporte, 2014). Thus, it seems that the invigoration of the relationships between schools and families can be more effective when the activities proposed relate to aspects which directly concern children. On the other hand, teachers underlined in this study some difficulties hindering mothers' participation opportunities in schools, mainly associated with reconciling work and family life and child or elderly care, aspect that was also highlighted by Consejo Escolar del Estado (2015). Working hours of teachers and mothers that work outside home are typically the same, making it harder to find spaces for collaboration and cooperation (Fernández-Freire *et al.*, 2019; Maganto *et al.*, 2004). Similar results were exposed by Domínguez (2010), who also indicates as a difficulty noted by teachers the rearing of children, task that is usually assumed by mothers, as well as elderly care. In this line, Perälä-Littunen & Leena Böök (2019), suggest that personal life and families' interest affect their involvement in schools. This way, the possibilities for reconciling family, work, school and personal life determine mothers' involvement in educational schools, reducing their possibilities to act jointly with teachers. These difficulties bring to light the need to promote social, educational and work policies that ease reconciliation. Besides, the research also identifies elements that help overcome the difficulties for collaboration, such as the establishment of diverse channels for communication (Andrés & Giró, 2016; Hiatt-Michael, 2006), the training of teachers and families in strategies for mutual support (Hernández-Prados, García-Sanz, Galián-Nicolás & Belmonte-Almagro, 2019; Vallespir & Morey, 2019; Yamauchi, Ponte, Ratcliffe & Traynor, 2017), the use information and communication technologies (Leo *et al.*, 2019; Epstein, 2005), or the adjustment of schools, in some circumstances, to the hours

when families can participate. In all of them, teachers and their perspective on collaboration with families is a key element. In this respect, their attitude adopted in order to facilitate relationships of mutual confidence is indispensable to achieve an effective involvement (Lasater, 2019).

Considering Nursery and Primary Education stages, the exploratory results obtained in this study do not recognize a trend where teachers perceive differences in the limitations that mother can have to participate in the school; this way, in this research the change from Nursery Education stage to Primary Education stage is not a distinctive feature. Nevertheless, this trend tends to be different in Secondary School, given that researches identify a gradual decrease in families' involvement and participation (Batle *et al.*, 2009; Leo *et al.*, 2019; Rodríguez-Ruiz *et al.*, 2016).

Considering that this investigation is an exploratory study, we also observed a tendency stating that the geographical area of the school affects the perception of teachers regarding the analyzed aspects; this way, rural schools tend to present a higher participation of mothers, compared to urban schools (Martínez-González *et al.*, 2014; Rodríguez-Ruiz, 2012). In this sense, the generally strong relationships established among people in rural areas are a invigorating element for participation in schools (Llevot & Garreta, 2008), given that it seems that there is a higher engagement among teachers, family and students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002) which increases the participation of every agent in joint activities (Flecha *et al.*, 2003). However, despite the positive attitude towards participation found in rural areas, they present a determinant factor, that teachers perceive as higher than in urban areas, which is associated to the difficulties found in transportation from some areas to the school. This is due to dispersed population in Asturias which sometimes leads to a certain degree of isolation (Förster *et al.*, 2014).

To conclude, it can be said that the results of this study –considering the limitations associated to the size of the sample– point to the need of proposing measures that lead families and educational centers to the reconciliation of both schedules. Likewise, it is convenient to train teachers in strategies on collaboration with families in order to face the possible limitations that can arise, given that it is the main dynamizing agent of participation in centers. It is understood that it would facilitate the achievement of the educational targets promoted towards children from these two microsystems and socializing contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1987). This, however, could imply the need of incorporating political and institutional reforms, which are usually difficult to obtain.

As complementary lines of analysis, which inform about the limitations of the present work, some other researches can be conducted using mixed methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative data, and making available samples of teachers and families as well, which would surely enrich the conclusions obtained after comparison between both groups, as the study shows Madrid *et al.* (2019). It is also necessary to overcome the

limitation of the size of the sample in this study and its representativeness in order to foster a major generalization of conclusions obtained. Overcoming this and other limitations would ease the achievement of a wider and more complete vision of family involvement and its difficulties, in order to perform new suggestions destined to promote actions in schools and educational policies regarding this matter.

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