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## Study on Communication between Migrant Families and Schools

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### Abstract

It is well known that families' participation at school has never reached the expectations desired by the educational community, but if we talk about migrant parents, we are confronted with a more complex issue than the previous one. For this reason, this article seeks to know participation and contribution degree of migrant families, as well as, teachers' behaviour to promote parents' knowledge and involvement at school life in early childhood and elementary schools of preferential attention in Región de Murcia. In this sense, a non-experimental quantitative research of a descriptive and inferential nature was carried out, using two questionnaires, in which a total of 823 families and 150 teachers participated. The results show very low levels of parental participation at School Council and AMPA (School Association of Parents). However significant improvements have been detected in terms of a greater contribution from parents, such as supervising and controlling schoolwork, supporting them in organizing study time, and informing about their children's regular attendance at school.

### Key Words:

Participation, contribution, communication, migrant families, faculty, school.

## Estudio sobre la Comunicación entre Familias Migrantes y Escuelas

### Resumen

Es sobradamente conocido que la participación de las familias en la escuela nunca ha alcanzado las expectativas deseadas por la comunidad educativa, pero si hablamos de los progenitores migrantes nos confronta a una cuestión más compleja que la anterior. Por

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Article linked to the Doctoral Thesis entitled: "Estudio sobre la participación de las familias de origen migrante

ello, el artículo persigue conocer el grado de participación y contribución de las familias migrantes, así como las actuaciones del profesorado, para fomentar el conocimiento e implicación de los padres en la vida escolar en los centros de educación infantil y primaria de atención preferente de la Región de Murcia. En tal sentido, se realizó una investigación cuantitativa no experimental de corte descriptivo e inferencial, empleando dos cuestionarios, en el que, han participado un total de 823 familias y 150 docentes. Los resultados arrojan niveles muy bajos de participación de los progenitores en el Consejo Escolar, y en la asociación de madres y padres (AMPA). No obstante, se detectan mejoras significativas en cuanto a una mayor contribución de los progenitores como supervisar y controlar las tareas escolares, apoyarles en la organización del tiempo de estudio e informarse sobre la asistencia regular de los hijos e hijas a clase.

**Palabras clave:**

Participación, contribución, comunicación, familias migrantes, profesorado, centro escolar.

## Introduction

It is not difficult to confirm clear evidences of encounters and misunderstandings associated to migrant families' participation on school context (Carrasco, Páimes and Bertran, 2009) on different educational stages of the student training process. Although these families' journey in Spanish educational system does not exceed three decades. There are numerous studies that warn about the low participation of migrant parents at school dynamics (Bolívar, 2006; Egido, 2015; Fernández, 2007; Gomariz, Martínez-Segura, Parra, 2019; Hernández Prados y Alcántara, 2016; Llevot and Bernand, 2015; Martín y Gairín, 2007; Rey, 2006). In this sense, it is necessary to clarify that school is a direct reference point for inclusion needs of these parents, in order to promote their participation and involvement at school life (Priegue, 2009), while recognising the limitations of these families and educational centres, and thus facing this new challenge that both educational institutions require for their mutual adaptation on a road to be built.

In the light of all that, despite migrant parents' interest on certain resources, such as individual meetings and contribution on certain educational aspects, the involvement of these is still lower than the native ones (Lozano, Alcaraz and Colás, 2013). This difference is due to one of the most cited limitations in various researches that has to do with the language difficulties of non-Spanish-speaking migrant parents, something that obviously impedes understanding and participating at different resources, such as the activities of AMPAs (School Associations of Parents) and School Council (Santos Rego and Lorenzo, 2009). In this regard, Garreta (2008) argues that migrant families and schools emerge as two distinct scenarios that are distanced and away from each other, and sometimes perceived as mutually conflicting, from perspectives of threat and intrusion, something that produces their scare presence around different channels of participation existing at school. This relationship is characterized by the unidirectional imbalance of power, which does not allow parents to take advantage of opportunities for action, as active collaborators and co-managers of daughters and sons' formative process (Ceballos and Saiz, 2019).

In such a precarious situation, it cannot be surprising that native parents know their children's educational centre much better, against migrant families whose ignorance is much more palpable in this sense (Hernández Prados, Gomariz, Parra and García Sanz, 2016). This may be damaging the contribution of these "new" families, minimizing the impact on their children's educational improvement. In summary, we would say that immersing it the life of the centre implies knowing and deepening at different school participation and management structures and organs, with the aim of channelling a genuine contribution from these migrant parents, and not focusing contributions solely on specific actions.

For that purpose, the general objective of this research was to analyse the participation degree of migrant families at school, as well as their contribution to their children's educational process, in preferential pre-school education and elementary schools in Región de Murcia. In order to achieve this objective, the following specific objectives are proposed:

1. To know the participation degree of migrant families, as well as faculty's behaviour to promote knowledge and parents' involvement in the life of the centre.
2. To specify migrant families' contribution at teaching-learning process of their sons and daughters.

## Methodology

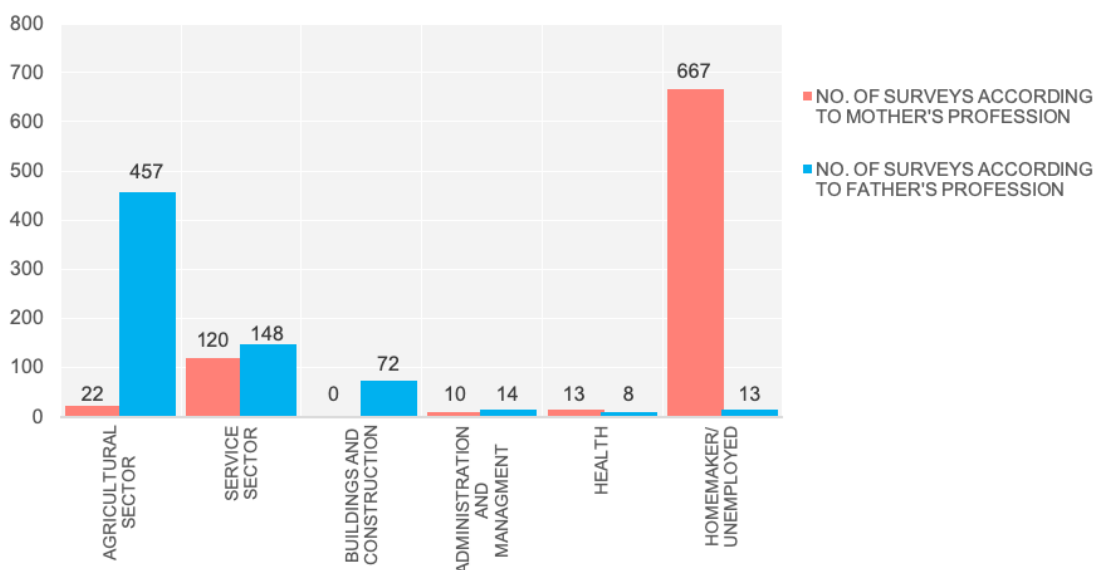
Among different analysis strategies used in education and social research, we opted for a non-experimental quantitative design with descriptive, inferential and transversal cut, using the survey method which was materialized in questionnaires.

### 2.1. Sample

This study included the participation of 823 migrant parents and 150 teachers belonging to preferential pre-school and elementary education centres in Región de Murcia. These centres have been called preferential attention by the Directorate General for Attention to Diversity and Educational Quality of the Ministry of Education and Sport of Spain, as they meet four significant percentages as a minimum, with the following characteristics or requirements: students with educational compensation needs, students with canteen aid, students with aid for books, annual absenteeism rate, repeating students, and teachers without final destination at public school. The sample has been made up of 10 educational centres, out the 15 qualified for preferential attention, as they are only the ones that have migrant students in their classrooms. Regarding families' profile that responded to this survey, it can be synthesized in the following characteristics at the level of work activity:

Table 1.

Parents' professional activity

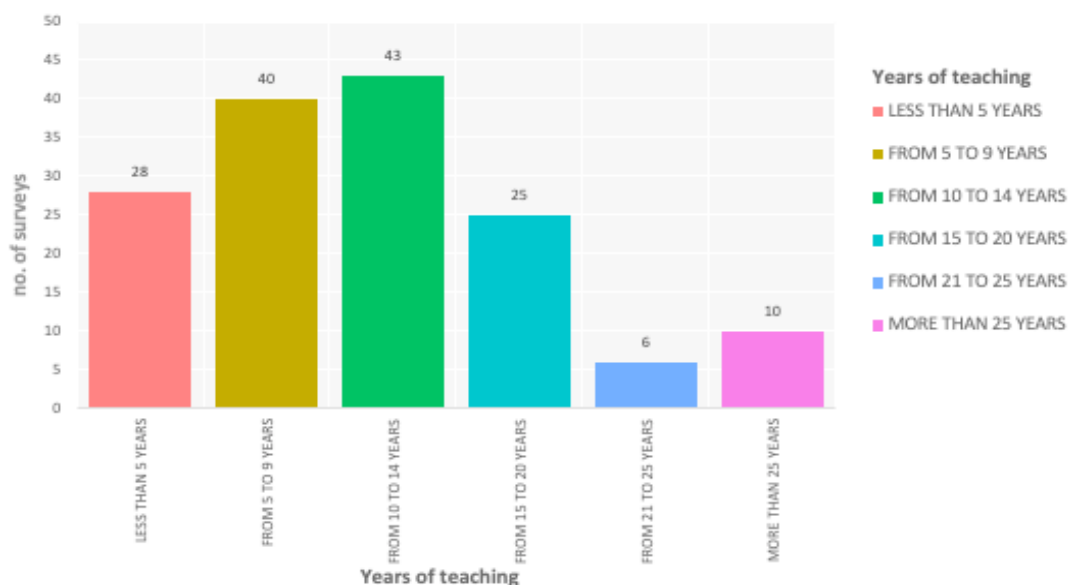


Most mothers are homemaker and unemployed women (667), service sector (120), agricultural sector (22), health sector (13), and finally, professional sector of administration and management (10). With regard to fathers' profession, the agricultural sector leads men's work (457), services sector (148), homemaker and the unemployed (133), building and construction (72), professional sector of administration and management (14), and finally, health sector (8).

With regard to participating faculty profile at professional experience level, it can be summarised in the characteristics detailed below:

Table 2.

Participants' teaching experience



In Table 2 highlights a group of teachers that accumulated between 10 and 14 years of experience (43), between 5 and 9 years of professional teaching career (40), less than 5 years (28), between 15 and 20 years of professional experience (23), and, to conclude, there are two more groups that have more than 25 years of experience (10), along with those who have between 21 and 25 years (6).

## **2.2. Instruments**

In order to investigate the matter, subject of the study, data were collected through two versions of questionnaires, one for migrant parents and the other for teachers, previously designed and validated by Gomariz, Parra, García Sanz, Hernández Prados and Pérez Cobacho (2008). After analysing the original instruments, it was decided to eliminate some items and add others, following the guidelines of 8 experts, of which three professors belonged to Department of Education of Universidad de Murcia and five teachers who teach in centres of preferential attention, object of our study. In this sense, in the present contribution, a total of 18 items were analysed, 10 belong to the dimension linked to migrant families' participation at the school, as well as teachers' behaviour to encourage their involvement at school life, and 8 items are related to migrant families contribution scope at children's teaching-learning process.

To assess the reliability level, we use Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency method. Once this coefficient was applied to the results, we obtained an excellent value (.911) at families' questionnaire, which guarantees compliance with Darren's criteria (2011). Although in reliability of the first-dimension block, the value obtained ( $p=.776$ ), and of the second-dimension block the value obtained ( $p=.821$ ), confirming the reliability between medium high and high, being above 0.7. Likewise, teaching's questionnaire has a high average value in global level (.825), although the reliability of the first-dimension block was obtained a high average value (.723).

## **2.3. Procedure**

Once instrument preparation was completed, the management teams' involvement of the selected schools was requested, which has been fundamental for research development, which sent us teachers' institutional emails, as well as the initial contacts with the families. In addition, the questionnaires were hand-delivered to the parents at the schools, after having provided them with information on the purpose of the research, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality about the ongoing process. As for teachers, the selection criteria for them were defined by derivation from families, assuring in the same way, the confidentiality of the procedure results, and with previous delivery of an explanatory document of the study objectives. For both groups, they were asked to complete the surveys in a reasonable time.

## **2.4. Data analysis**

All information was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 2.24. Then, we conducted a descriptive statistical study (percentages, means and standard deviations) as the nonparametric inferential to compare the differences between

opinions of both participant groups through the Mann-Whitney U test adopting the statistical significance level of  $p \leq .05$ . Specifically, descriptive and inferential statistical tests have been applied to objective 1 in order to know the participation degree of migrant families, as well as faculty's behaviour to promote knowledge and parents' involvement in the life of the centre. However, in objective 2, only descriptive statistics tests have been applied, since the same information is not compared to the two participating groups, but rather it is a question of specifying migrant families' contribution at their teaching-learning process.

## 2.5. Results

Objective 1. *To know participation degree of migrant families, as well as faculty's behaviour to promote the knowledge and the involvement of parents at school life.*

Table 3 details the descriptive statistics and the statistical significance referring to the participation degree of migrant parents at educational centres considering family and teachers responses.

Table 3.

*Descriptive statistics and statistical significance. Participation degree of migrant families in educational centres*

ITEM	FAMILY		M	Sd	Significance Statistics
	TEACHER	QUESTIONS			
1.1	F	I am member of School Council in the school where my child studies	1.65	1.204	.000
	T	Some parents of my students are members of the centre School Council	2.49	1.340	
1.2	F	I am member of AMPA (School Association of Parents)	1.81	1.372	.000
	T	The parents of my students belong to AMPA (School Association of Parents) of the centre	2.27	1.203	
1.3	F	I participate in school activities and/or extracurricular activities which are organized by the centre	2.46	1.390	.116
	T	Parents of my students participate at school activities and/or extracurricular activities organized by the centre	2.53	.967	
1.4	F	I attend to workshops and/or training activities for parents when they are organized at the centre	2.48	1.407	.821
	T	Parents of my students attend to workshops and training activities for parents when they are organized at the centre	2.33	.973	
1.5	F	I participate in assemblies organized by the centre, class assemblies, group meetings, etc.	2.75	1.434	.051
	T	Parents of my students participate in the assemblies organized by the centre, class assemblies, group meetings, etc.	2.41	.844	

Interpreting the results from higher to lower mean scores, as can be seen in Table 3, in relation to families' participation as members of AMPA, parents assign values close to very low (item F.1.2; M=1.81), and teachers give low scores in this respect (item P.1.2; M=2.27). With regard to whether some parents are School Council members indicate values close to very low (item F.1.1; M=1.65), and teachers indicate medium-low scores (item P.1.1; M=2.49).

As regards statistical significance, after applying Mann Whitney's U test, as can be seen in Table 3, in the first two items the differences between the two groups had significant results except for those referred to: item 1.4 ( $p=.821$ ): *I attend to workshops and/or training activities for parents when they are organized in the centre*; the one referred to item 1.3. ( $p=.116$ ): *I participate in school activities and or extracurricular activities organized by the centre*; the one referred to item 1.5 ( $p=.051$ ): *I participate in assemblies organized by the centre, class assemblies, group meetings, etc.*

Objective 2. *To specify migrant families' contribution at teaching learning process of their children.*

Next, Table 4 shows descriptive statistics referring to migrant parents' contribution at teaching-learning process of their sons and daughters, where only family responses are analysed.

Table 4.

*Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) referred to migrant families' contribution at teaching-learning process of their children*

ITEM	FAMILY	QUESTIONS	M	Sd
2.1	F	I talk to my child about his/her studies	4.15	1.104
2.2	F	I supervise and control my child's homework at home	4.16	.962
2.3	F	I help my son in his/her study time organization	4.07	1.039
2.4	F	I keep informed about my child's regular attendance at class	4.48	.795
2.5	F	I am aware that truancy can have negative consequences for my child's school efficiency	4.32	.922
2.6	F	I encourage cultural activities in my family such as cinema, theatre, museums, readings, trips, concerts, exhibitions, etc.	3.50	1.238
2.7	F	I get information about the type of cultural or leisure activities that my child carries out (type of film, stage play, readings, etc.)	3.63	1.271
2.8	F	I support extracurricular or complementary activities of my child such as languages, computers, music, dance, sports, academies, etc.	3.77	1.294

Interpreting the results from higher to lower mean scores, as can be seen in Table 4, with regard to whether parents are kept informed about their children's regular attendance at school, they indicate values close to very high (item F.2.4.; M=4.48). With respect to whether they are aware that school absenteeism may have negative consequences on their school performance, high values are found (item F.2.5.; M=4.32).

In terms of supervision and control children's homework at home high values are obtained (item F.2.2.; M=4.16), very similar when it comes to maintaining communication with their children about their studies (item F.2.1.; M=4.15). With regard to the help, they provide on the organization of their children's study time, high scores appear (item F.2.3.; M=4.07).

When extracurricular or complementary activities such as languages, computers, music, dance, sports, academies, etc. are realized, values close to high are granted (item F.2.8.; M=3.77). In relation to whether parents are informed about the type of cultural or leisure activities carried out by their children, medium-high scores are considered (item F.2.7.; M=3.63). Finally, in terms of encouraging the realization of same activities in family, such as cinema, theatre, museums, readings, trips, concerts, exhibition, etc., medium-high values also appear (item F.2.6.; M=3.50).

## Discussion and Conclusions

This work first objective was to know about participation degree of migrant families, as well as faculty's behaviour to promote knowledge, and parents' involvement at school life. On a global level, the trend regarding parents participation at educational centres is regular, deficient or very deficient according to the recognition of a significant number of families due to the lack of time, information, training and sometimes trust, as indicated by Martín Gairín (2007) in their study that reflects on philosophy and sense of social participation of families at schools in Castilla-La Mancha.

On the one hand, it should be noted that native parents participate scant o regularly in school life, while migrant families do not even manage to do it with scant assiduity. On the other hand, authors such as Domínguez and Pino (2009), in their study, focused on pre-school and elementary education, analysed conceptual models that teachers and families have on their participation, as well as factors that determine it that qualify the evidence regarding low motivation of both teachers and families. Finally, they highlight the lack of knowledge of the functions that families may perform distrust, disinterest, interference fear and lack of training; providing that there is participation understood as help or collaboration, and not as participation in experiences or activities.

In the same vein, authors such as Andrés and Giró (2016) who analyse participating situation in Spain, starting from the evolution of educational legislation and counting on the results of an extensive qualitative research carried out at educational centres in Cataluña, Aragón, Islas Baleares and La Rioja that reveals in their results the scarce participation and involvement of migrant families on school dynamics. Other aspects evident in this study are participation value of families at schools, transparency, in sense that families have as much information as possible about what happens at the centre and affects their children.



Furthermore, other elements are included in other research, such as the individualized vision that parents present regarding to participation, understood in terms of children's particular interests (Garreta, 2010; Larrosa, 2009). All this is simulated by results produced by educational policies to foster participation which have been limited and reduced, not achieving the proposed objectives (Egido, 2015; Santa Cruz and Olmedo, 2011).

Facts that have been more evident at results found in our study, through the Mann-Whitney test, which shows worse assessments in relation to whether some are School Council members, with very low scores assigned by the own parents and low scores indicated by teachers. These data are also corroborated by other research (Bolívar, 2006; Fernández, 2007; Martín and Gairín, 2007), which confirms that information is regularly and poorly transmitted at School Council, as well as in AMPAs, where the information is scarce and the participation is insignificant, despite the fact that management teams consider that the aspects dealt with in both communication channels which are adequate or very appropriate.

Along same lines, other authors confirm (Gomariz, Parra, García Sanz, Hernández Prados and Pérez Cobacho, 2008; Vallespir, Rincón and Morey, 2016), that after analysing perception and assessment of families participation, with respect to their involvement at School Councils of educational centres, they warn that participation levels in this organ are low or even nil. It must be taken into account that many families are unaware of the process to follow in order to obtain a representative position in this participation way. They also add that lack of transparency and excessive teachers' representation does not facilitate the approach to issues linked to their interests, and they resist their participation at voting time, expressing on the contrary their desire to collaborate in the design and the elaboration of proposals. Teachers, for their part, allude to the fact that an extended comment on the scant family participation, arguing also that parents know neither the existence nor the function of this organ.

Worse and insufficient rating appear again, in this case, with respect to families' participation as members of AMPA, where families again indicate very low scores and teachers once again give low ratings. Even though the results of the research carried out by Llevot and Bernard (2015), show that the number of families that are registered in AMPA is high, the representativeness is insufficient, since they are small groups, due to the scarce resources available in this association, together with the fact that the teaching staff shows scant or no collaboration, which makes difficult the design and implementation of activities proposed by these associations (Feito, 2007); Garreta, 2010).

In the same line of argument, Garreta's (2008a) results support our own, in term of the low representation of families in AMPA. Similar data appear in other studies (Kňahnsky, 2003; Lozano, Alcaraz and Colás, 2013) that confirm in AMPAs, families participate scant or nothing, adding that there is a greater number of families that claim to participate a bit in AMPA, in relation to native families. Other revelations (Hernández Prados et al. 2016) show that the percentage of families that claim to participate much in this association is significantly lower on migrant families than in autochthonous families, despite the fact that both parties are registered in this way of participation.

Likewise, it should be remembered that there are no statistically significant differences on parents' participation at school activities and/or extracurricular ones, organized by the school, as well as in attendance at workshops and training activities when they are carried out from that institution, and families' participation in assemblies. In this sense, parents' involvement in these activities is among their strength, although the figure falls when it comes to attendance at workshops and activities aimed at parents, according to Llevot and Bernand (2015) and González (2007). Furthermore, Lozano, Alcaraz and Colás (2013), point out that families' participation in extracurricular activities organized at the centre is scarce, highlighting the difference between autochthonous and foreign families, existing in this sense, a greater group of foreign families that participates scant in extracurricular activities, in comparison with autochthonous families' group that also recognises that it participates scant.

Furthermore, contribution of various studies (Rey, 2006; Hernández Prados et al., 2016) indicate that groups are small, when it comes to parent's schools such as training workshops, something that corroborates the results obtained in our research that show low values expressed by families and teachers in this regard. Similar data reveal other studies (Fagan, 2013; Garreta, 2015) in relation to the opinion of families' majority who respond that they participate somewhat or scant when the school in which their children are enrolled convenes assemblies or informative meetings, and even less when it is about native parents. Results that we consider endorse those collected in our research in migrant families where low scores are collected by both participating groups.

By the way of conclusion, it should be pointed out that the scarce or non-existent participation of parents as members of School Council and AMPA is palpable, bearing in mind that this disinterest distances parents from the internal reality of the educational centre where their own children are enrolled at school, despite the absence of significant differences when it comes to informing parents about school activities and extracurricular activities development, attendance at workshops and/or training activities for parents, as well as participation in assemblies and group meetings, there is also no relevant interest in participation on these activities, both recreational and formative.

This study has shown, as stated above, that information is a prior step that acts as a common thread towards participation, and that it constitutes both a right and a duty that implies and enrichment of all agents involved in education. For this reason, it is considered a priority to establish and develop initiatives to promote participation in different learning and communication spaces. It should be pointed out that formal and informal participation, or full or partial participation of parents in these bodies and activities, would be an added value of pedagogical nature that contributes to the construction of a school for everybody.

The second objective of this work was to specify migrant families' contribution at teaching-learning process of their children, in which only parents' opinions have been collect. In general terms, results obtained from descriptive statistics indicate high values in relation to this contribution. If we focus on whether parents communicate with their children about their studies, better ratings appear. Results that go in same line as Georges' (2014) recommendations, when he points out that families' permanent interest in their sons and

daughters' studies is an essential aspect to maximize parents' contribution, in relation to students' teaching-learning process.

Similarly, high ratings are obtained in relation to children's supervision and control in their homework assignments. Data that do not coincide with several studies (Hernández Prados, et al., 2016; González, 2007), in which it is shown that autochthonous parents contribute as a great deal from home to their children's learning, as opposed to migrant families that do so at somewhat lower level. Along same lines, authors such as Tardif, Archambault, Lafantasia, Odile and Baradhy (2018), warn that conversations between families and children about studies are not regular, and that their involvement in learning from home is very scarce in general.

From this perspective, the longitudinal study by Colás and Contreras (2013), which analyses parents' response to participation offer made by elementary schools, as well as conceptions that promote families' collaboration with the centre, confirms that the trend towards this contribution is positive; However, it does not reach levels desired by the educational community. The results show that parents' communication and contribution on school tasks is higher than their participation and their involvement at educational community offers. This leads to a cultural profile emergence that assumes education from a perspective of individual responsibility, rather than from the perspective of collaboration or participation. Furthermore, another study affirms that parents' contribution increases when there is greater interest on communication about children's studies and education, however, this implication decreases when there is no availability of time for a greater dedication (Llevot and Bernand 2015).

Other research carried out at secondary schools (Santos, Godás and Lorenzo, 2016) to analyse parents' involvement to improve their children's academic efficiency before and after the implementation of a family education programme that reveals that transmitting clear, coherent and compact lines of action to the participating parents, such as direct behavioural strategies, are of great help to improve to their contribution to children's school task organisation.

Having said this, it should be pointed out that high values are once again appearing in terms of the help provided by parents in their children's study time organization. Data that corroborate the Akkari and Changkakoti's (2009) opinion, when they affirm that the efficient organization of study time with parents is often the result of fluid communication between parents and children about its planning.

Another key aspect with high values is whether parents are kept informed about their children's regular school attendance. In this sense, it is stated that parents' contribution to alleviate school disengagement and abandonment is closely linked to their concern about their children's regular attendance at school and, therefore, their permanence at school system (González, 2015; Schmitt and Kleine, 2010). We identify scores similar to the previous ones, in terms of whether families are aware that absenteeism can have negative consequences in their school efficiency. From this perspective, we collect the contributions of Valle et al. (2015), which confirm families' growing interest on their children's attendance to class is something habitual; however, there is a generalized lack of knowledge to carry

out a prevention and monitoring process of school absenteeism, when their children begin to miss class without justification.

The following are medium-high scores in relation to promoting family cultural activities, such as cinema, theatre, museums, readings, trips, concerts, exhibitions, etc. Linked opinions are obtained in other works (Gil, 2014; Gutiérrez, 2009), which comment on the importance of developing activities at family nucleus, as well as identifying benefits of the same for a family cohabitation improvement. Once again, medium-high values are observed when it comes to informing parents about the type of cultural or leisure activities and it is a question of carrying out extracurricular or complementary activities such as languages, computing, music, dance, sports, academies, etc. Facts that coincide with other studies (Collet, Besalú, Feu and Tort, 2014; Fajardo, Maestre, Felipe, León and Polo, 2017; Hernández Prados et al., 2016) that show that informing oneself about different activities alternatives is a complement to school and a more integral learning vehicle.

In conclusion, it is clear that there have been very significant improvements in the greater contribution of parents, as recognised by the own families. Particularly when it comes to communicating with children about their studies, supervising and controlling schoolwork, supporting them to organize their study time, learning about their children's regular attendance at school, as well as knowing absenteeism consequences on school efficiency. In the same way, children's interest and support in realization of family cultural activities, inside and outside the school environment, and to be informed about the type of cultural or leisure activities that children usually carry out, appear as sufficient but improvable aspects.

In spite of these significant advances, regarding parent's contribution, it will be necessary to design and implement actions that, in our opinion, are oriented towards understanding the contribution conception in children's teaching-learning process. Understanding this as an active and permanent exercise of decision making on family part, from the own families' dynamic, in consonance with the different learning strategies provided by the advice and teachers' guidance.

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