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School and foreign-origin families. Channels and barriers to communication in primary education

Escuela y familias de origen extranjero. Canales y barreras a la comunicación en la educación primaria

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ABSTRACT

Communication between families and professionals is a relevant issue in the family-school relationship and can be further explored in order to understand better its dynamics, strengths and limitations. Previous studies indicate that it is an important issue for developing the democratisation of schools and the involvement of families, as well as improving their satisfaction with the school. It also has a positive influence on teachers and pupils. Based on the idea that fluid and bidirectional communication is positive, a study was designed and carried out with a quantitative perspective. Specifically, a telephone survey for which a questionnaire was designed and an empirical study was carried out to obtain a sample (n) of 1730 representatives of management teams in Spanish primary schools. The sample was selected with a proportional distribution to the population (N)

of schools in each Spanish province and the empirical work was carried out during the school year 2019-2020. The survey is focused on knowing the communication channels used, especially with families of foreign origin, and the existing barriers to improve communication. The conclusions indicate the use of multiple communication channels and that according to foreign origin families, the support communication channels acquire relevance. From the results, the authors conclude that schools need to have communication plans or strategies adapted to the profile of their families and overcome the phase of using support channels to promote richer communication actions with foreign origin families.

Keywords: communication, families of foreign origin, schools, primary education, Spain.

RESUMEN

La comunicación entre familias y profesionales es una temática relevante en la relación familia-escuela y en la que se puede seguir profundizando para conocer mejor sus dinámicas, fortalezas y limitaciones. Estudios previos indican que es un tema importante para desarrollar la democratización de los centros escolares y la implicación de las familias, así como mejorar la satisfacción que tienen éstas últimas respecto el centro escolar. Además de que influye positivamente en el profesorado y en el alumnado. Desde este planteamiento de que una comunicación fluida y bidireccional es positiva se diseñó y realizó un estudio con perspectiva cuantitativa. Concretamente, una encuesta telefónica para la que se diseñó un cuestionario y un trabajo empírico que permitió la obtención de una muestra (n) de 1730 representantes de equipos directivos de centros escolares de educación primaria españoles. La muestra fue seleccionada con una distribución proporcional a la población (N) de centros escolares existentes en cada provincia española y el trabajo empírico se realizó durante el curso escolar 2019-2020. La encuesta se ha centrado en conocer los canales de comunicación usados, especialmente con las familias de origen extranjero, y las barreras existentes para que ésta sea mejor. Las conclusiones apuntan al uso de múltiples canales de comunicación y que respecto a las familias de origen extranjero adquieren relevancia los canales de comunicación *de apoyo*. De los resultados los autores concluyen la necesidad de que las escuelas tengan planes o estrategias de comunicación adaptados al perfil de sus familias y que superen la fase de uso de canales de apoyo para potenciar acciones comunicativas más *ricas* con las familias de origen extranjero.

Palabras clave: comunicación, familias de origen extranjero, escuelas, educación primaria, España

INTRODUCTION

The involvement of families in the education of their children is considered increasingly relevant and, in this sense, this is a European action to promote the democratisation of education, as well as to improve the academic processes of pupils, their attitudes toward schools and educational success

(Cankaya et al., 2015; European Parliament, 2020). This proposal undoubtedly arises from the amount of academic literature that points to the relevance of family involvement in schooling due to its positive effects for pupils, families, teachers and school governance. Involvement increases the social development of pupils and the probability that they will progress in their learning and attitudes (Epstein, 1995, 2001; Grant & Ray; 2013; Jeynes, 2011). Other studies show the benefits obtained by families who learn how to assert themselves and develop specific skills related to school, the classroom, and, in general, the schooling of their children (Olmsted, 1991). They understand better how to work and to develop more positive attitudes towards the school and teachers (Grant & Ray, 2013). Teachers also obtain benefits, since this provides them with greater knowledge of the families and their expectations and attitudes, in addition to facilitating their work (Grant & Ray, 2013) and increasing the feeling of greater efficacy and personal satisfaction (Kuusimäki et al., 2019; Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2008). The governance of the school also benefits, since being an expression of democratisation, it enriches the objectives and improves its functioning (Darling-Harmmond et al., 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2000), as well as the quality of the schools (Grant & Ray, 2013). For all these reasons, actions and programmes that favour the relationship and involvement of families should be implemented, and which should be evaluated and reviewed (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019) to be improved, in order to recognise and value their importance more.

The concept of family involvement is multidimensional and includes both, home and school, as well as the relationship between the two. In fact, many different components of involvement have been identified. Epstein (1995) distinguishes between six types of activities: parenting, communication, learning at home, volunteering, decision making, and community connections. What is done by the families at home and the degree of their involvement in the school are both strongly marked by the information that circulates between the two and which is usually directed or controlled from the school institution, the party that has more power in the relationship. An important component of the relationship is communication and how its various possible modes are implemented and combined (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Rodríguez-Herrera, 2021; Thompson & Mazer, 2012). Effective communication is essential to creating strong home-school partnerships (Gubbins & Otero, 2020) and an opportunity to support student learning (Graham-Clay, 2005). In this regard, if the school had made communication a part of the school culture, families would have learned to become active-positive partners (Palts & Harro-Loit, 2015).

Families should receive information and guidance on the importance of involvement to improve the academic success and satisfaction of their children (Cárcamo & Jarpa-Arriaga, 2021; Sahin, 2019). If the professionals are receptive

to the messages that arrive from the families (concerns, opinions, expectations, etc.), true communication is generated which overcomes the usual one-way messages between two institutions with an imbalance of power in the relationship (Harris & Goodall, 2008).

In the case of foreign-origin families, the imbalance in the communication (and the relationship) between the professionals in the school and the families is more marked. The latter perceive this and are inferiorised by it, some more than others, (Garreta, 2016) and more so in some situations (for example, the closure of schools due to COVID made it more difficult for disadvantaged families to adapt, Spear et al. 2021). For these families, information in both directions and frequent communication are just as, or more, relevant than for the rest, since they are conditioned by a lack of information about the school system, the language barrier, limited teacher training in this field or the underuse of available resources (Anthony-Newman, 2020). In fact, there are barriers and/or difficulties in establishing fluid communication and involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). These are barriers or difficulties related to the families (beliefs about involvement, life context, perceptions about the invitations they receive from the school and for the classroom), the pupils (age, learning difficulties, talent, etc.), relational (agenda, language used) and social (historical, demographic, political and economic issues).

Schools and teaching teams should place more value on the role of communication and rethink it. They should detect the barriers in dealing with families in their school and classroom and try to eliminate these hurdles with the use of a range of communication strategies, especially with minority groups (Conus & Fahrni, 2019), and without distancing families from the school in general, and its power structures in particular (Saltmarsh & McPherson, 2019). Maintaining closeness generates more trust and communication, and in this, it is important to consider all the situations and moments, from the first contact, registration (Evans, et al., 2019), until the end of the studies, as well as to assess the roles of the different professionals. However, it is true that teachers have a key role in improving involvement (Yulianti et al., 2020) and communication.

In Spanish research, there are also references to the importance of good communication and that this is a good indicator of how existing relationships work in schools (Andrés & Giró, 2020). In this sense, it is pointed out that its relevance has not been valued and that the devices and channels available to the schools are not used (Cantón & García, 2012) to generate communication (not information in a single direction) taking advantage of all the resources, devices and situations (García, et al., 2010). Schools have different traditional and technological, individual and group channels (Garreta & Macia, 2017; Snell et al., 2020) and strategies that can be used taking into consideration the diversity of the socio-geographical-family situations of the students (Hernández et al., 2016).

Research in Spain indicates that communication must be based on mutual trust and good relationships between families and teachers, and for this to happen, transparency and the incorporation of an emotional charge are essential (Vingut & Bertran, 2015). To promote group awareness and the identification of families with the centre, they must have two-way communication channels that allow for discussion and negotiation (López et al., 2004). However, in practice, the conclusion is that informative models with little participation are frequent and that the challenge is to create horizontal and interactive communication (Palomares, 2015). If this communication is to be efficient, fluid and bidirectional (informative travelling in both directions and communicative), and even with a positive emotional charge, various barriers that make it difficult or even impossible to develop must be overcome. These are linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic and institutional (Garreta 2012; Hernandez et al., 2016).

Within this framework, this text aims to address two objectives: to define and analyse the communication channels used (and specifically, those aimed at foreign-origin families) by primary schools in Spain and to detect the main barriers to more and better communication. These targets are part of broader research that seeks to analyse the discourses and practices regarding cultural diversity in Spanish primary schools. Communication is one of the topics that was gone into in depth in this research.

METHODOLOGY

Given these objectives, a quantitative research methodology was chosen, specifically the design of a survey and a questionnaire aimed at representatives of management teams in primary schools throughout Spain. The sample, the data collection instrument and the procedure followed are presented below.

Sample

The population the study focuses on are the schools that provide primary education (from ages 6 to 12) in Spain. Given that it is intended to carry out an analysis of how schools work, the decision was made that the best profile of participants is the people who are very knowledgeable about how schools work, that is, members of management teams with years of experience in the same centre (having worked for at least 5 years in the school was chosen as the sample point). The sample (n) was calculated taking the lists of centres from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (2018-2019 academic year) as a starting point. The sample, with a confiden-ce level of 95.5% in the most unfavourable case (p = q = 50%), with a statistical error of ±2.25%, consisted of 1730 schools. This sample (n) was compiled proportionally according to the distribution of the population from a random number table and, therefore, randomly selected. However, it was checked that

the sample represented the territorial distribution into provinces and within this, the ownership of the schools —applied to the aforementioned lists of educational centres. The sample calcula-tion with low statistical error and the process followed for the selection of sample points confer high external validity to the survey. More specifically, 79.2% of those who responded to the questionnaire were from publicly owned centres; 2.5%, from private without concert and 18.3%, private with concert. The following table shows the position of the interviewees, the gender and years of teaching experience in the school that were chosen as the sample points.

Table 1
Profile of position, gender and teaching experience in the current school

Position of the interviewee	%
Director	57.2
Head of studies	26.0
Secretary	13.4
Others	2.2
Not provided	1.3
Gender	**%**
Male	34.3
Female	63.1
Not provided	2.7
Years teaching in the current school	**%**
Up to 15	68.2
From 16 to 25	21.6
Over 25	8.8
Don't know/not provided	1.3
Average	13.06
Typical deviation	8.28

Instrument

The instrument used to collect the information, that is, the questionnaire, was designed by the project's research team from a previous theoretical-empirical phase. Specifically, from a theoretical point of view, beyond delving into the results of research carried out on the subject on the international and Spanish levels, the discourses and policies of the educational administrations (ministerial and regional)

were analysed based on published documentation and also what was available on the respective web pages. This, plus a phase of documentary interviews (two in each autonomous community or city) with representatives of the educational administrations, made it possible to understand the different realities and design an appropriate information collection instrument applicable to primary schools in a range of territories and under different administrations. The questionnaire was compiled with various types of question: open, closed, single or multiple choice. Specifically, the questions presented and analysed in this text are all open-ended and multiple with the intention that the respondent would have maximum freedom and not respond to the suggestion of the interviewer. Before applying the instrument, it was validated (content validation) by the team's 16 researchers, plus three experts with a profile in psycho-pedagogy and sociology (a total of 19 people), to assess and review the questions and their degree of relevance to the objectives. Specifically, the quality, pertinence to the construct to be measured and relevance of each question were assessed. Regarding the questions that are analysed in this text, the assessment was that they were very adequate to respond to the objectives set. Subsequently, this was tested by giving the questionnaire to 35 people who corresponded to the profile of the respondent from different provinces and ownership of schools to verify the correct understanding, structure and order of questions. This trial verified the consistency and understanding of the questions and after being reviewed, it was applied to the respondents. Furthermore, the reliability of the questionnaire is high, especially in the questions analysed, given that it had already been applied in previous studies in specific Autonomous Communities (Garreta, 2003; 2008; 2015) with similar results. It was only improved with the steps previously commented.

Procedure

The empirical work was carried out through telephone surveys (from the 1st of October, 2019 to the 31st of January 31, 2020), since it was easy to access this population and obtain responses this way, as there are lists of schools in the educational administrations and doing the empirical work by telephone did not affect the results. The interviewers, with previous experience in telephone surveys, were trained in relation to the objectives, design and selection of the sample from lists and randomness, the formulation and annotation of responses, etc. Once the field work had been completed, all responses that had not been previously processed were coded and tabulated. It should be born in mind that when dealing with open questions without suggestion, a diversity of answers appears. These responses were grouped by the research team as presented below. It was also important, since it was a possible multiple response, that the person who answered the survey had enough time and the option of multiple responses. Subsequently,

the statistical analysis was performed using the Pulse Train Star programme, with which univariate and bivariate analyses were performed and statistical significance tests were applied (T test of proportions at 95%). At all times, the participation of the respondents was voluntary and their anonymity was guaranteed.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The survey made it possible to define the actions carried out by schools to communicate with families, the specific actions with families of foreign-origin and the barriers that they detect with respect to the latter.

Family-school communication

The answers given to the question "What actions are you carrying out to communicate with families in primary education?", with no conditioned response and the possibility of multiple answers, were grouped according to whether they were rich, poor channels, technological information and communication resources (ICT) or if they were support channels. Rich and poor channels derive from the Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986; in Spain Macia, 2016, 2018), which differentiates between two major types of channels: rich channels, very effective in communicating important messages, and those channels called poor, whose content should be limited to issues of little importance. For Macia, in this theory, the richness of a medium is determined by four variables: 1) its ability to allow immediate feedback; 2) its ability to convey visual messages and other cues beyond verbal communication; 3) the ability to use language to help explain an idea, and 4) the ability to personalise a message. Thus, following this theory, face-to-face messages (whether in interviews or informal contacts) and telephone calls would be the most appropriate channels to communicate complex messages, while e-mails or the diary, for example, would be effective for less relevant issues.

Following this classification, rich channels are the most frequently used in primary schools (84.6% mention them), closely followed by ICT resources (80.1%) and poor communication channels (77.7 %). The least used are support channels (4.6%). Of course, as explained below, the support channels are more used in the centres with a greater presence of pupils of foreign origin. The rich channels mentioned were individual interviews with families (69.9% mentioned these), telephone calls (33.8%), informal direct contact, for example, at the entrance and exit of the school (26.5%) and through the parent delegates in the classroom (2.7%). On the other hand, among the poor channels were the use of the school diary (44.2%), group informative meetings

Table 2

Specific actions carried out to communicate with families

			% of foreign-origin pupils in the school			
	TOTAL	None	Up to 5%	From 6 to 20%	From 21 to 50%	Over 50%
Rich communication channels	84.6	87.4	83.9	85.6	79.6	90.5
Individual interviews	69.9	68.4	70.2	70.6	65.8	79.0
Informal communication at the entrance and exit	26.5	42.3	28.8	21.8	22.5	21.0
Telephone call	33.8	34.4	38.4	30.2	32.4	34.3
Parent delegates in the class	2.7	0.9	4.2	2.5	1.8	1.9
Poor communication channels	77.7	68.8	75.4	80.3	80.3	85.7
School diary	44.2	35.3	46.6	46.4	42.6	41.0
Bulletins and circulars	36.6	35.3	32.6	37.2	40.1	46.7
Group meetings	36.9	31.2	40.7	36.4	34.5	39.0
Through the student	5.0	5.6	7.9	3.0	3.9	3.8
Posters	3.4	2.8	4.4	2.1	4.2	3.8
ICT resources	80.1	77.7	84.1	82.1	76.4	63.8
Webs and blogs	27.1	22.8	26.5	28.1	27.8	30.5
Email	26.3	23.3	27.1	28.4	26.1	17.1
School online platform	35.8	34.0	44.7	34.2	30.3	20.0
Mobile applications (i.e. WhatsApp)	34.2	35.8	31.1	35.5	36.6	32.4
Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	3.2	2.8	3.8	3.1	2.5	3.8
Support channels	4.6	1.9	4.4	4.5	6.0	8.6
Non-professional translators	2.4	0.5	2.3	2.1	3.2	6.7
Professional translators	1.2	-	0.6	1.8	1.1	2.9
Other professional (mediators)	1.2	0.9	0.6	1.2	1.8	3.8
Parents' associations	0.9	0.5	1.2	0.8	1.1	1.0
Don't know/not provided	0.3	1.4	0.4			1.0

(36.9%), the distribution of communications and informative circulars from the school (36.6%) and, at a distance, communication through pupils (5%) and information posters in the school itself (3.4%). In reference to ICT resources, the actions implemented by

schools were: the building and use of an online platform (35.8%) or mobile phone applications (34.2%), the creation and dissemination of websites or blogs (27.1%) and the use of email to communicate with families (26.3%). Finally, among the support channels (recall that these were only cited by 4.6% of those surveyed) were non-professional translators (2.4%), professionals (1.2%) and the resort to other mediation professionals (1.2%) and the school parents' association (0.9%).

Communication between foreign-origin families and schools

A second level of analysis makes it possible to identify the specific actions that are implemented, beyond the previous ones aimed at families as a whole, to communicate with foreign-origin families (the free-response question was: "What actions are carried out to communicate with families of foreign origin in primary education?"). Of course, it is necessary to highlight a first response block: the people surveyed who indicated that no specific actions had been designed and carried out (52.7%). This answer decreased in inverse proportion to the presence of foreign-origin students in the schools: The response was 67.2% among those who have up to 5%; 49.1% in those from 6 to 20%; 39.1% for those who have between 21 to 50% of these pupils and 38.1% in those with more than 50%. This question was not asked in schools without pupils with this profile. In summary, as a whole, slightly more than half of respondents indicated that they do not carry out specific actions for their families of foreign origin, but the centres with more pupils with the aforementioned profile carry out more specific communication actions.

The results obtained from those who mentioned specific actions show that the most frequently used are support channels (38.2%). Above all, these are non-professional translators (28.4%), professional translators (13%) and resorting to other mediation professionals (7.1%). Once again, the presence of foreign-origin pupils is statistically relevant, since the support channels are used more often as the presence of these pupils increases: It was 23.4% among those who have up to 5% of these pupils; 40.5% for those from 6 to 20%; 54.9% between 21 and 50% and 52.4% in those with more than 50%. This question was not posed in schools without this student profile. At a distance come specific actions related to the "rich" channels (14.3%, mainly personal interviews, 8.6%; telephone calls, 4%, and informal contact, 2.1%), the "poor" ones (9%, communications and circulars, 6.2%; school agenda, 3.1%, and group meetings, 1.7%) and ICT resources (7.3%), among which the most cited were mobile phone applications (3.9%), online platforms (2.4%), email (1.8%) and websites and blogs with specific features (1.8%).

Table 3

Specifics actions: communicate with foreign-origin families

	TOTAL	None	Up to 5%	From 6 to 20%	From 21 to 50%	Over 50%
			% of foreign-origin pupils in the school			
Rich communication channels	14.3	-	10.4	18.0	13.7	14.3
Individual interviews	8.6	-	6.7	10.1	8.8	9.5
Informal communication at the entrance and exit	2.1	-	1.3	2.6	1.4	4.8
Telephone call	4.0	-	3.3	4.8	3.5	4.8
Parent delegates in the class	0.2	-	-	0.5	-	-
Poor communication channels	9.0	-	6.1	10.4	10.2	12.4
School diary	3.1	-	2.5	3.3	3.5	3.8
Bulletins and circulars	6.2	-	3.6	7.3	7.4	9.5
Group meetings	1.7	-	1.5	1.7	1.8	2.9
Through the student	0.2	-	0.2	-	0.4	1.0
Posters	0.2	-	0.2	0.2	-	1.0
TIC resources	7.3	-	5.8	7.9	7.7	9.5
Webs and blogs	1.8	-	1.5	1.8	1.4	3.8
Email	1.8	-	1.2	2.3	1.8	1.9
School online platform	2.4	-	2.3	2.8	2.1	1.9
Mobile apps (WhatsApp)	3.9	-	2.1	4.5	4.9	6.7
Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	0.2	-	0.4	0.2	-	-
Support Channels	38.2	-	23.4	40.5	54.9	52.4
Non-professional translators	28.4	-	17.5	30.1	40.8	40.0
Professional translators	13.0	-	6.9	13.4	20.1	21.9
Other professionals (mediators)	7.1	-	3.1	8.6	10.2	10.5
Nothing specific for them	52.7	-	67.2	49.1	39.1	38.1
Don't know/not provided	2.0	-	4.4	1.0	-	1.0

The aforementioned actions respond to the communication barriers that are detected in schools. Specifically, the question was asked: "What are the main barriers that hinder good communication between schools and families of foreign origin?" The answers given were grouped to identify the main barriers to better communication with families of foreign origin. The most commonly cited obstacles were linguistic (58.2%), followed at a distance by cultural (18%), socioeconomic (6.3%) and institutional (2.6%) ones. In addition, practically a third (32.6%) indicated that there were no barriers to communication, a response related to the greater or lesser presence of foreign-origin pupils (this response decreased as the presence of this profile of pupils in the school increased). The response among those interviewed in whose school this pupil profile was less than 5% was 45.5%. It was 30.7% among those with between 6 and 20% of these pupils, 20.1% among those with 21% to 50% and 13.3% among those with more than 50%. Schools without the presence of this pupil profile were not considered.

Going into detail, little knowledge or lack of knowledge of the language(s) of communication in and with the school (56.9%) was almost the only language barrier. This mention increased with the greater presence of students of foreign origin. This communication difficulty can be related to the use of support channels, especially professional or non-professional translators and mediators. Then, 18% mentioned cultural barriers. These were specified as the little willingness/interest/involvement of the family (8.8%), followed by them attributing little or less value than expected to the school and the activities done there (6%) and a lack of confidence in the school (3.4%). The most frequently mentioned socioeconomic barriers (6.3%) referred to the fact that families have economic difficulties (3.2%), problems of reconciling family and work (2%) and that families are unstructured (1.5%). Lastly, institutional barriers were little mentioned (2.6%), which leads one to think that the school accepts little responsibility for communication not being optimal. Specifically, the lack of human (1.8%) and economic (0.6%) resources, and the prejudices of the teaching staff (0.1%) were the most commonly cited institutional barriers.

Table 4

Main barriers to good communication between schools and foreign-origin families

			% of foreign-origin pupils in the school			
	TOTAL	None	Up to 5%	From 6 to 20%	From 21 to 50%	Over 50%
Linguistic barriers	58.2	-	46.1	59.8	70.1	76.2
Socioeconomic barriers	6.3	-	4.6	6.3	7.4	12.4
Cultural barriers	18.0	-	10.6	19.0	26.8	25.7
Institutional barriers	2.6	-	1.9	2.6	2.1	6.7

Within the limits of the school institution to respond to families of foreign origin and communicate with them, it was expected that the school lacking more organised communication plans or teachers not having sufficient training would appear as barriers. However, this did not appear spontaneously (given that the questions analysed were open-ended, not suggested, and multiple). In fact, there was no awareness that the school (institution) has limitations when responding and communicating with families of foreign origin, and none mentioned that they have a plan for communication, or for improving this, with all families or those of foreign origin when asked about actions implemented. This was despite this being an open question that allowed this answer. Teacher training did not appear as a conditioning factor either, in the question referring to barriers. On this last aspect, two questions were asked about training, specifically whether the respondents considered that the teachers in their primary school had sufficient training to communicate with all the families and the same question formulated referring to families of foreign origin. The results indicated 89.9% believe that teachers are trained adequately to communicate with families and 71.6%, with families of foreign origin. Of course, it was observed that with those of foreign origin, there was a greater perception of a need for training, 3.6% responding that there is no training to communicate with families in general, rising to 14.5% when referring to families of foreign origin. This perception increased in schools with a greater presence of foreign-origin students., this response increased and became more relevant in schools with more than 6% of foreign-origin pupils. The perception of a need for training increased to around 20% in centres with more than 20% of pupils of foreign origin.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Communication between families and professionals is a relevant topic in the family-school relationship (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Gubbins & Otero, 2020; Rodríguez-Herrera, 2021; Thompson & Mazer, 2012) and one that can be further explored to understand better its dynamics, strengths and limitations (Cárcamo & Jarpa-Arriaga, 2021; Palts & Harro-Loit, 2015). Hence the interest in defining and analysing the communication channels used by primary schools —and those specifically aimed at families of foreign origin—, as well as detecting the main barriers to more and better communication and to whom responsibility for these is attributed. It is based on the importance of involving families in the schooling of their children given the beneficial effects this brings and for which communication is one of the key aspects. In fact, if the school made communication part of its culture, families would learn to become active-positive partners (Palts & Harro-Loit, 2015). Involvement in general, and communication in particular, is conditioned by the imbalance of power in the relationship between families and professionals in

schools (Harris & Goodall, 2008, Garreta, 2012; 2015). This is especially so with foreign-origin families, due to linguistic difficulties, lack of understanding of the logic of the educational system and school culture. This can be explained because the educational system these families have prior knowledge of is different, with family and professional roles that may not coincide with those of the new school they join and because teachers do not provide them with enough information to overcome these previous situations, etc. Other aspects are the limited training of teachers in this field and the underuse of the available resources (Anthony-Newman 2020). These factors can be grouped into linguistic, socioeconomic, cultural and institutional barriers (Garreta, 2012; 2015).

The results of the survey presented indicate that there are diverse communication channels in Spanish primary schools. For the most part, these combine both rich (84.6%) and poor (77.7%) channels, or new information technologies (80.1%). In other words, in general, multiple channels and strategies are used to communicate with families, which shows interest in establishing links and circulating information. It would be desirable that this be in both directions, although this cannot be guaranteed given the direction, quality and effectiveness of the messages, because a survey of members of the management team would be complicated, a weakness of this current research. This would fit with the idea that both families and teachers consider that there are issues (conflicts, health issues... sensitive issues in general) that should be dealt with personally or, at the very least, by phone (Kuusimäki et al., 2019; Macia, 2018), in other words, using what are defined as rich channels. On the other hand, the poor channels would be employed in other circumstances. This is also conditional on it not being possible to verify the use and effectiveness of these channels, which is another limitation of the study. This appropriate or inappropriate use of the channels in question is a relevant issue that should be studied in depth, since, as Cantón and García (2012) have shown, the devices and channels used by schools are not used to their full potential. As Garreta and Macia (2017) show, communication with families in Spanish primary schools reproduces old communicative schemes (understood here, in general, as informative) to which the new technologies used are introduced but without deploying their full potential. Nor are the set of channels being designed with the profiles of families in each school in mind.

When focusing on families of foreign origin, it appears that some primary schools do not carry out specific actions to improve communication (52.7%). Of course, this answer is less frequent the greater the number of foreign-origin students enrolled in the school is. The fact of having more pupils with this profile increases actions for better communication with these families. Despite this, in the schools with the greatest presence, where more than 50% of pupils are of foreign origin, 38.1% still do not carry out specific actions. Among the rest, it was observed

that the idea of outsourcing the resolution of the situation using what have been labelled as support channels (professional or natural, that is, non-professional, translators or intercultural mediators) dominates. The response of improving some of the rich channels (mentioned by 14.3%), poor channels (9%) or ICT (7.3%) for these families is not high. This solution of support from the schools is again greater among those that have more pupils of foreign origin. Greater complexity (diverse languages, different profiles of origin, etc.) determines that this response was higher and the promotion of rich channels was not more favoured. These are channels that imply immediate feedback, verbal and non-verbal messages, greater specificity and personalisation of ideas (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Macia, 2018). Also, it is not feasible for the teaching staff to know and be able to communicate in the languages of all the families (especially in centres with a great deal of cultural and linguistic diversity), so support agents (professional or natural) are important for communication.

However, the results of the survey indicate that there is no awareness that teachers need more and better training to communicate with foreign-origin families. Only 14.5% state that the teaching staff at their centre require more training in this regard. This, plus the fact that the institutional barriers were little mentioned, leads us to think that the school institution continues to consider that the deficits are external, of the family, above all. The results had already indicated that, in general, the barriers are attributed to the families in the view of teaching staff (Garreta, 2003), representatives of associations of parents of pupils (Garreta, 2008) and members of management teams (Garreta, 2015), although there is much less responsibilisation of the school and its professionals. Since schools and teaching teams are responsible for promoting regular and bidirectional communication, they should value the role of communication, detecting the barriers existing with the families in their school and classrooms and try to eliminate these through different communication strategies, especially with minority groups, (Conus & Fahrni, 2019) and that do not distance families (Saltmarsh & McPherson, 2019).

There is no evidence of the existence of communication plans in the centres in which the survey was carried out, although it is true that the Centre Educational Project (CEP) must include a minimum about the relationship, involvement of and communication with families. The CEP is a document adapted to each school, a flexible and open project model so that schools can respond to their needs (Gómez & Olveira, 2018). Each centre is located in a different and unique context, made up of a different educational community. The teachers, students and their families are diverse because each school requires a specific project which must also refer to the relationship and communication with families. In fact, in general, information for the families is talked about, but given the importance of communication, there should also be a communication plan adapted to their peculiarities (Macia, 2018),

a plan that should be applied and evaluated (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019). Based on the knowledge of the families, the professionals and the dynamics of the centre, a strategic communication plan would make it possible to highlight its relevance in the educational process among all the agents involved, and improve and adapt the channels used, seeking greater efficacy and efficiency in the work carried out to inform, communicate and interact.

As indicated, the survey was carried out before the COVID pandemic, so a limitation of this research, beyond the fact that a survey does not allow us to go beyond what the people who respond mean, is that the pandemic has brought about relevant changes in the dynamics of schools and the relationship and communication with families. It would be interesting to delve into these and find out how they have been affected and which communication channels have been the most widely used and valued by the different agents in addition to assessing whether some of these adaptations have come to stay. To overcome both limitations, an ethnographic study in primary schools that aims to delve into the actions implemented by those schools with a greater presence of students of foreign origin (specifically 19 centres with a percentage greater than 50% of foreign-origin students enrolled) is being carried out.

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