



Analysis of Facebook Use in the Context of School-Parent Cooperation: the Example of Primary Schools in Baranja

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Abstract

The use of digital tools and social networks is part of everyday communication, so parent-teacher cooperation is also being digitalized. This paper analyzes the way in which elementary schools in the Baranja region use the social network Facebook as a tool for communication and cooperation with parents. The aim of the research was to determine which forms of digital cooperation with parents appear on Facebook posts and which of them are the most common. The research was conducted using the method of content analysis of publicly available posts on the official Facebook pages of schools during the 2024/2025 school year (from September 1, 2024 to August 31, 2025). Epstein's model of parental involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community) was used as the theoretical framework for the research. The analysis shows that elementary schools in Baranja primarily use the social network Facebook as a channel for informing parents about school activities and projects. Although cooperation with the community is visibly represented, dimensions that imply active cooperation with parents, such as support for home learning, parent volunteering and participation in decision-making, are almost completely absent. The research results show disagreement in the forms of cooperation between parents and schools, because although the importance of modern tools is emphasized, the traditional form of cooperation still prevails.

Keywords: cooperation, Facebook, parents, school

Introduction

School-parent cooperation can be seen as a continuous development process in which all participants of the educational institution participate with the aim of creating optimal conditions for the child's holistic development. Such a relationship is based on mutual trust, open and two-way communication and the exchange of relevant information about the child's needs and progress, emphasizing mutual respect between parents and educational workers (Hornby, 2000). Epstein's model of family-school partnership sees parent as valuable and equally important as teacher in educational success of their children (Epstein, 1992). High-

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quality cooperation not only contributes to the well-being of students, but also has a positive effect on parents and school staff, strengthening the quality of the educational process as a whole. Modern social changes, including the rapid development of technology and changes in family structures, further emphasize the need for stronger connections between school and family. In primary education, the family plays a key role in supporting students' academic and socio-emotional development (Martinez-Yarza, Solabarrieta-Eizaguirre, Santibáñez-Gruber, 2024) but various social and organizational factors can make it difficult for parents to actively involve themselves in school life. Therefore, educational institutions are increasingly using digital communication channels to improve cooperation and ensure timely exchange of information.

Research conducted in recent years (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019; Moraru, 2019; Rogulj, 2019) indicate the growing presence of digital and communication platforms in the development of collaborative relationships between schools and parents. Bordalba and Bochaca (2019) highlight the increased use of digital media in the communication of educational institutions with families, emphasizing the importance of perceiving parents as equal partners in the process of introducing innovations. According to Moraru (2019), obstacles to achieving quality partnerships most often relate to the lack of time for communication and a reduced level of trust, which is why the author emphasizes the need to design systematic support for schools and parents. Rogulj (2019) emphasizes the importance of social networks in improving communication between parents and teachers and points to the need to develop professional, communication and digital competencies of educational workers. Aycicek (2020) highlights the potential of social networks in connecting schools and families, but warns of the lack of formal guidelines that would regulate such a form of cooperation. Research by Chairatchatakul et al. (2012) and Curry and Holter (2015) also confirm that the use of social media can have a positive impact on communication and relationships between parents within the school community.

In accordance with the above findings, this paper seeks to investigate how primary schools in the Baranja region use the social network Facebook for the purpose of achieving and encouraging cooperation with parents. By analyzing the content of posts on the official Facebook pages of Baranja schools during the 2024/2025 school year, the aim was to determine which forms of cooperation are most commonly represented and to what extent Facebook serves as a tool for communication between schools and parents.

Joyce Epstein Model of Parental Involvement





Most cited and used model of parent-school partnership was constructed by Joyce Epstein. Epstein's overlapping spheres (parents, school, communities) of influence model “integrates and extends Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, Leichter's (1974) educational insights of families as educators, Litwak and Meyees (1974) sociological perspectives on connections of professional and nonprofessional institutions and individuals” (Epstein, 1992, p. 3). The same author constructed the Framework of Six Types of Parental Involvement. These types of parental involvement are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with communities (Epstein, 2004). Parenting means assisting families with parenting skills and at the same time assisting schools in understanding families’ cultures. Communicating with families means using different two-way channels of communication. Families should be included in different activities through volunteering and supporting students at school. According to Epstein (2004), parents should be included in academic learning activities at home, including homework and goal setting. Also, parents should participate in decision-making processes through parent organizations and PTA. The last form of parental involvement is collaborating with communities such as agencies, cultural and civic organizations, colleges or universities (Epstein, 2004).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Cooperation with Parents

The development of information and communication technology (ICT) has revolutionized the way parents and schools interact to support students’ academic and non-academic development (Harwanto, Werdiningsih, Pudjiarti, 2025). The use of ICT in communication between parents and educators can contribute to the development of collaborative relationships, although it also involves certain challenges (Palts and Kalmus, 2015). Communication platforms provide parents with continuous access to information about their child’s development and facilitate their involvement in the educational process, regardless of time and space constraints (Lunts, 2003; Olmstead, 2013; Ramirez, 2001). Modern forms of digital communication increase the frequency of interaction between parents and institutions and contribute to parents’ feelings of security and trust thanks to greater insight into children’s activities (Lupton et al., 2016). Research shows that social networks can positively influence parent-child relationships within a group and strengthen the connection between family and institutional upbringing (Curry and Holter, 2015).

In the modern educational context, digital communication is becoming an increasingly prevalent form of collaboration, with participants' attitudes depending on the type of platform,





the context of work, and the level of digital competence (Bordalba and Bochaca, 2019). Despite the aforementioned differences, the research results indicate the justification for using communication platforms in developing partnerships, especially with the support of a professional team within the educational institution. Parents express a strong need for the use of new technologies in communication, which can encourage their greater involvement in the educational process (Child & Westermann, 2013; Mesch, 2006; Panić, 2020; Williams et al., 2012). Using communication platforms to facilitate parent-teacher communication can be challenging. Numerous factors play a role in its implementation, and one of the challenges is the ethical aspect (Palts and Kamus, 2015). Publishing photos of children on social networks or other communication platforms can result in parents' fear of the online environment and can be an obstacle to achieving positive parent-teacher communication. In addition to ethical issues, obstacles can also arise at the individual level. Roman (2022) points out that parental motivation, the level of digital knowledge and skills, as well as the broader context in which communication takes place, can influence the willingness to use modern forms of communication. Ambiguities in the way messages are interpreted and concerns about the impact of shared content on recipients can lead to the emergence of digital anxiety, which further complicates communication.

Social, economic, and cultural factors can also pose barriers to the use of communication platforms. According to Hefniy et al. (2022), parents' socioeconomic status can influence the availability of technology, while cultural attitudes towards digital tools can limit their use. In addition, parents' lack of time is often cited as one of the key challenges in achieving regular communication, despite the efforts of educators to facilitate two-way information exchange through digital platforms (Bocoş and Marin, 2022). The use of information and communication technology in communication between parents and educators can bring numerous benefits to the participants in the educational process. Sharing responsibility for the upbringing and education of a child contributes to strengthening the sense of belonging of parents, while at the same time encouraging the professional development of educators (Jurčević Lozančić, 2016; Kaya, 2007; Ljubetić, 2009; Višnjić Jevtić et. al, 2018). The use of communication platforms enables two-way exchange of information and feedback, which is an important factor in the development of partnership relationships, although this area is still insufficiently researched (Kuusimäki et al., 2019). Digital communication can therefore be seen as a potential direction for further development of partnership, provided that its advantages are systematically used and its disadvantages are minimized. Henderson and Mapp (2002) state that when schools and families collaborate, students achieve better academic





success, attend classes regularly, and demonstrate more positive attitudes toward school and learning. In the digital context, such communication becomes necessary because contemporary parenting styles and students' learning processes are greatly influenced by technological advances that enable wider and faster access to information.

Methodology

This paper reports a study on the use of Facebook as a tool for school–parent communication in primary schools in the Baranja region, eastern Croatia. The research is based on a content analysis of publicly available Facebook posts published on official school pages during the 2024/2025 school year (from September 1, 2024 to August 31, 2025).

Given that the use of social networks as a channel for school–parent cooperation in this specific regional context has not been extensively explored, the study focuses on a defined and manageable sample of schools. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of communication patterns and the identification of dominant forms of parental involvement. The sample includes primary schools that maintain official Facebook pages, and the unit of analysis is an individual Facebook post.

Selection of schools

The selection of schools was based on an official list of primary schools published by the administrative authority of Osijek-Baranja County in eastern Croatia (Osijek-Baranja County, n.d.). The list includes a total of 76 primary schools, of which 11 are located in the Baranja region.

All schools from the Baranja region were considered for inclusion in the study. Among them, six schools maintain official Facebook pages, and these were included in the final sample. Schools without a Facebook presence were excluded from the analysis, as they do not use social networks as a communication tool with parents.

The sampling approach can be described as purposeful (criterion-based), since inclusion in the sample depended on the existence of a Facebook page. This ensured that the analysed data were relevant to the research aim, which focuses on digital communication and cooperation with parents via social networks.

Data collection and analysis

A content analysis approach was applied to the data analysis. Content analysis enables insight into the intentions and patterns of communication within texts, which, in this case, refers to schools' communication with parents via Facebook.





This study was inspired by the deductive approach to content analysis, based on predefined, theoretically derived categories. The categories used in this study are based on the model of parental involvement developed by Epstein.

Table 2. Information on schools' Facebook pages related to Epstein's six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 2009).

Key components regarding parental involvement	Examples of information related to the components
Parenting	Parental education, such as lectures/seminars/materials for parents
Communicating	School vision/profile, curriculum, regulations and action plans, teaching and learning in school, schedules, school/class activities, students' work and products, support for students in school, school lunch menu
Volunteering	School or class activities that parents are supposed to be involved in, parents as volunteers
Learning at home	Homework, learning and teaching resources related to homework
Decision making	Parental board
Collaborating with community	Resources and services provided by community organizations outside of schools, links to social media

The unit of analysis was an individual Facebook post. The data consisted of publicly available posts published on the official Facebook pages of selected schools during the 2024/2025 school year.

The data collection and analysis were conducted in several steps. In step 1, all Facebook pages were reviewed as a whole in order to gain an overall understanding of the communication practices. In step 2, relevant posts were identified and selected based on Epstein's six components of parental involvement. In step 3, coding rules were applied in order to classify the posts into predefined categories. In step 4, the data were interpreted as a whole, with the aim of understanding the dominant forms of communication and cooperation between schools and parents.

The analytical strategy included identifying the presence of specific categories in a quantitative manner, as well as analyzing the content of posts in a qualitative way. Each post could be assigned to one or more categories, depending on its content. The coding process was conducted manually, as the dataset was considered manageable.

Ethical considerations

This study followed general ethical principles for conducting research, particularly with regard to the use of publicly available data. The analysis was based exclusively on publicly accessible content published on official Facebook pages of primary schools. Although the data are publicly available, special attention was given to protecting the identity of the schools involved. For this reason, individual schools are not explicitly named in the presentation of the results, and no identifiable details are disclosed. The study focuses on institutional





communication rather than on individuals, and no personal data of students, parents, or teachers were collected or analyzed. The collected data were used solely for research purposes.

Major findings

The analysis of Facebook posts shows that primary schools predominantly use Facebook as a channel for informing parents about school activities, rather than as a tool for active cooperation. An overview of the identified categories is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Information on school Facebook pages relevant for parental use related to the six key components by Epstein (2009).

School	Parenting	Communicating	Volunteering	Learning at home	Decision making	Collaborating with community
A1	+	+				+
A2		+				+
A3		+				+
A4		+				+
A5	+	+	+			+
A6		+				+

Communicating

The most dominant category was communicating, which was present in all analyzed schools (A1–A6). The posts primarily focused on sharing information about school activities, events, and student achievements. These posts typically included photographs accompanied by short descriptive captions, highlighting what had taken place in the school. While such content contributes to transparency and visibility of school life, communication was largely one-directional. However, some level of interaction was visible through user engagement, such as likes and occasional comments, although this interaction was not systematically encouraged or structured by the schools. In some cases, posts also functioned as gateways, directing users to more detailed information available on the school's website.

Collaborating with community

Collaboration with the community was represented in all six schools, as all schools included content related to cooperation with local institutions, projects, or community events. These posts often presented schools as active participants in the local environment, emphasizing partnerships and public engagement. However, this type of communication mainly focused on presenting activities, rather than encouraging direct involvement of parents within these collaborations.





Parenting

Content related to parenting was limited and appeared in only two schools (A1 and A5). These posts included elements aimed at supporting parents, such as advice or information relevant to child development or education. However, such content was not systematically developed and did not represent a consistent form of communication.

Volunteering

Volunteering was almost completely absent. Only one school (A5) included posts that could be related to parental involvement in school activities. Even in this case, the invitation for participation was not strongly emphasized or structured as an ongoing form of engagement.

Learning at home and decision-making

No evidence was found for the categories learning at home and decision-making. None of the analyzed schools published content that would support parents in assisting learning at home or involve them in school decision processes.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that primary schools in the Baranja region primarily use Facebook as a tool for one-way communication, focusing on informing parents about school activities. This confirms previous research (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019; Moraru, 2019), which suggests that digital platforms are more often used for information sharing than for building genuine partnerships.

From the perspective of Epstein's (2009) model, a clear imbalance is visible. While communication is strongly represented, other forms of parental involvement, such as learning at home, volunteering, and decision-making, are largely absent on Facebook. This does not necessarily mean that these forms of parental involvement are not present in school practice, but rather that they are not visible within this specific digital communication channel. For example, parents may still participate in decision-making processes through formal structures, such as the adoption of school curricula at the beginning of the school year, which are not typically represented on social media. This suggests that Facebook provides only a partial view of parent-school cooperation.

One explanation for the dominance of one-way communication and the limited visibility of other forms of parental involvement on Facebook may lie in the institutional use of social media. Although Facebook allows interaction, schools tend to use it in a controlled and formal





way, focusing on presenting positive aspects of school life rather than encouraging dialogue or participation. In this sense, Facebook is used more as a presentation tool than as a platform for collaboration, which is consistent with findings by Palts and Kalmus (2015) on the challenges of digital communication.

Overall, the findings reveal a gap between the potential of digital communication tools and their actual use in practice. Facebook is primarily used as a digital notice board, rather than as a platform for interactive and collaborative engagement. This suggests that the digitalization of communication alone is not sufficient to transform parent–school relationships without intentional pedagogical and organizational changes.

Future research should explore parents' perspectives to better understand this imbalance. In addition, it would be valuable to examine how parent–school cooperation and partnership are defined in the official curricula and school documents of the analysed schools. This could provide deeper insight into whether certain forms of parental involvement are present in practice but not visible on Facebook, highlighting the possible discrepancy between institutional practices and their digital representation, as well as the limitations of relying solely on social media content as a source of data.

Conclusion

Digital communication is becoming a prevalent form of collaboration between parents and school in the modern educational context. The analysis of Facebook posts of primary schools in Baranja was made on the Epstein's conceptual Framework of Six Types of Parental Involvement. The research results show that primary schools in Baranja primarily use Facebook as a channel for one-way information about school activities and projects. Although collaboration with the community is visibly present, dimensions that imply active partnership with parents, such as support for home learning, parent volunteering, and participation in decision-making, are almost completely absent. Limitations of this study are small sample and inclusion of only one region. Further research should include wider sample of schools and include other social networks. In addition, future research could explore parents' perspectives and examine how parent–school cooperation is defined in official school documents, such as school curricula, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of partnership practices.

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