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To cite this article: Gabriella Pusztai, Zsuzsanna Demeter-Karászi, Enikő Major & Marcell Puskás (08 Aug 2024): Beyond the barriers of deficit orientedness? Comparing distinct teacher approaches of parental involvement, British Journal of Religious Education, DOI: [10.1080/01416200.2024.2388133](https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2024.2388133)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2024.2388133>



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Published online: 08 Aug 2024.



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Beyond the barriers of deficit orientedness? Comparing distinct teacher approaches of parental involvement

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ABSTRACT

Researchers in the 1980s identified strong school-parent relations as a significant potential in the church sector, but this potential has not received enough attention in the European context. However, a serious obstacle to this partnership can be the unpreparedness, overwork, and deficit orientation of teachers, as well as their narrow-mindedness towards parents. Our analysis, based on Epstein's typology of parental involvement, focuses on the question whether partnership with parents in church-run schools shows any differences from that in state schools. Our qualitative research involved semi-structured interviews with teachers from 32 primary schools. Despite the similarities between school providers, we detected differences between church-run and state schools regarding Epstein's types of parental involvement. While in the former sector, schools appeared more active in creating a parental community, the latter was characterised by formal and individual ways of parental participation. The practical result of our research is that the parent-school partnership is an area in need of improvement and that different school providers can learn from each other's good practices.



KEYWORDS

church-run school; state school; parent-school partnership; comparative study

Introduction

The literature suggests that the accelerated pace of life and heavy workloads have made it increasingly difficult to engage parents in parental involvement, and that the lockdowns during COVID have also affected this relationship (Brown et al. 2011; Wright, Park, and Saadé 2022). Therefore, it is a current research challenge to re-examine the factors that promote and hinder parental involvement. The factors influencing the quality and degree of parental involvement are classified as student-level, school-level, parent-level and school system-level elements. Among the school-level factors, the impact of the school provider is rarely examined, although the effectiveness and popularity of the institutions can be enhanced by ensuring parental engagement as well (Hamlin and Flessa 2016; Hamlin and Cheng 2020; Mulligan 2003; Ospino and Weitzel-O'Neill 2016; Pusztai et al. 2024). Identifying good practices in each school providing sector can therefore be of general utility.

The question of the popularity and effectiveness of schools run by denominations and religiously affiliated organisations in relation to state schools is a matter of debate. The effectiveness of church-run schools is often explained by the fact that these institutions attract children of higher status (Gibbons and Silva 2006). However, these studies do not compare the sectors regarding the commitment of parents to the school and their parenting practices at home, which in themselves

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may contribute to higher student achievement (Pusztai, Róbert, and Fényes 2023). The effectiveness of church-run schools is influenced not only by the composition of the parent population, but also by the attitude of the school staff in developing a closer, trusting relationship with parents and organising a community around the school (Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993; Bryk and Schneider 2002).

The attractiveness of the sectors may also vary from country to country, from culture to culture and time to time, and may depend, among other things, on the traditions of the education system, the division of tasks between the sectors, as well as the regional and local social context and the social status of religious parents (Pusztai, Róbert, and Fényes 2023). Outside Europe, some research has been conducted on the relationship of church-run schools with parents (Hamlin and Flessa 2016; Hamlin and Cheng 2020; Joseph, Vélez, and Antrop-González 2017; Mulligan 2003; Ospino and Weitzel-O'Neill 2016), but the problem has not received much attention in the European context. In Central and Eastern European countries, where church-run schools had been closed for decades, their numbers have only increased in the last two decades. As a result, these new institutions do not have a strong community tradition. The development of cultural sensitivity is not the primary focus during either teacher training or recruitment for church-run schools. In addition, many non-religious or individualised religious families choose church-run schools, raising the question of whether there is an effort to create a parent-school partnership and, if so, how effective it is. In Hungary, there have been no comparisons of sectors in terms of school-parent partnership. The present study seeks to focus on that question based on qualitative interview data and content analysis supported by ATLAS.ti software.

Theoretical background

Church-run schools

First, we clarify the notion of church-run schools as we use it in the present study. Schools run by religious organisations are referred to with several terms internationally (e.g. faith-based, religiously affiliated, church-run, parochial schools, etc.). In European culture, religiously affiliated schools are usually operated by one of the churches, which is why they are called church-run or denominational schools (Vermeer 2009). What makes the distinction important is that recently some schools have been founded in Europe which are run by organisations affiliated with non-European religions (Driessen and Merry 2006; Muslih 2019). In the Hungarian context, the most common word to use is church-run school.

In Hungary, the debate on religious education has been particularly heated for the past few years (early 2020s) due to the relatively rapid expansion of the church-run sector. An important element in the dismantling of the Soviet-style centralised education system based on totalitarian ideology after 1990 was the re-authorisation of church-run schools, so that the share of the church-run sector was approaching 10% by the early 2000s. A new wave of expansion started after 2010, when the conservative government explicitly supported even the conversion of state schools into church-run schools (Pusztai 2013). Despite the rapid growth, the share of the church-run sector in Hungary is still at a medium level by European standards, below the size of the French, Spanish, Dutch and Belgian church-run sectors (Franken and Vermeer 2019; Maussen and Bader 2015; Rogero-García and Andrés-Candelas 2020).

As international research has pointed out, the function of church-run schools within the education system can vary (Bertola and Checci 2013; Dronkers and Avram 2015) depending on the educational traditions of a region and the mission of state schools. In countries where state school enrolment policies are comprehensive and more socially inclusive, church-run schools are positioned in a meritocratic, selective role, while in countries where state schools are strict and selective, the church-run sector assumes the role of social inclusion. This cannot certainly be treated separately from the position of the religious population in society. In Hungarian society,

according to the 2011 census, one in two adults professes to belong to a religious community or denomination (Hungarian Central Statistical Office 2012). In Hungary, highly educated or upwardly mobile parents are more religious, and it can be clearly seen that, especially in poorer areas, families who want to rise out of poverty tend to choose church-run schools (Pusztai, Róbert, and Fényes 2023).

It is generally true that the proportion of children from religious families in church-run schools is higher than in state schools. Non-religious families who opt for church-run schools perceive the specific pedagogical culture of these schools (greater discipline, moral education, transmission of traditional community values, etc.) as beneficial or as an escape from previous school failures, unstable family environments and deviant, abusive peer networks (Pusztai, Róbert, and Fényes 2023).

The role of parental involvement

Families influence students' school performance in many ways, and the biggest challenge for the education system is to compensate for the resulting disadvantages (Pusztai et al. 2024). Education policies aimed at reducing social inequalities in the school system emphasise the importance of involving parents in their children's school life and studies, and of developing family-school partnership (Epstein and Sanders 2002; Epstein 2010). Therefore, researchers have investigated both the ways in which parents are involved and their impact on achievement (Hamlin and Cheng 2020). Overseas research suggests that the institutional sector can influence schools' attitudes towards parents. In cross-sectoral studies of parental involvement, researchers have paid special attention to the church-run sector as the second largest school provider in America (Hamlin and Flessa 2016; Hamlin and Cheng 2020). Examining the ways to create equal opportunities, early research on church-run schools highlighted particular patterns of engagement with parents (Greeley 1982; Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore 1982; Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Morgan and Sorensen 1999). Studies have shown that the involvement of parents of low-status students in school activities has created a community around the school that has enabled wide circles of teachers and parents to work together to promote student achievement and mitigate risks to progress (truancy, indiscipline, etc.). However, the details and methods of engaging with parents have not been discussed; nor has it been considered how this is perceived by individuals. Previously, traditional patterns of parental involvement have dominated, with the role of parents being conceptualised as supporters of fundraising initiatives and events (Epstein and Sanders 2002; Hamlin and Cheng 2020). Epstein (2010) constructed a six-dimensional typology and thereby extended previous models of parental involvement. The framework of parenting, communicating, volunteering, home learning activities, decision making, and collaborating with the community has greatly contributed to advancing research on parental involvement, as it draws attention to the role of educators and schools. In examining parenting and school activities, Epstein distinguished between effective school activities and parenting activities at home and pointed out that there are no rigid boundaries between parents' and schools' domains but the seemingly separate sets of activities at home and school intersect (Epstein 2010). Parenting at home can be seen as a private sphere at first glance, but it can be regarded as a social investment at the same time. It is most often thought of as an activity directly supporting a child's educational progress, especially through giving academic assistance in the home. In this sense, the parent is a kind of external supporter of schoolwork, a representative of the processes taking place in the educational institution. Dedicated parental involvement is considered to include helping with homework and discussing what has happened at school, which make the parent clearly appear as an ally of the school. However, other activities such as listening to children read, attending parent education workshops and parent-teacher meetings may not have such a direct and instant impact on children's school performance. Parental involvement at home may be aimed at developing a specific skill in the child, but also at transmitting values, norms and

expectations that lay the foundation for good academic performance later (Sy, Gottfried, and Gottfried 2013).

Epstein describes parental involvement as a multidimensional aspect of parental behaviour that influences a child's school performance and that is characterised by the cooperation of collaborating parties across the school-family-home continuum. The dimensions of parental involvement are parenting in the home, communication with the school, volunteering in the school, assistance with learning at home, participation in school decision-making, and cooperation with the wider community around the school (Epstein 2010). Parental involvement thus provides visibility for parents in schools through their attendance at events organised either for parents or the entire school as well as through their voluntary work in the school. It also gives an opportunity for schools to educate parents in their attitudes, to train them in their role as parents, and to reinforce their belief in the importance of learning and schooling in collaboration with teachers and other parents (Schneider and Coleman 1993). The Epsteinian approach has shed new light on parental involvement and has complemented the earlier notion of it, which was centred around parental behaviour, with an emphasis on the school's scope for action and responsibility. His approach focuses on partnership, interpreting parental involvement as a response to the school's activity (Epstein and Sanders 2002; Epstein 2010). In the Epsteinian framework, the factors crucial to parental involvement include school heads and teachers' attitudes, initiative and capacities for cooperation as well as establishing and operating a school action team, all in accordance with the school culture. Therefore, it is essential to monitor and train teachers in this field as well.

In the school culture of church-run schools, teachers' concepts of their profession are determined by their value orientation (Pusztai, Róbert, and Fényes 2023). The question arises as to what views are held by teachers of church-run schools on family-school partnership. Our analysis was conducted to find out whether church-run schools showed any differences from state schools in their partnership with parents.

Materials and methods

The database of our qualitative research consists of a semi-structured corpus of interviews with 31 primary school teachers, averaging 68 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the autumn of 2021, based on a self-developed interview draft within the framework of the research project 'Improving teachers' capacity to enhance parental engagement' conducted by the MTA-DE-Parent-Teacher Cooperation Research Group. The research was carried out in the most disadvantaged region of Hungary, where the proportion of schools with a disadvantaged and cumulatively disadvantaged student composition is very high. The population consisted of primary school teachers from the church-run and state sectors. Stratified sample selection was based on the National Student Assessment. First, groups of schools from the region were created based on their geographical location, the type of settlement, the achievement of the school's students adjusted for social background, and the intensity of parental involvement as reported by the school head. From the groups of schools thus formed, the institutions to be visited were selected in proportion to the group size, and within these, the teachers to be interviewed were selected at random. The sample included 7 respondents from church-run schools and 24 from state schools. Of the teachers in church-run schools, 2 teachers were selected from schools with a low proportion of disadvantaged pupils, 2 from schools with a high proportion of, and 3 from schools with a medium proportion of such pupils, and of the teachers in state schools, 5 were selected from schools with a low proportion of disadvantaged pupils, 10 from schools with a high proportion of, and 9 from schools with a medium proportion of such pupils.

The interview survey explored teachers' views on 10 aspects of parents' involvement in their children's school life. The interview draft included the following items: a description of the basic characteristics of the teachers, the school, the municipality and the parents; teachers' views on the role of parents and on their communication with parents; a description of the parent-school

Table 1. Number of mentions by main code among teachers in church-run and state institutions.

	Church-run	State	Total
Mentions	12	3	15
Collaborating with community	5.1%	0.5%	1.9%
Adjusted Residual	4.3	-4.3	
Mentions	4	28	32
Decision making	1.7%	4.9%	4.0%
Adjusted Residual	-2.1	2.1	
Mentions	14	33	47
Learning at home	5.9%	5.8%	5.8%
Adjusted Residual	0.1	-0.1	
Mentions	30	65	95
Volunteering	12.7%	11.4%	11.8%
Adjusted Residual	0.5	-0.5	
Mentions	38	62	100
Parenting	16.0%	10.9%	12.4%
Adjusted Residual	2.0	-2.0	
Mentions	139	377	516
Communication	58.6%	66.4%	64.1%
Adjusted Residual	-2.1	2.1	
Total	237	568	805

relationship; patterns and gaps in contact; good practices in the school; methods of parent-teacher communication and its impact as well as suggestions for keeping in contact. The interviews reflected teachers' subjective views and attitudes. Transcripts of the interviews were made, and a corpus of texts was created for research. It was analysed using ATLAS.ti 23 text analysis software.

During the research, teachers' interpretations of the characteristics of parental involvement were examined in terms of differences and similarities between institutional sectors. The text material was first subjected to thematic coding. This involved a deductive coding procedure based on Epstein's six categories, which were used as the main codes. The first stage of coding was carried out by two researchers. Subsequently, the texts classified under each thematic main code were subjected to inductive coding and then code groups were formed (see Appendix 1). Inductive coding allowed us to focus on teachers' attitudes and opinions, which in turn enabled us to infer how the family-school partnership was reflected in school culture. Finally, by means of cod-document analysis, we examined, in a cross-sectoral comparison, the differences in the frequency of occurrence of inductive code groups in relation to the mentions in the texts produced by teachers working in the church-run and state sectors. A frequency table of the occurrences of the code groups by sector was made and adjusted residuals were calculated to eliminate variation due to sample size. Adjusted residuals were calculated by dividing the raw residuals (i.e. the difference between the observed and expected element counts) by the estimated standard error. For adjusted residuals above + 2, the occurrence of code groups was over-represented in the sector (see Table 1). In the presentation of our results, proceeding along the thematic units based on Epstein's categories, we focus on the characteristics for which the cross-sectoral comparison showed an over-representation of one or another sector. The results are visualised using Sankey charts from ATLAS.ti.

Ethics

We obtained informed consent from all participants included in the study. To assure participants' confidentiality and anonymity. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of the School Ethics Committee of Doctoral Program on Educational Sciences at the University of Debrecen, Hungary (protocol code 1/2022 and date of approval: 2022. 03. 10.). The research was conducted ethically, the results are reported honestly, the submitted work is original and not (self-)plagiarised, and authorship reflects the individuals' contributions.

Results

Parenting

The first thematic unit consisted of texts summarising teachers' perceptions of parenting in their students' families. There were 123 quotes for this theme. Both positive and negative poles emerged from the inductive coding. For the main code of parenting at home, six sub-codes were identified in the teachers' narratives, namely digital challenge, diversity among parents, flawed parenting, cultural value distance, supportive family, and lack of teacher insight.

The most common subcode, with just over a third of the mentions, contained quotes on flawed parenting from teacher interviews. We included here the mentions of parenting strategies that hindered the child's development or had a negative impact on it. The second most common code group was parental diversity. Teachers seemed to encounter considerable inequality and diversity in the way children were raised at home, and detected parental attentiveness, motivation and commitment as well as negative parental influence at the same time. In some cases, an explanation was given, attributing the disadvantages of parenting to the low status of the family, their difficult social situation and lack of education. Not only were differences in family environments and parental care highlighted, but the distance between value preferences at school and at home was also mentioned relatively often. Slightly behind this, positive parental behaviour supporting the child's development was mentioned next. The lack of information for teachers on home parenting was also frequently referred to, as was the emphasis on the serious digital challenge to parenting. There was no difference between the sectors in the relative frequency of mentions of the positive, supportive family climate and the difficulties posed by digital tools and channels.

The cross-sectoral comparison showed a significant correlation for the cultural value distance code group, which was over-represented (Adj. Resid. = 4.6) for teachers in the church-run sector (see [Figure 1](#)). Church-run sector teachers tended to perceive the differences in home parenting as a cultural and values issue, attributing it to a lack of parental engagement and conscious role-taking, to permissive, liberal parenting, and to the weakening of the family as a cohesive community. The mentions under the code group of flawed parenting were clustered around unpreparedness, ignorance and failure to engage with the child. Church-run sector teachers were critical of parents, but they found parents capable of, and in need of, development, and it was common for them to mention not only the problem but also, right at the same time, the need to shape parental views and provide training (e.g. parenting courses).

As for teachers in the state sector, there was an over-representation of two code groups, namely the perception of diversity in parenting roles (Adj. Resid. = 3.9) and the lack of teacher insight (Adj. Resid. = 2.0). There is heterogeneity in the status of families across the extensive state sector, which affects child-rearing in the home in different ways. In addition to families with low status, there are also families that strive to create an inspiring and valuable home environment, pay attention to their children, support their studies, take them to extra preparatory and language classes, but it is to be noted that the care, attention and support are mostly material. It is also striking that teachers in the state sector were over-represented in saying that they did not have an insight into the family's parenting practices nor did they know what went on behind the closed doors of the home, which suggested that child-rearing at home was an area outside of what was meant by keeping in touch with families. However, the official duty of teachers to act as child welfare monitors was certainly taken seriously in the state sector as well, since most of the examples of flawed parenting indicated child welfare problems, such as destructive, aggressive, emotionally or physically neglectful parenting or a psychologically stressful family atmosphere.

Learning at home

This thematic code included 63 quotes and the inductive coding of the texts under the main code revealed four code groups: perceptions of (i) negative parental attitudes, (ii) barriers and constraints to parental care, (iii) material care and (iv) parental care. The negative pole was also prominent in this

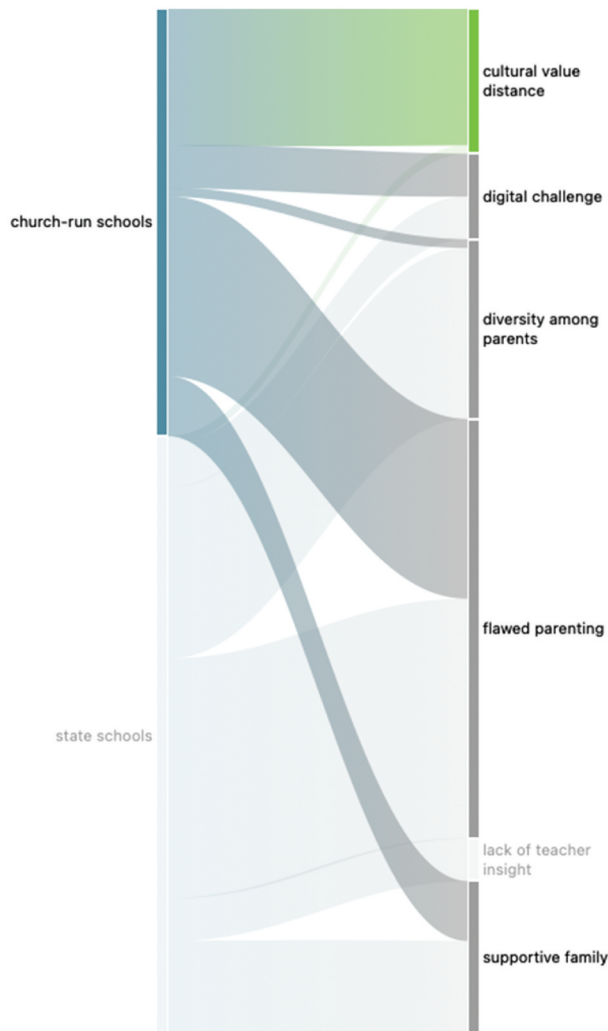


Figure 1. Cross-sectoral comparison of the code groups for parenting at home.

main code, accounting for almost 40% of the mentions, while the positive pole (parental care) was mentioned only half as often. In this code group, too, teachers pointed to the diversity of parent groups, from the negative pole of parental behaviour suggesting that learning was not a value for them to the positive pole of trying to provide children with the necessary care, attention, and conditions for basic learning. Thus, the dominant narrative here was one of categorisation and blaming parents. A very significant proportion of the texts that could be placed between the extreme poles contained not only categorisation but also attempts at explanation, trying to take account of the factors that were experienced as obstacles by parents. Examples included parents' lack of education, a fragmented family structure, language or material barriers, time constraints due to a heavy workload, and possibly differences in values (Brown et al. 2011). We did not find any content on teachers providing systematic support to prepare parents for the work they were expected to do in connection with home learning. Thus, regarding parental support for pupils' home learning, we did not find any elements of partnership, but, instead, mentions of the individual responsibilities and constraints of parents.

The results of the cross-sectoral comparison did not show a significant correlation for any of the code groups; their relative proportions were essentially the same in the church-run and state sectors. Thus, no intersectoral differences can be reported for learning at home. This result suggests that church-run schools are no better than state schools in providing support for home learning, with teachers performing similarly poorly in this area in both sectors.

Communication

In our analyses, the main code of communication was found to be the richest thematic unit with 726 quotes on the subject, which suggested that this aspect of parental involvement was the easiest for educators to grasp. The texts reflected an almost total agreement that communication with parents was definitely important for the development of pupils, but on the other hand, although they were in a minority, we also found teacher statements reflecting a resigned attitude and highlighting the pointlessness and futility of communicating with parents.

The inductive coding of this thematic unit produced a differentiated pattern of attitudes and everyday practices. In total, 15 code groups were identified with strong positive and negative poles (see [Figure 2](#)). Part of the interview transcripts reflected that the pedagogical programme of the school attached high importance to communication with parents, and communication practices were an integral part of the school culture and a priority for the responding teachers themselves. A further fifth of the texts on the subject contained a communication solution that involved the renewal of traditional forms of contact with



Figure 2. Cross-sectoral comparison of the code groups for communication.

parents, seeking partnership and community building. In contrast, one fifth of the texts in the main code suggested an image of a passive school and passive teachers. In a passive school, there are essentially no organised forms of contact, teachers communicate with parents only when there is a problem, they do not even know the parents of their pupils, or can only recall minimal, formal elements of contact with some of them. Not only the frequency of occurrence, but also the shortness of responses to the questions on communication with parents illustrated it if this aspect of parent-school partnership was of low importance to a teacher or under-developed in the school context.

The picture was also varied in terms of the general form of communication. The second most common code group referred to digital means of communication. Communication through digital channels, which became widespread during the COVID pandemic, was mentioned by teachers as a remarkable milestone. Almost one eighth of the mentions involved some form of digital communication, even multiple forms at the same time. It seems that parent-school communication has moved into the virtual space, as the texts on the subject were dominated by this. However, two basic interpretations of digital contact were observed. The vast majority of the texts in these code groups viewed digital communication as a positive paradigm shift, pointing to its speed, immediacy and democratic nature, and reflected the belief that these channels would facilitate adequate (or at least satisfactory) communication in the new era, because they were suitable for informing parents or teachers and for the rapid, practical exchange of information. On the other hand, one sixth of the texts in this code group clearly referred to the inadequacy and risks of using digital communication channels.

The cross-sectoral comparison revealed significant differences at several points. Active school (Adj. Resid. = 3.8), active teacher (Adj. Resid. = 2.0), active parent (Adj. Resid. = 4.0), perceived risk and inadequacy of digital channels (Adj. Resid. = 4.9), programmatic community building strategy (Adj. Resid. = 5.5), and prioritising face-to-face discussion and counselling (Adj. Resid. = 4.8) were all over-represented in the church-run sector. We found that, compared to the random distribution of the categories, code groups reflecting that institutions, teachers and parents not only theoretically valued interaction with each other, but also had regular, organised forms of reciprocal, partnership-like communication were over-represented in the church-run sector. Regularly organised community-building events (family days, courses for parents, love feasts, charity fairs, fundraising or distribution of donations) were mentioned much more often by teachers in the church-run sector. Similarly, mentions of personal conversations based on mutual trust and individual counselling as a form of communication were over-represented among teachers in church-run schools. With regard to hard-to-reach, minority parent groups, the effectiveness of forms of contact accompanied by rewards and praise were also highlighted by teachers. Furthermore, a higher proportion of teachers in the church-run sector called attention to the downsides and inadequacies of communication through digital channels, which they considered impersonal and easy to misunderstand. It is also noteworthy that the negative image of parenthood (parental uninterest, ineptitude, bad manners, etc.) was under-represented in the narratives of teachers in church-run schools.

Volunteering

The main code for school volunteering contained 107 quotes and four code groups were identified (see [Figure 3](#)). Positive and negative poles were also observed here. On the one hand, teachers assessed parental attitudes by distinguishing between generally supportive or unsupportive parental attitudes. The texts also suggested that typically, there were only a few parents in a school who volunteered, and only rarely. On the other hand, the responses also reflected a different approach when teachers did not evaluate parents' volunteering, but highlighted school initiatives and events that enabled volunteering. They listed the events – such as special days or community occasions – through which the school

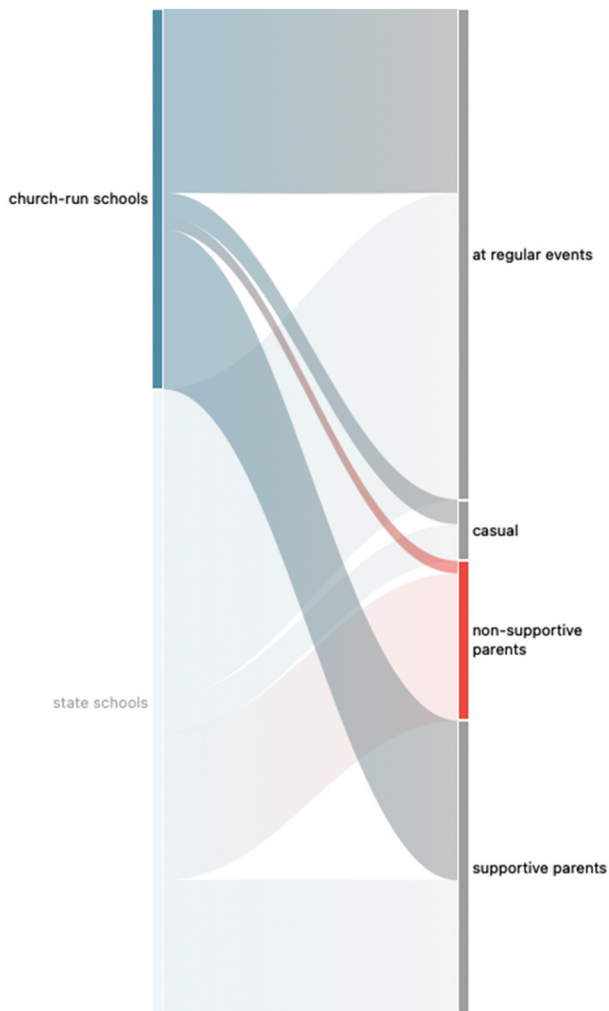


Figure 3. Cross-sectoral comparison of the code groups for school volunteering.

provided opportunities for volunteering. It was apparent that the organisation of such occasions seemed to be embedded in the institutional culture.

In the state sector, the results of the intersectoral comparison showed a significant correlation for only one code group. As a result of the random distribution of the categories, mentions of non-supportive parents (Adj. Resid.=2.5) were over-represented in the state sector and under-represented (Adj. Resid.=2.5) in the church-run sector, with responses split between the code groups for different occasions and supportive parents (see [Figure 3](#)). Our results support our previous findings that teachers in church-run schools are more likely to report active, community-building activities and, as a result, parents who support the school through volunteering.

Participation in school committees and decision-making at school

Under the main code of participation in school committees, 47 quotes were included, and five code groups were created: parental passivity; participation being too burdensome for parents;

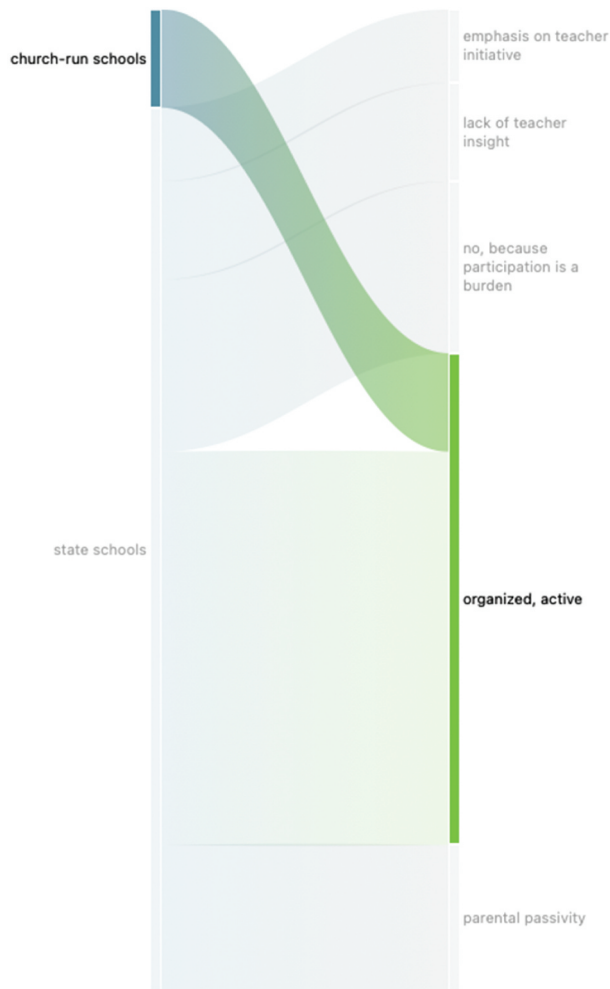


Figure 4. Cross-sectoral comparison of code groups for participation in school committees.

lack of teacher insight; organised, active forms of participation; and emphasis on teacher initiative (see Figure 4). After inductive coding, positive and negative poles were identified, from participation based on teacher and parental activity to different forms of passivity. We detected an implicit form of institutional (teacher) passivity when respondents said participation was not necessary or possible due to parents being overloaded. A more overt but dismissive attitude was reflected by blaming parental passivity. It appeared to be a negation of parental involvement when the teacher was not aware of such activities. Quotes assigned to code groups closer to the positive pole were slightly in the majority compared to those closer to the negative pole.

The cross-sectoral comparison showed that organised, active participation in school committees was over-represented in church-run primary schools (Adj. Resid. = 2.3). It was manifest both at school and class levels, and teachers believed that parents found this activity useful, and that the institution could count on them. Furthermore, church-run school teachers' statements revealed that parents did not appear to consider participation in certain bodies as a burden, while neither the passivity of parents nor teachers' initiative or lack of insight were identified in this sector.

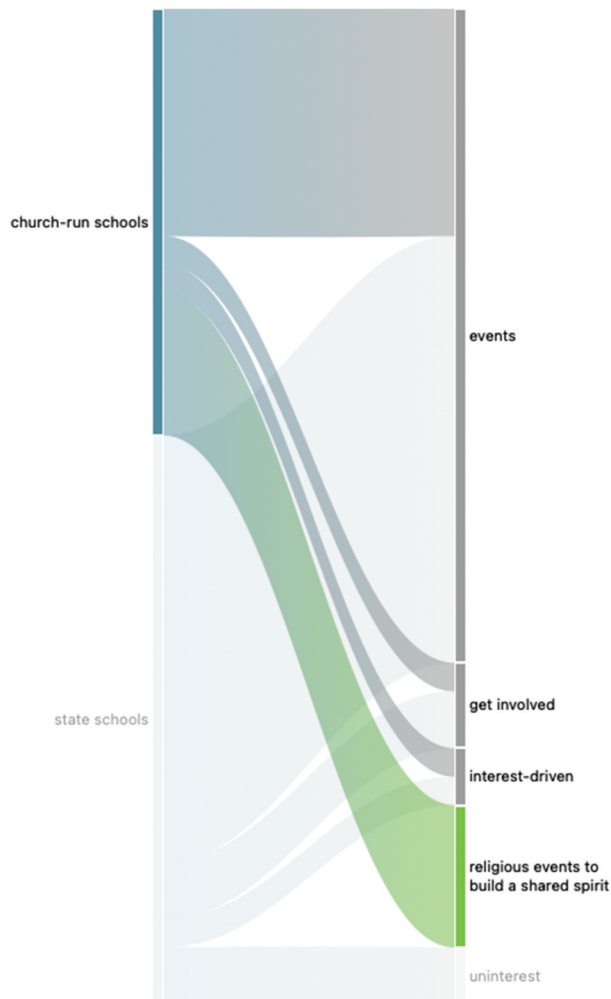


Figure 5. Cross-sectoral comparison of code groups for community participation around the school.

Parental collaboration with the local and school community

The main code for community involvement around the school included 23 quotes, which were classified into four code groups: parental involvement in communities, parental uninterest, interest-driven involvement, participation in various events, and community events to build a shared spirit (see Figure 5). The positive pole included quotes about parents being active, helpful and willing to get involved, and the passive pole included quotes about parents being completely detached from these activities. Between the extremes, we could find the interest-driven group, which was involved in community activities around the school under the auspices of a grant-based programme, or possibly in return for some financial reward. Among the code groups, mentions of community events to build a shared spirit stood out considerably, such as church services for families, church feasts, various Christian-themed events serving as community-building activities.

The results of our cross-sectoral comparison showed that mentions of the code group 'community events for the development of a shared spirit' were over-represented in the church-run sector (Adj. Resid. = 3.0) (see Figure 5). However, this code group was also unique

because it was exclusive to the church-run sector. The active presence of local communities in Hungarian society is weak, but religious events and church feasts have a strong local community-building potential that extends beyond the school walls.

Discussion

As Bertola and Checci (2013) argue, the function of the church-run sector as school provider varies across countries, education systems and even regions within a country, and therefore no uniform conclusions can be drawn about the recruitment, school culture and effectiveness of church-run institutions. In addition to the fundamental differences between different education systems, sector-specific patterns of interaction with parents add further subtlety to the picture. This was why we considered it necessary to examine communication with parents across sectors. The topicality of our study is that the COVID pandemic has significantly reorganised the patterns of parental contact and thus may have had an impact on sector-specific characteristics. Our research findings may also shed more light on the decades-long debate on whether the specific characteristics of church-run schools are rooted in student input or the school effect (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore 1982; Coleman and Hoffer 1987). Analyses of interview transcripts with teachers by means of thematic and then inductive coding revealed significant cross-sectoral variation in parent-teacher interaction. The importance of this research is enhanced by the fact that family-school partnership is not only a prominent feature of institutional culture in its own right, but also an important issue regarding institutional effectiveness, as it is one of the factors influencing student achievement. In our study, we did not investigate the impact on achievement, but sought to explore teachers' views on, and attitudes towards, parental involvement, which we consider to be an important feature of school culture.

In examining parental involvement in school, we adopted the Epsteinian approach, which, on the one hand, examines parental involvement from several aspects and, on the other hand, focuses on school actors rather than parents, thus emphasising the triadic, partnership-like collaboration of schools, teachers and parents.

Our empirical research focused on primary schools in a disadvantaged region. Teacher interview transcripts were subjected to deductive thematic coding based on Epstein's six types of parental involvement. In general, the involvement types appeared in the interviews with different weights regardless of the sector, indicating that teachers had the most experience with parent-school communication, which they discussed most frequently and in most detail. Overall, they did not have as much to say about the other five aspects. They spoke less about the role of parents in home learning and parental volunteering at school, and even less about parental participation in school committees. The fewest mentions were made about parent communities around the school.

As we sought to answer the question of whether any differences could be expected between the church-run and state sectors in parental involvement, we performed thematic coding and after that, inductive coding within each thematic unit and finally created code groups. Within the main codes, the frequency of occurrence of each code group was compared.

Our results showed that, despite the similarities between sectors, there were significant differences in teachers' views on how to interact with parents. Examining the Epsteinian categories, we found that both the positive and negative poles of each category were present in both sectors, but that there were also some features that distinguished between the sectors.

Communication with parents emerged as the most important theme, and there was wide variation in the responses in terms of the activity of schools and teachers. There were differences in the nature of the digital shift following the pandemic. In addition, teachers in the church-run sector reported greater school activity in communication initiatives, and it was also highlighted that community-building events where parents could talk informally with teachers and each other were an integral part of school culture there. This is the community-building model that Coleman

observed in Catholic schools as the empirical basis for his theory of social capital (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore 1982). Another characteristic of the church-run sector is the preference for one-to-one, face-to-face, trust-based conversations rather than one-way, informative communication, largely relegated to the digital space.

In relation to parenting at home, teachers in church-run schools were significantly more likely to emphasise the tension between the value preferences of the school and those of the family. They were much more critical of parents than their colleagues in the state sector, with more frequent comments about parents being unprepared. In the light of teachers' criticisms, the body of parents that teachers in church-run schools encountered did not appear to be of a higher quality. However, the narratives of teachers in the church-run sector particularly emphasised the need to train and prepare parents to raise children. Some research has shown that families of church-run school pupils raise their children in a different way (Pusztai, Róbert, and Fényes 2023), but we have not found similar statements among teachers' views on this issue.

Teachers were very critical of parents' activity in home learning in both sectors: on the one hand, they sought and found explanations and excuses for poor parental performance; on the other hand, no initiatives to support parents' work in home learning were mentioned in either sector, so there was no church-run school advantage in this area. We have not found either any research findings in the literature on this subject or any conclusions consistent with our results.

Regarding school volunteering, mentions of non-supportive parents were over-represented in the state sector, but mentions of active parents were not over-represented in the church-run sector. In terms of participation in school decision-making bodies, teachers in denominational primary schools had an over-represented proportion of mentions of organised, active parental participation in school governing bodies. This is inconsistent with the common conclusion drawn by the international literature that in church-run schools, parents tend to be involved in the school community through community building events, because decision-making in church-run schools is often dominated by the school provider (Joseph, Vélez, and Antrop-González 2017; Hamlin and Flessa 2016; Hamlin and Cheng 2020).

Teachers in the church-run sector were clearly overrepresented in mentions of the organisation of community events by school management and teachers. Community events aiming to form a spiritual community with shared values and norms were reported as the exclusive activity of the church-run sector, which is also in line with Coleman and Hoffer's findings published in their book in 1987 (Coleman and Hoffer 1987). A significant outcome of our analysis is that both sectors are characterised by a deficit-oriented, narrow understanding of parental attitudes and competences. Consequently, they have not moved beyond the barriers of deficit-orientedness, although differences exist when comparing the teacher approaches to parental involvement in the distinct sectors. Therefore, teachers in church-run schools have higher expectations of parents, and are frequently highly critical, but in terms of teacher and school activity, we have observed a characteristic school strategy that relies heavily on involving parents. Of course, during the analysis of the texts one may raise the question of whether teachers in church-run schools encounter a different body of parents in terms of social status, but the strong criticism of parental activities suggest that even if the parental status is higher, teachers do not consider the quality of parenting to be of high quality. Thus, dissatisfaction with parents indicates that, despite the fact that parents who choose church-run schools tend to be more conscious, they are perceived by teachers as unprepared for childrearing and home learning. The issue of school choice is also important because it is presumably families open to the institution's worldview that choose a church-run institution, and in addition, in Hungary, upwardly mobile classes are more religious. The internal stratification of the church-run sector is strong, and its role varies from region to region. While in some regions the church-run sector has a complementary function to the state sector, in others it has more of a supportive, gap-filling function, so it is understandable that teachers in the region's church-run schools are mostly confronted with parents who are less prepared for parenting at home. Interview transcripts show that it is very rare for teachers to refer to religious parents. If the choice of a church-run school is not

made because the parent is looking for an institution that is in line with the family's worldview, the church-run institution faces similar challenges to state institutions. In the region under study, other factors besides worldview may also play a part in school choice, such as the school's role in helping and empowering families to overcome disadvantage. Teachers of church-run schools, with their knowledge of the church-run school tradition and context, are aware of the importance of the school's proactive role and use more varied, low-threshold forms of parental involvement that offer opportunities for informal contact. Church-run schools appear to have adopted an attitude promoting inclusion and social mobility, a partnership approach between schools and teachers, and a school culture that combines expectations with opportunities, including care for parents. However, the active work of training parents and preparing them for the challenges of parenting and learning at home is rarely reported by teachers, despite their awareness of the need for it.

Conclusion

In our study, we have found that in the disadvantaged region under study, the Epsteinian family-school-community partnership is more pronounced in the church sector than in the state sector in several areas, but there are areas where church-run school teachers are not ahead of the others, for example, they are not more effective in advising parents in their childrearing and home learning support activities. In church-run institutions, school staff develop closer ties with parents, working to create a sense of community around the school. Community-building events, which are also provided by state institutions, are much more frequently organised in church-run schools, where the range of events comes complete with religiously themed ones, which give opportunities for teachers, parents and pupils to meet in informal settings. In addition, in church-run institutions, it is more common for parents and teachers to engage in personal exchanges, which, besides the mutual sharing of knowledge, are also extremely useful for building trust.

Further research needs to include data on the student composition and performance of schools to investigate the relationship between teachers' views on partnership and school performance. At the same time, there would be practical benefits in collecting and sharing good practices in schools that teachers have mentioned.

The novelty of our work is that, although it is common in research on school-parent relations to interview teachers, this is usually limited to a small number of institutions. In other cases, large-sample quantitative research is done, where closed questions do not allow for exploring content that researchers have not expected in advance. In Europe, few studies deal with cross-sectoral comparisons of the school-parent relationship from a teacher perspective, so our research is unique in this respect. The novelty is that we compare the perceptions of teachers in the church-run and state sectors on the school-parent relationship.

Our analysis reveals several differences and similarities in the school-parent relationship between the two school-providing sectors. The similarities can mainly be attributed to regional characteristics, since the area under study is dominated by disadvantaged parents, which may be the reason for the general critical attitude of teachers. At the same time, the lack of teachers' socio-cultural openness and their inexperience in keeping in contact with parents are factors which pose an inescapable challenge in the field of teacher education and professional development. However, despite the homogeneity of the region, the differences between the sectors are apparent.

Overall, it can be concluded that the institutions in each sector have a different impact on cooperation with parents, but that the sharing and adoption of each other's good practices could be useful for school providers in developing institutional culture and policies in relation to parents. As a practical outcome, our research has also drawn attention to the need to improve teacher education regarding sensitisation to school-parent relations.

Acknowledgments

The research on which this paper is based has been implemented by the MTA-DE-Parent-Teacher Cooperation Research Group and with the support provided by the Scientific Foundations of Education Research Program of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix

Annex 1. Breakdown of main codes by subcode

Main code	Subcode (Code groups for inductive codes)	Description (description)
parenting	digital challenge	parents face digital barriers and lack the technical equipment and knowledge to support their child's learning
	diversity among parents	differences in status between families
	flawed parenting	Parental attitudes that negatively affect the child's development, e.g. over-rewarding, pampering, lack of a daily schedule, excessive freedom
	cultural value distance	distance between school and family values (especially for Roma families), a stressful home environment, emotional poverty, lack of values transmission, a psychologically stressful home environment
	lack of teacher insight	teacher's lack of insight into the upbringing of children at home, not knowing/not caring what happens at home, gap between school and family
learning at home	supportive family	a loving family environment, parenting is important and conscious, child development is a priority
	material care	parents try to do all they can for the child's development, but this is usually limited to material activities (i.e. extra lessons)
	barriers and constraints to parental care	parents are unable to create the necessary environment for learning, lack of basic forms of education
communication	negative parental attitudes	the parent does not want to create an environment for learning, learning is not a value in the family
	parental care	make every effort to provide the right environment for learning
	active school	the school attaches the utmost importance to communication with parents, and communication is a compulsory part of the organisation's operating rules
	active teacher	the teacher takes the initiative in dealing with parents, is cooperative, and tries to find common ground with everyone
	maternal dominance	mothers/careers communicate primarily with the teacher
	father also communicates	less frequent, the father/career communicates and keeps in touch with the teacher
	inadequacy of digital channels	communication through digital channels can be misleading, as well as being more impersonal
	digital means of communication	communication on digital platforms is a product of COVID-19, which has been preserved and is still in use, but it is also fast, with more information available to more people in less time
	excuses the parents	parents are busy, working
	community building	organizing community-building events, which provide an opportunity for communication
volunteering	collaboration in partnership	the teacher treats the parent as an equal partner, communication is more effective
	passive school	the school does not provide social occasions that would provide opportunities for communication
	rare contact	parents rarely seek out the teacher
	personal advice	personal, individual advice for parents to help them work together more effectively
	active parent	the parent actively seeks out the teacher and opportunities to collaborate
	negative parental image	passive parent, learning is not a value in the family, they do not care about the child's education, so they are not interested
	positive parenting	parents are grateful, ask for advice, try to keep in touch with the teacher, are happy to ask for advice
volunteering	casual	less frequent, attendance at a few mandatory events
	at regular events	the school provides opportunities for volunteering through holidays, community events, exam preparation, charity events, etc.

(Continued)

Main code	Subcode (Code groups for inductive codes)	Description (description)
participation in school communities and decision-making at school	non-supportive parents	parents cannot be relied on, they are not willing to take on such tasks
	supportive parents	creative, supportive parents, eager to help
	no, because participation is a burden	is seen as a burden by parents, it has no legitimacy, these bodies have no decision-making power
	organized, active	multi-level (school and class), active communication, in a decision-making position
	parent passivity	parents do not take the initiative, they join in but are passive and formally organized
	emphasis on teacher initiative	the teacher ensures that these bodies are set up and functioning
parental collaboration with local and school community	lack of teacher insight	lack of teacher insight into the existence and functioning of these communities
	get involved	active, helpful participation
	uninterest	passive or no participation
	events	at class level, school level, local level
	religious events to build a shared spirit	family worship, church celebrations, Christian community programmes
	interest-driven	application-based programme, with a cash benefit for participation