

PARENTS AS STAKEHOLDERS IN THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Abstract

In the article, the author analyses the role of significant risk factors in school management and the decision-making process including aspirations of and potential actions taken by parents as the stakeholders. The aim of this article is to provide a preliminary identification of complex school-parents interactions. The focus of this article is on the Polish education system and the principles of primary and secondary school operations, irrespective of their management style or status. The author focuses on the influence of parents on the school management process and the potential results of these interactions for the school management, using research that includes the analysis of legal acts and the results of a pilot study in the form of an electronic questionnaire addressed to school headmasters and teachers, as well as a questionnaire for parents of students attending public and private schools. The author presents the results of research on legal acts concerning the functioning of schools in Poland in the context of parental participation. Additionally, results of the pilot surveys taken by parents and teachers were presented. Against the background of the analysis of the existing legal rules, recommendations were drawn up for further research and construction of a cooperation model between the school and the parents, in order to minimise the risk of conflicts and actions taken in opposition to school managers.

Keywords: stakeholders, school management, decision-making process, risk management

Streszczenie

Autorka analizuje rolę istotnego ryzyka w zarządzaniu szkołą i procesie decyzyjnym, uwzględniając aspiracje i potencjalne działania podejmowane przez rodziców jako interesariuszy. Celem artykułu jest wstępna identyfikacja złożonych interakcji szkoła–rodzice. Artykuł koncentruje się na polskim systemie edukacji oraz zasadach funkcjonowania szkół podstawowych i średnich, niezależnie od ich stylu zarządzania i statusu. Autorka skupia się na wpływie rodziców na proces zarządzania szkołą i potencjalnych wynikach tych interakcji dla kierownictwa szkoły,

wykorzystując badania obejmujące analizę aktów prawnych oraz wyniki badania pilotażowego w postaci elektronicznej ankiety skierowanej do dyrektorów i pracowników szkół oraz ankiety skierowaną do rodziców uczniów szkół publicznych i niepublicznych. Autorka przedstawia wyniki badań aktów prawnych dotyczących funkcjonowania szkół w Polsce w kontekście partycypacji rodziców. Dodatkowo zaprezentowano wyniki badań pilotażowych wśród rodziców i nauczycieli. Na tle analizy istniejących przepisów prawa sformułowano rekomendacje dotyczące dalszych badań i budowy modelu współpracy szkoły z rodzicami, aby zminimalizować ryzyko konfliktów i działań opozycyjnych wobec dyrektorów szkół.

Słowa kluczowe: interesariusze, zarządzanie szkołą, proces decyzyjny, zarządzanie ryzykiem

Introduction

Each school is a small community comprising internal and external shareholders who have various goals, aspirations, and interests [cf. Freeman, 1984]. It cannot be denied that a special role can be ascribed to the relationship of the head teacher and school staff with students. However, it is parents/students' guardians who have a particular impact on the process of school management. In order to describe these impacts, it is necessary to place school management in the context of the existing legal regulations and the education system, which define not only the goals set for educational institutions in a given system, but also the degree of autonomy of school managers and the rights and obligations of stakeholders towards the organization.

For the purposes of further considerations, the definition of school according to Szczepański [1963] was adopted. He depicts it as

a social system which functions as a whole consisting of subjects and relations between them as well as their features. The whole has its own properties, functions, and goals different from the properties, functions, and goals of individual components. The school is a very complex and open system, in constant relations with the wider community and it cannot exist without these contacts. It is because they – as long as they are correct – give the direction and meaning of school work [Szczepański, 1963: 38].

The above definition, presenting the school in a systemic approach, allows to assume that, like any organization, it should identify stakeholders and their potential risks and have the ability to manage them. The idea of working with parents is about parents' involvement [Cabardo, 2016; Gichohi, 2015; Hii, Odhiambo, 2012; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010].

It is worth citing Młynek [2021], who writes:

If the school is not democratic, i.e. it does not allow parents and students to influence what is happening there, it will not prepare young people well to live in a democratic society. If parents are not real partners, but clients, then the entire process of their children's learning path (acquiring knowledge, teaching behaviour, learning about

values) will be very difficult, if not impossible. The cooperation of teachers, parents, students and even the local community is therefore a necessary condition for the proper functioning of the school [Młynek, 2021: 7].

The mission of an organization such as the school means that in management work, it should be equally important to take into account the risk arising from the interactions of stakeholders. In particular that the important role of the school manifests itself in its impact on the environment. Additionally, both the school's stakeholders and their positions are exceptionally diverse and, at the same time, interdependent. Therefore, it is worth trying to describe the importance of various stakeholder groups from the point of view of the school head/management and take into account different interests, aspirations, and blocking actions in school management. The author assumes that in the perspective of the impact of stakeholders, the main risk for the school as an organization and its management process is reputation risk. It can be defined as

an (intangible) asset and as a liability – a buffer against losses (entities with a better reputation will be affected less severely by the crisis). From the point of view of the discussed issues, the third approach seems to be the most important, where risk and reputation itself are treated as responsibility i.e. a set of obligations towards stakeholders, which must be met [cf. Kil, Miklaszewska, 2017: 81].

The complexity of expectations and relationships are emphasized even by the authors who formally narrow down the role of students and parents to the role of the school client. They write:

The management's task is to look after the interests of all the stakeholders and keep some sort of balance between them. School managers have a right and duty to resist demands that seriously upset the balance and health of the organization and have to resolve conflicts of interest, some of which are more apparent than real. It is a help when the different stakeholders recognize and respect each other's legitimate aims for the organization, and can see that its best interests are served when any conflict is resolved by consensus [Everard, Morris, Wilson, 2004: 145].

Everard, Morris and Wilson place an emphasis on the fact that: "While barriers to curriculum development are most often said to be financial, the real problems are often human." Adding that: "The raison d'être of a school is to promote its pupils' learning, within a curriculum acceptable to its stakeholders, or as prescribed by the law" [Everard, Morris, Wilson, 2004: 7–10].

By the same token, Paine and McCann, who also refer to parents as internal stakeholders, place a significant emphasis on the role of this group saying that

(...) When the long-term success of a school system is deemed important, we must ask: "To whom do the schools belong?" and "Who has a long-term vested interest in the success of our schools and students?" In answering these questions, we quickly

find ourselves at the doorstep of our constituents: the families who send their children to our schools, the taxpayers who support the schools, and the businesses who hire our graduates. In this light, external stakeholders can be highly motivated and can become powerful drivers to help achieve and sustain positive change in our schools [McCann, Paine, 2009: 5].

However cited authors classify students and parents as the group of internal stakeholders, defining them as clients, adopting the systemic definition of the school, a dual character of the latter groups should be emphasised. From this angle, it is difficult not to notice that reducing the role of students and parents to being only a client of the school may significantly weaken not only the effectiveness of organizational management, but also contribute to the inability to identify risks and conflict situations. After all, it seems that while for the client the main form of relationship with an organization providing services or offering goods is a contract and liability based on a contract, the relationship with students and parents is much deeper and varied for the school. The school is characterized by broad responsibility towards these stakeholders, based on trust, understanding, and often interference in private and family matters. Here, unlike in contractual liability, it is not about proper performance of obligations or offering a product or service of average quality, compliant with the standard and norms.

On the other hand, we should take into consideration the difference between parents' involvement and importance of parental engagement in the learning process of their children. [cf. e.g. Bartz, Hill, Witherspoon, 2018; Hornby, Lafaele, 2011; Ullman, Williams, Williams, 2002]. While analyzing the scope of this concept against the background of literature, Harasiwka [2021: 12] writes that:

distinguishes between 'parental involvement', defined as 'parents getting involved in school life', e.g., attending parent's evenings, and 'parental engagement', defined as a parent directly engaging with their child's learning, e.g. helping with homework. In this context engagement has become more pertinent, whereas traditional forms of parental involvement may not even be possible. Even with this distinction, there are still a wide range of activities that can be categorised as parental engagement.

If the latter method directly influences the child's learning process, the level of parental involvement and participation in the former concept of 'parents getting involved in school life' is of decisive importance for the processes of school democratization and its socialization [cf. Mencil, 2009]. Furthermore, the scale of involvement of students' parents also has a significant impact on the development of social capital on a local scale, on the other hand, it is the result of the "inherited" level of social capital within the family and local community. The complexity of the role of parental involvement and, more broadly, the school's stakeholders on the processes taking place in the internal environment and its surroundings, requires in-depth research into the impact of these phenomena on the school management process from a managerial perspective. In this respect, in the context of the presented literature, the author proposes two ways of perceiving parents as

school stakeholders, which determine the type of relationship, but also the management instruments used by school managers:

- when we treat the school as an organization with closed membership where internal stakeholders include school management and its employees (teaching and administrative staff),
- when we treat the school as a community, a membership organization when internal stakeholders include members of this community, i.e. school management and its employees as well as students and their parents.

Parents as stakeholders – own pilot research

Methodological assumptions

From the point of view of research on parents in the school management process, for the purposes of the article, the author will undertake, in line with the research triangulation approach, the following:

- the analysis of legal acts concerning the participation/involvement of students' parents in the school activity (statute – Education Law);
- analysis of legal acts and guidelines regarding the obligations of public schools as public finance units in the field of management control and risk management;
- analysis of own pilot study of students' parents in terms of their aspirations and evaluation of school activities in terms of parental involvement.

The conclusions drawn from the analyses should allow for recommendations regarding the parents as stakeholders in the school's activities and potential forms of cooperation as important components of planning, managing and evaluating the management process at school, including a wider group of stakeholders.

Parents and school head in the Polish education law – analysis

The basic legal act in Poland regarding the education system is the Act of December 14, 2016 Educational Law. The assumption of the system is compulsory education for children and adolescents aged 7–18 (art. 35). On the part of the parents/legal guardians of children, this means taking actions enabling the child to actively participate in education.

On the other hand, the parents' rights to influence the school's activities are primarily related to the created system of their representation in the school's consultative and advisory structures. And yes, art. 80 of the Act indicates that schools may have school councils that participate in solving internal affairs of a given school, as well as:

- 1) adopt the school's statutes;
- 2) give their opinion on the draft financial plan of the school;

- 3) have the right to apply to the authority exercising pedagogical supervision over the school with requests to examine and evaluate the activities of the school, its head teacher or another teacher; these conclusions are binding on the authority;
- 4) give their opinion on the school's work plan, pedagogical experiment projects and other matters relevant to the school;
- 5) on their own initiative, assess the situation and condition of the school and submit applications to the head teacher, the pedagogical council, the school governing body and the regional educational council, in particular regarding the organization of classes;
- 6) have the right to collect funds from voluntary contributions and other sources to support the school's statutory activities.

As a collective body, an equal number of school councils are made up of teachers elected by all teachers; parents elected by all parents and students elected by all students. The school statute may provide for the extension of the board to include other persons, although the statutory assumption indicates three groups of internal stakeholders in the understanding of the school as a community presented above. The school head may only participate in the meetings of the school council in an advisory capacity.

The establishment of the school council is organized by the head teacher of the school or institution on his/her own initiative or at the request of the parent council, and in the case of secondary schools, also at the request of the student union.

On the other hand, on an obligatory basis (art. 83), in Polish schools there are parent councils representing all parents of pupils, which each include one representative of department (class) councils, elected in secret elections by a meeting of parents of pupils in a given department. The powers of the parent council include, first of all, the right to apply to the head teacher and other school bodies, the body managing the school and the body exercising pedagogical supervision with motions and opinions on all matters. The parent council also participates in:

- 1) adopting, in consultation with the pedagogical council, the educational and preventive program of the school;
- 2) giving opinions on the program and schedule for improving the effectiveness of education or school upbringing;
- 3) giving opinions on the draft financial plan submitted by the school head.

An important right is that the Parent Council may collect funds from voluntary contributions from parents and other sources in order to support the statutory activities of the school. To that end, a separate bank account of the parent council may be opened.

The act regulates the position of the school head in detail, from the method of selecting them and the required qualifications, to the scope of duties and powers. In most public schools, the method of selecting the head teacher is through a competition. In this case, there are two representatives of the parent council

on the jury. As a rule, the post of head teacher is entrusted with a term of up to five years. The remaining managerial positions in the school are entrusted by the schoolteacher, after consulting the governing body, the school council and the pedagogical council. This means that in the case of a school where a school council has not been appointed, parents have no influence on the appointment of other managerial positions. At the same time, it should be added that in a school with at least 12 departments, it is obligatory to create the position of deputy head. The head teacher, as the person managing the school, has a wide range of tasks and duties including:

- the function of the head of the workplace for teachers and employees who are not teachers employed in the school or institution;
- managing the activities of the school or facility and representing it outside;
- pedagogical supervision;
- students' wellbeing;
- implementation of the resolutions of the pedagogical council and the school council (if this occurs in a given institution);
- managing financial resources;
- ensuring the safety of students and teachers (cf. art. 68).

It should be emphasized that education law imposes on the head teacher the duty to cooperate with the school council, pedagogical council, parent and student council .

In terms of school cooperation with parents, it is worth pointing out the role of form master (of a class) as a class guardian whose task is to ensure work continuity and effectiveness.

The principal formal document of the school is its statute. Among its many elements, the act stipulates that its provisions, in the case of a school for children and adolescents, define the organization and forms of cooperation between the school and parents in the field of teaching, upbringing, care and prevention (art. 98.1).

On the basis of the above analysis of the act of education law, it can be concluded that the main responsibility for relations with parents as school stakeholders rests on the head teacher. Therefore, it is the person who should control the risk arising from these interactions, both in the case of the impact of parental representation (in the school board, parent council, class council) and in informal parent groups and individuals.

Stakeholders from the school community are given special rank by appointing a school body, which is the school council. This entity allows, to the fullest extent permitted by Polish law, to provide parents, especially of public schools, with agency and participation in school management. At the same time, it emphasizes the rights of students and the teaching council to co-manage. However, this is an optional solution. Mandatory solutions in the form of the obligation to appoint a parent council do not provide equally wide powers to co-decide, focusing on opinion-making functions.

It should be highlighted that a significant role of influencing school management has been delegated in the Polish act (not analyzed in this article) to supervisory and control bodies – school superintendents (government administration) and, to a lesser extent, to managing authorities (for public schools, mainly local governments). According to the author, the balance point in terms of co-deciding on matters and ways of managing the school has clearly been shifted to public stakeholders, and not to the stakeholders deriving from the school community. This is evidenced by the provisions of many regulations of education law (including pedagogical supervision, evaluation of the school's activities, giving opinions on school decisions and documents in the field of compliance with the law).

Summing up the considerations in the context of the applicable legal framework, despite indicating the group of parents as members of the school community, in the perspective of the management and co-decision making process in the school, they are treated rather like external stakeholders, who give their opinion on certain solutions. From the point of view of the importance and role of the school in the social context and, at the same time, the effectiveness of management, they should be treated, according to the author, as internal stakeholders, which should imply giving them broader decision-making powers (e.g. by establishing school councils as obligatory bodies of educational organizations).

Risk management as the element of school management control

The Act of 27 August 2009 on public finance [Journal of Laws of 2009, No. 157, item 1240, as amended] imposed obligations on public finance sector entities, including public schools, related to the inclusion of control. It is defined as all activities undertaken to ensure the implementation of goals and tasks in a lawful, effective, economical and timely manner. The Act lists a number of objectives for these checks, including:

- compliance with the law and internal procedures;
- effectiveness and efficiency of operation;
- reliability of reports;
- resource protection;
- compliance with and promotion of the principles of ethical conduct;
- efficiency and effectiveness of information flow;
- risk management (cf. art. 68 UoFP).

Ensuring the functioning of adequate, effective and efficient management control is the responsibility of the head of the entity, i.e. in the case of a school, its head teacher.

In Poland there are approximately 21 thousand primary and secondary schools for children and adolescents, i.e. those where education is aimed primarily at minors. About 80% of primary and secondary schools are public schools, which adhere to the above-mentioned rules and regulations.

In the perspective of ministerial guidelines for carrying out this process, it is indicated that thanks to risk management, management control becomes more effective and efficient and focuses on the most important types of risk, as well as the selection of appropriate control measures and monitoring of results. Hence, risk management is one of the elements of management control.

The management control standards came into force on the basis of the Statement No. 23 of the Minister of Finance of December 16, 2009 on management control standards for the public finance sector [Komunikat Nr 23 Ministra Finansów..., 2009]. The document emphasizes that risk management aims to increase the probability of achieving goals and accomplishing tasks. Objectives and targets should be set out clearly and in at least an annual perspective, and their implementation should be monitored. It is recommended to evaluate the objectives and tasks taking into account the criteria of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Responsibility for achieving goals and objectives should also be identified, and resources should be allocated. Risk identification should be performed at least once a year, and in the event of a material change in the conditions in which the entity operates, it should be repeated. The identified risks are analyzed in order to determine the probability of their occurrence and potential consequences, with the determination of the acceptable level of risk. For significant risks, the type of reaction (tolerance, transfer, withdrawal, action) should be specified.

Detailed guidelines for the public finance sector in the field of risk planning and management are presented in the Statement of the Minister of Finance of December 6, 2012, which broadly indicates the method of conducting the risk management process. For the purposes of this article, only those provisions that may apply to public schools have been analyzed.

The guidelines define the notion of risk and risk management in reference to public sector entities. Risk is

defined as the possibility of an event that will adversely affect the achievement of goals and objectives. It is neither possible nor deliberate to reduce uncertainty to zero. Risk management consists of procedures and policies as well as coordinated activities undertaken by both the entity's management and its employees, which by identifying and analyzing risk and defining adequate responses to risk, increase the probability of achieving goals and performing tasks. Owing to the fact that risk management consists of many interpenetrating and interdependent elements, it can be called a system [Komunikat Ministra Finansów..., 2012].

It is emphasized that the basic condition for the effectiveness of any risk management system is its adjustment to the entity, and the entity manager plays an important role in it.

The introduction to risk management is always the right specification of aims and tasks of an entity. The aims must be specified in such a way that the identification of risks and their analyses can be conducted, but, also and more importantly, in order that any institution can be managed effectively.

In the business planning process, the guidelines give particular importance to the involvement of senior management: “The planning process should not be based solely on the bottom-up proposition of goals by employees or organizational units” so that – according to the document – higher-level goals do not become a simple sum of lower-level goals. “Setting goals in such a way contradicts the principle that the entity is managed by a manager and makes the goals identified in this way not set new and ambitious directions, but rather recreate the tasks performed thus far” [Komunikat Ministra Finansów..., 2012]. The guidelines recommend writing down goals and disseminating them among all employees (i.e. only narrowly understood internal stakeholders). At the same time, it is pointed out that risk identification should be carried out at all levels of the entity, as well as taking into account the interior of the entity as well as the environment in which it operates. Therefore, when identifying risks, all risks should be taken into account, regardless of their place or source of origin.

While identifying risk, it is advisable to describe its causes as well as the possible consequences in order to assess risk significance. The guidelines indicate the possibility of risk cumulation, which, with even a small influence in one organizational entity, may result in a significant impact of risk on the achievement of the goals and tasks of the entire entity. However, attention is drawn to avoid risking situations/factors/events that do not affect the achievement of objectives or tasks.

The guidelines underline that all risks ought to have their owner who is responsible for ensuring that risks are managed and monitored. The risk owner should have sufficient capabilities (powers) to ensure effective risk management.

The document indicates that the identification of risks should involve those responsible for the implementation of the set goals and tasks as well as those who implement them. In accordance with the provisions: “potential participants of the risk identification process are top management (at least in relation to strategic goals), middle management, selected employees, person/team/unit manager, the person responsible for coordinating the risk management system in the entity, audit committee”.

The guidelines also present different techniques of risk identification. As a result, a list of risks related to the formulated goals is obtained, specifying the causes and effects of their occurrence. The identified risks should be analyzed in order to determine the likelihood of occurrence of a given risk and its possible consequences. The acceptable risk level should be determined as the one which the entity manager is able to approve of and not take any further action towards a particular risk. The acceptable risk level should be clearly specified, however, it can be different for various goals of the unit and should be properly communicated so that everyone interested is familiar with it.

In terms of each significant risk, a type of reaction should be determined such as tolerating, transfer, withdrawal, and action. According to the guidelines under discussion, the type of reaction to risk depends on:

- the influence of potential reactions on the likelihood of risk occurrence and its consequence;
- the level of acceptable risk (e.g. the risk deemed negligible might be tolerated by the entity);
- the relation of the costs of implementing activities that would be a response to the risk and the benefits obtained from these activities, as the costs of the activities undertaken should not be higher than the expected benefits of these activities.

The control mechanisms should constitute a response to a particular risk. The costs of the implementation and using control mechanisms ought not to be higher than the benefits obtained thanks to them.

The internal procedures, instructions, guidelines, documents specifying the scope of duties, powers and responsibilities of employees and other internal documents constitute the documentation of the management control system. The documentation should be coherent and available to those for whom it is deemed indispensable.

Both managers and employees ought to have access to the information necessary to perform their duties. The communication system should enable the flow of the necessary information inside the entity, both vertically and horizontally. An effective communication system should ensure not only the flow of information, but also its proper understanding by the recipients.

Summing up the analysis of legal documents concerning public schools in Poland in terms of management control and risk management, it should be emphasized that despite the wide definition of the objectives set for these processes for public finance entities, they contain instructions and guidelines that do not take into account the specificity of organizations with open membership, where stakeholders other than management and employees play an important role in the management process. Although undoubtedly the management control and risk management processes, as introduced obligatorily in the Polish public sector, have an invaluable role to play in achieving public and organizational goals, two reservations should be made:

- the already mentioned narrow approach to stakeholders and their role in the process;
- non-obligatory use of regulations and guidelines in non-public schools.

Parents as school stakeholders and their aspirations – findings of pilot studies

In March 2022, the author conducted a pilot study, the aim of which was to develop future research tools for in-depth analyses of the possibilities of implementing participatory school management with the participation of parents and identifying the risks and risk management tools that may be generated by students' parents. The link to the survey: (1) addressed to parents and (2) addressed to

teachers, was made available on Facebook on the author's private and professional profile, and was also passed on. As a result of this survey, 66 responses from parents and 25 from teachers were obtained.

In the first group (1) of parents, there were responses regarding both public and private schools (13 secondary schools, 43 primary schools; 20 non-public schools, 46 public schools) located in various parts of Poland (the vast majority being in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants), managed by different categories of leading bodies (private individuals, corporate entities, local government units).

In view of the topic of the article, it is worth providing the opinions of the respondents on the reasons for choosing a given facility.

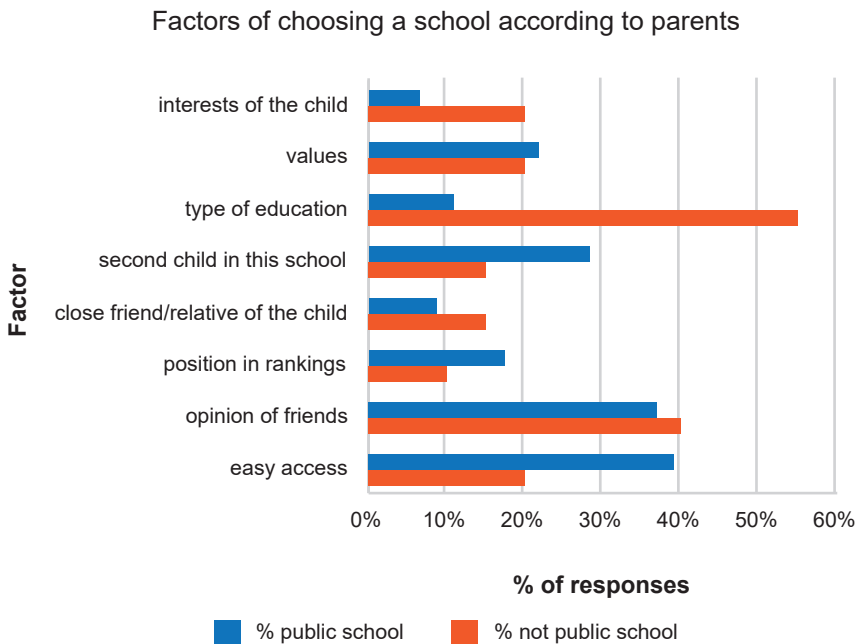


Figure 1. Factors of choosing a school in parents' opinion

Source: own research, percentage of responses, N = 66, parents with child in public school = 46, parents with child in non public school = 20.

Fourteen of the 66 surveyed parents do not know (13) whether there are any forms of parental representation in their child's school, and one person (representing the parent of a public institution) even believes that such a form does not exist at all. This means that in the pilot group as many as 20% of parents do not know that parents are represented as stakeholders at school (6/20 participants

in non-public schools). The most frequently indicated forms of representation include – resulting from legal provisions – the so-called class triples and Parent Councils. Less frequently, the respondents mentioned the School Council (8 answers only referring to public schools), in one of the non-public schools – the so-called PRC – Parents Responsible for the Class, another – Parent Community. Interestingly, also in non-public schools there were so-called class triples and Parent Councils (in 8 schools, both forms, in 3 – one of them).

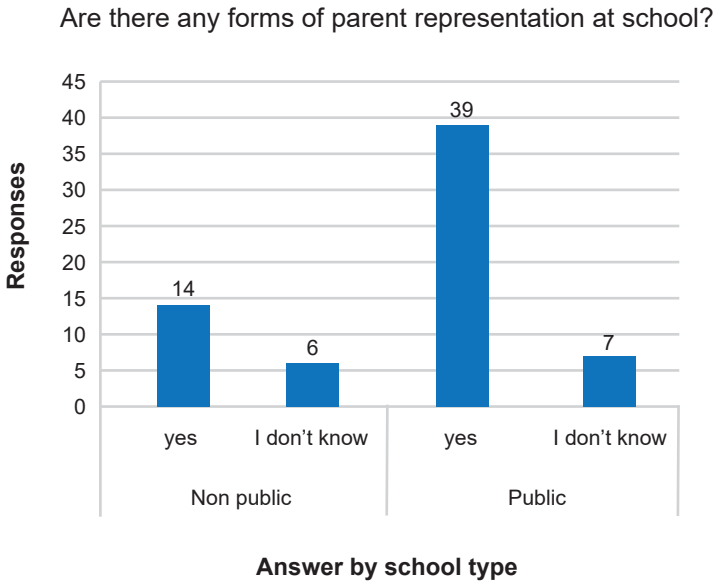


Figure 2. Parents’ knowledge about the occurrence of forms of representation of students’ parents

Source: own research, number of responses, N = 66, parents with child in public school = 46, parents with child in non public school = 20.

Parents were asked whether the school should create specific offers for them in such areas as education and training, psychological support, recreation, sport, entertainment or volunteering. 20 out of 66 surveyed parents do not think that such offers are needed, but the others consider them necessary, and psychological support is most often pointed out. 9 out of 66 respondents see the need for the school to prepare an offer for parents in the full scope presented for selection.

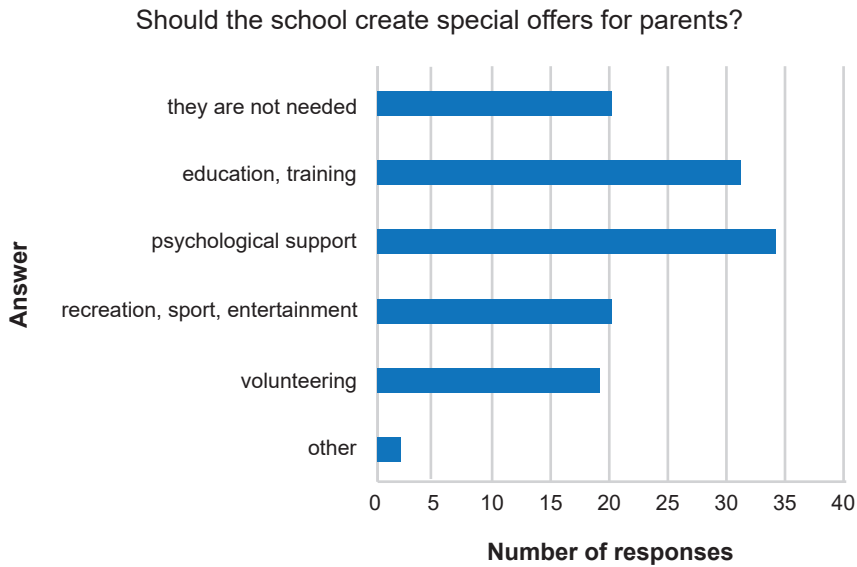


Figure 3. Parents' opinion about types of special offers for students' parents

Source: own research, number of responses, any number of responses was possible, N = 66.

From the perspective of the participation ladder, the respondents were presented for evaluation with various forms of involving parents in school matters. With a generally good evaluation of the information process (the lowest level of participation) – median of 4, a lower evaluation of the level of consultation and codecision in the group of respondents was noticed – 3.

A type of institution, irrespective of being public or non-public, was irrelevant.

Parents' evaluation of various forms of involvement in school matters

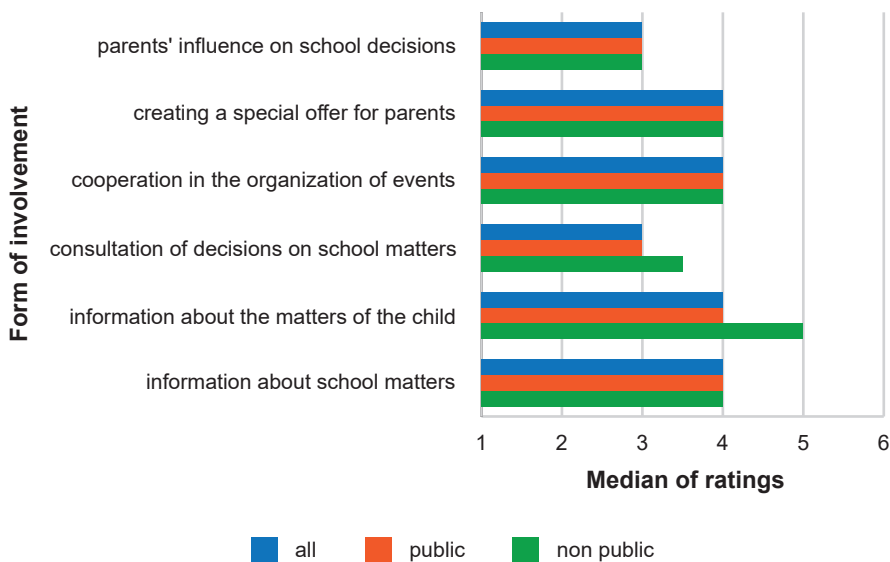


Figure 4. Parents' evaluation of forms of involvement in school matters

Source: own research, median of ratings, rating scale 1–6.

Interestingly and worth exploring more closely, the majority of the surveyed parents do not associate the type of school (public or non-public) with the scope of parents' influence on the institution's management process.

As many as half of the pilot group of parents want to be involved in co-decision on school matters and at the same time have experience with it.

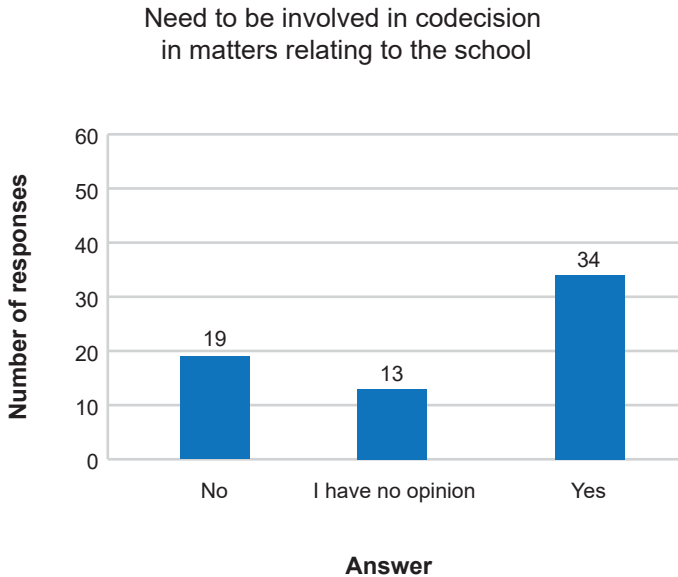


Figure 5. Parents' need to be involved

Source: own research, number of responses, N = 66.

According to the surveyed parents, the most important factor determining their relations with the school is the figure of the form teacher and, secondly, that of the head teacher (understood as character, personality, set of values). This group also sees a significant role of the specificity of school and education (e.g. Montessori, Waldorf, Catholic, artistic). It is worth comparing the indications of the surveyed parents with the teachers' answers to the same question formulation, given in a pilot survey conducted in parallel (2). The differences in the perception of both pilot groups that are visible here require confirmation in the relevant research, due to their potential importance for risk management at school. It would be particularly interesting to deepen the teachers' opinions on two factors that determine the relationship between the school and parents, i.e. their demanding attitude towards the school (12/25) as well as their level of commitment (11/25).

Factors determining the relationship of the school with parents

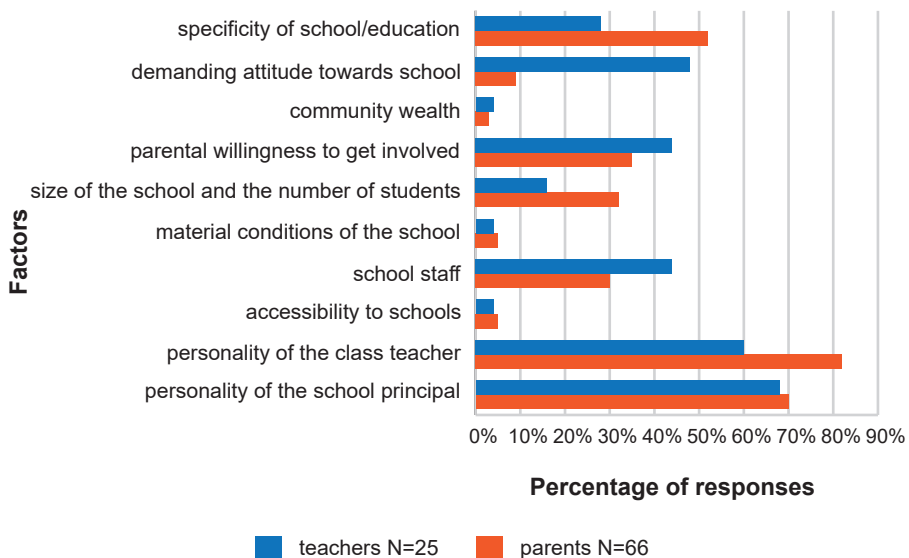


Figure 6. Factors determining the relationship of the school with parents

Source: own research, percentage of responses of teachers (N = 25) and parents (N = 66).

While considering the importance of the head teacher as a factor determining the school-parents relationship, it is worth pointing out the teachers’ responses to the question about the possibility of parents calling a meeting with the head teacher. Nearly half of the surveyed teachers (12 out of 25) who took part in the pilot survey do not even know if parents have the right to organise a meeting with the head teacher in their school.

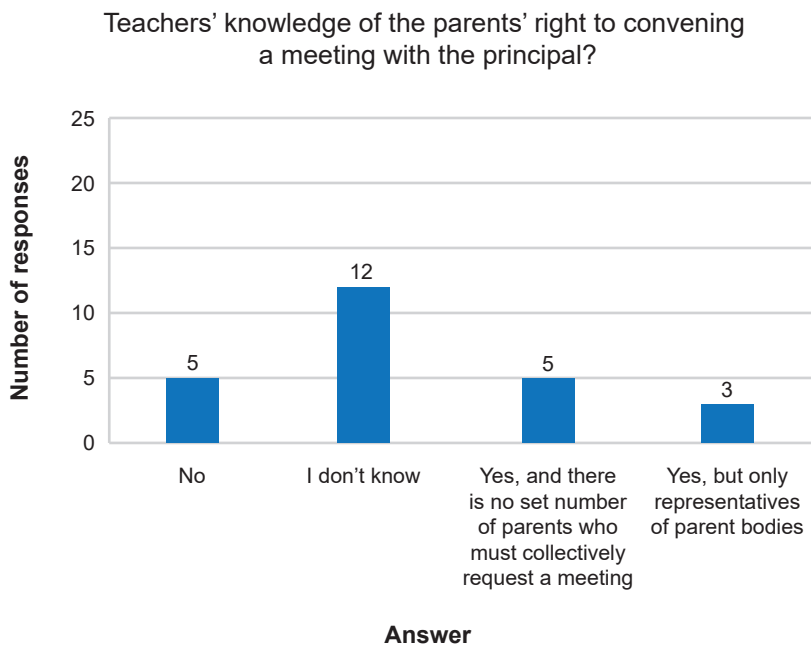


Figure 7. Teachers' knowledge of the parents' right to convening the meeting with the school head teacher (principal)

Source: own research, number of responses, N = 25.

In the pilot groups, various emphasis was placed upon the possibility of developing the participation of parents in deciding on different matters of the school. Teachers are open to activities related to parents' contribution to the fulfilment of the institution's needs and willing to include them in the process of assessing their own child, or allow them to codecide about the form of feeding students at school. To a lesser extent than the parents' expectations, they agree to include parents in the evaluation of the work of teachers, form teachers and the head teacher. So again – in the assessment of the elements constituting the factors that have a decisive (in the opinion of both pilot groups) impact on the school's relationship with parents.

The teachers (in the survey prepared for this pilot group) reaffirmed the importance of these factors, answering the question about the influence of the relationship with parents on the working atmosphere at school. They indicate the relationship between the principal and parents as significant and very significant (19 out of 25 responses), assessing the impact of their own relationships with their parents on the job in the position they hold as lower (14 out of 25 assess the importance of these relationships as very high).

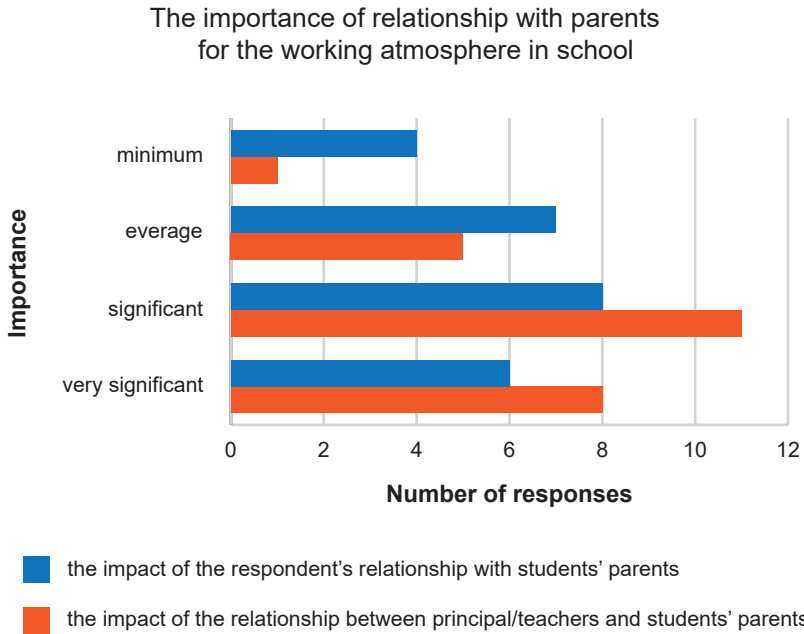


Figure 8. The importance of relationship with students’ parents–teachers’ evaluation

Source: own research, number of responses, N = 25.

The findings of the pilot studies confirmed the author’s initial assumptions regarding the areas worth exploring in the field of parental influence on school management and risk management. Taking these results into account, it will be worth conducting a broader and, at the same time, in-depth research on the discrepancies in the perception of the relationship between parents and the school in various groups of respondents. It is also recommendable, in representative groups of teachers and parents alike, and then in qualitative research, to gain insight into the scale and possibilities of developing forms of management with the participation of parents in areas important for both groups and the wider community. Bearing in mind the contexts in question, a deep analysis of the role of the head teacher and their leadership will be of particular importance.

Summary

Scientific publications and research findings on the issues of school management from the perspective of stakeholders in Poland are of a very limited nature. It is also true in terms of the broader research area, i.e. risk management at school, which is rarely described in Polish literature as well. Risk management is much more popular in terms of schools of tertiary education (universities), where, for obvious reasons (adult education), parents are not the subject of research as a special group of stakeholders.

The author has attempted to portray possible areas of exploration of the issue of risk in school management in the perspective of parents' influence. The analyses and selected tools undertaken in the study were only of a pilot and preliminary nature, however, they allowed to define the proposed directions of more extensive research on these issues.

The analysis of the Education Law Act indicated that the principal responsibility for relations with parents as school stakeholders rests with the school head teacher. This is the person who should control the risks arising from these relationships, both in the case of the impact of parental representation (on the school council, parent council, class council) and informal parent groups and individuals. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the pilot survey of parents and teachers.

Despite the fact that the main focus in terms of co-deciding on matters and the method of school management in the Polish legal system is clearly shifted to public stakeholders, for the efficient management of the school and building a community around the school, attention should be paid to the group of parents who, in the social context and effectiveness of management, should be treated as internal stakeholders and thus be more privileged in the co-deciding process. A pilot survey addressed to parents revealed that half of the respondents expect to have the possibility to get involved in school matters and, at the same time, they have experience in co-deciding in the existing forms of parental representation.

It is worth deepening research on the methods and expected forms of involvement due to the fact that certain differences in the perception of the scope of cooperation and co-decision-making in the opinions of teachers and parents emerged in the pilot group. If, in line with existing principles, in the process of planning the activities of a public school, special importance has been given to conducting risk analysis at all levels of the entity and its environment, regardless of their place or source, involving parents in the process should be taken for granted. None of the participants of the pilot study, neither among parents nor among teachers, indicated that this type of cooperation exists in the institution they represent.

It is worth noting that if more in-depth research confirms the factors identified in the pilot study that guide parents or, more broadly, families when choosing a school, it will be an important indication to pay attention to the potential reputational risk in the school's activities.

In connection with the development of the idea of participation and codecision in public affairs and in the context of the importance of education for the development of social capital, there is a need to identify school management methods and tools that will not only indicate the risk of not using them in the perspective of school managers, but also in the wider social dimension.

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