

# INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION UNITS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**Abstract:** *Personality characteristics are formed and self-created through a mechanism built in society and a special tool - interpersonal relationships. Relationships within educational units, between colleagues, can influence the efficiency of teachers, in order to develop a balanced educational process. The study was conducted to ascertain the quality of interpersonal relationships between directors of preschools in urban areas, teachers, preschoolers and parents of preschoolers in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, during the period of teaching activities that took place online at the beginning of 2020, starting with March 10. We conducted a sociological survey, using the questionnaire as a research tool, because the realistic concept that has earned its deserved place among theorists and practitioners, is that we should not absolutize the two terms of the educational process, teacher - subject, but must look as mutually receptive partners who are co-participants in the interaction. The directors of the pre-school units also played an important role in that period, because they have to carry out a complex activity of designing, preparing, organizing, coordinating and administering the elements involved in achieving educational objectives. The interaction of directors with teachers and parents involves complex skills.*

**Keywords:** interpersonal relationships; preschool; education; teachers.

## 1. Introduction

Personal relationships linked to the surrounding reality are determined by value orientations and mutual understanding, the ability to tolerate differences between people, the sense of belonging and the feeling of satisfaction.

Researchers in the field designate interpersonal relationships as conscious and direct psychological alliances between people. Interpersonal relationships are presented as a support based on which the formation and discovery of the self and of the other takes place. The relationship with a person involves understanding them, transposing them into the world of their thoughts, feelings, relating to their behavior and expectations.

Norbert's Dictionary of Psychology defines interpersonal relationships from a broad perspective: human relationships, interpersonal relationships within a group (Norbert, 1996: 346). Interpersonal relationships are established and developed based on the background of communication between individuals. Some relationships, such as those with relatives or close friends, tend to be close, meaningful relationships that last for many years. Others, for example, those with schoolmates, acquaintances and colleagues at work, may not be as close and may last as long as those people live or work together (Milcu, 2005: 226).

They have a pronounced moral character, because through them the individual seeks the realization of good or evil, either in relation to himself or in relation to others.

Through them, human behavior is valued, ie it becomes positive or negative, accepted or rejected from a social point of view.

Such a peculiarity is acquired over time, being instituted or functioning only when people reach the consciousness of identity and human value.

Defined in an original way, interpersonal relationships are formed between two or more people who each have a certain individual linguistic, cultural and human background, but who can still proceed, through interaction, to create a substantially common understanding of the world around them, which they formulate in the discussions they have and which they apply in their daily relational behavior (Zlate, 2004: 274).

The pandemic has revealed several problems in the field of education, such as: lack of infrastructure, protocols and online working methods (Cerbușică, 2020: 3).

Intrapersonal communication must be as objective as possible, but it must be based on a positive attitude towards oneself, having a positive thinking in relationships with those around us.

For a long time, the educational process, the teacher-student interaction was viewed unilaterally, in the sense that only the teacher influences him, he must influence the subject of education.

Didactic communication, as a particular form of human communication, consists in a “complex and multi-channel transfer of information between entities (individuals or groups) that simultaneously and successively assume the roles of transmitters and receivers signifying the desirable contents in the context of the instructional- educational process” (Cucuş, 2002: 177).

In the absence of a decent technological infrastructure at the level of teachers, but especially at the level of students, without consistent skills in the area of digital skills of teachers, without access to dedicated online platforms, with poor digital teaching and multimedia resources, without a time horizon or intended for online activity, teachers were forced to support teaching activities in a very special regime. (Botnariuc, 2020: 9)

## **2. Particularities of interpersonal relations at preschool level**

In the preschool period, students actively accumulate social knowledge without which the human individual would not assert himself as a personality. Interpersonal relationships represent the framework, the context of shaping and formation, as well as the gradual crystallization of personality traits, which are nothing but internalized interpersonal relationships. From this point of view, relationships are not only the content of the personality, but also its essence. Personality will be the mirror and expression of the relational plan.

In the period from three to six years, the child is characterized by a great openness to the environment, by a lively curiosity, by the desire to find out the cause of processes and phenomena perceived or talked about, manifested by the high frequency of questions. Why? and What's this? The child is like a sponge that absorbs information, with a wide eye open to the world, with an ear attentive to everything that is said around.

Similar to the Member States, in Romania, starting with March 2020, “the COVID-19” crisis has reconfigured educational practices from the “face-to-face” interaction to the online environment.

The reopening of educational institutions in the school year 2020-2021 was done worldwide under the special conditions imposed by the pandemic with the new coronavirus SARS-COV-2. Central and local authorities have thus been faced with new challenges, unprecedented in the last hundred years, to manage the educational process that traditionally involves communities of children and young people in the best possible physical distance.

In this epidemiological context, on September 14, kindergartens were to reopen, for most children after a “vacation” of 6 months, because in the case of many online courses held between March and June 2020, or could not take place due to lack of the necessary infrastructure or training, or have been carried out superficially, in the absence of clear regulations in this regard. The more than three months of online education at the end of the previous school year were a good opportunity to identify deficiencies in the education system, as a premise for correcting them during the summer holidays in order to adapt the activity to the challenges of the “pandemic school”.

The kindergarten, as the first institution for the culturalization and socialization of children, for their preparation for school integration, has a decisive role in the construction of future schoolchildren, in their intellectual, personal and social development.

The relationship between kindergarten and school must be a relationship of continuity aimed at: planning, organization, objectives, content, methods, means, teacher-child relationship.

Distance learning has shown that it is necessary to organize special activities with parents (a valuable resource among educational actors, who can attract and inspire their children in various activities), both in terms of their pedagogy and the use of digital tools. The first step was more insistent communication of teachers with parents, who needed to be informed in a timely manner about online teaching methods and distance learning objectives in times of crisis (Cerbusica, 2020: 31).

### **3. Methodology**

To carry out this research we used the sociological survey, using the questionnaire as a research tool. Through the efficient use of the questionnaire, we wanted to discover both the opinions, interests and characteristics of the judgments, as well as the interpersonal relationships created between teachers, parents and the management of educational units in this period of preschool education conducted online.

The questionnaire consisted of several questions, to which were added identification questions (such as the name of the school). These were applied online through the google forms platform to a staff of 150 teachers from preschool education units in Pitești, Argeș County. The questionnaire was sent to the target group via social networks and WhatsApp.

The aim of the research was to analyze the interpersonal relationships between teachers, parents of preschoolers and management in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in preschools in urban areas during this period of online education.

The objectives of the research were: to identify the quality of the existing relations between the teachers and the parents of the preschoolers, as well as to

discover the ways of the relationship between the teachers and the directors of the unit.

The general hypothesis from which we started this research was the following: assuming that the relationship between teachers and the director of the unit is based on respect, cooperation and teamwork to fulfill their tasks and obligations regarding the development of the educational act, then collaboration teachers-parents of preschoolers, as partners of the kindergarten, will be maintained in appropriate parameters, and preschoolers will be able to acquire the appropriate acquisitions. The limit of the research undertaken is that of using the questionnaire online, in which the questionnaire operator no longer has absolute control over the study: it can often happen that the questionnaire circulates and the respondents encounter difficulties in completing it.

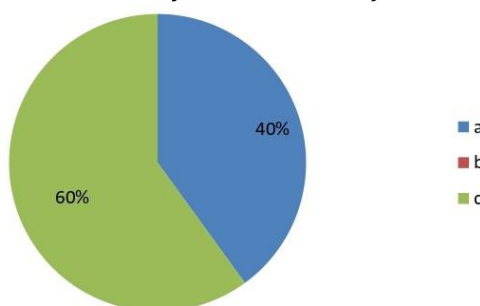
From the point of view of the structure of the sample according to sex, all respondents are female out of the 150, because in preschool education 100% are female teachers.

SEX	Number of respondents	%
Female	150	100%

#### 4. Discussions and results

When asked about the type of relationship that should exist between teachers and directors, some teachers (40%) answered that they have a professional relationship with the school director. No teacher considers that there can be a friendly relationship. 60% of teachers consider it more important to have a collaborative relationship with the director of the unit to achieve performance.

**Figure 1: What kind of relationship should there be between principals and teachers?** (a. professional, b. friendly, c. collaboration)



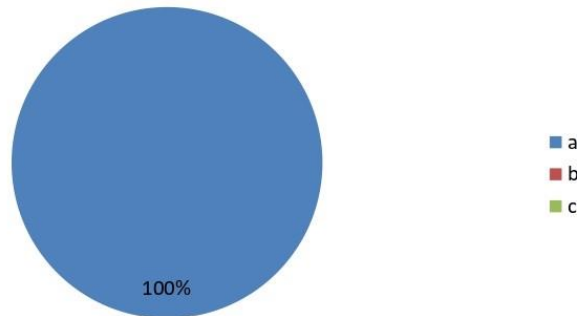
The collaborative relationship is one of the most important and basic of social relationships. The director can be appointed from outside the working group or from within it, as a rule, the one who has more experience or who knows more about the organization and management, about the work tasks that aim at the management of the educational unit. Relationships in work groups are different from those at home (with family) or with friends. They are based on cooperation in organized groups and hierarchy, which differ from social contacts.

As a result, organizational communication is not a spontaneous and natural process. It must be designed in such a way as to allow collaboration, a process that aims

to achieve a predetermined goal, necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of the organization.

Figure 2 shows that all teachers responded positively whenever requested by the management of schools, although the COVID-19 pandemic greatly influenced the communication process at the level of organizations.

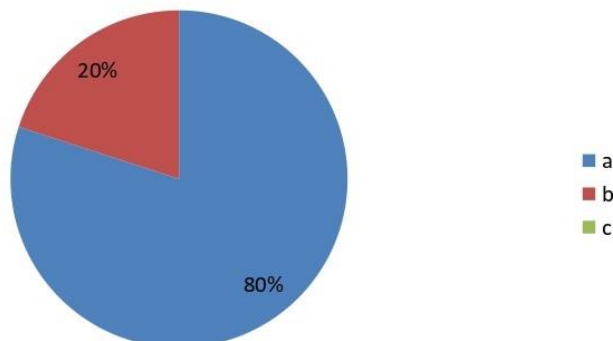
**Figure 2: Do you respond positively to the demands of the management of the unit?**  
(a. yes, b. no, c. sometimes)



Regarding the communication with preschoolers, 80% of the teachers stated that they had a very good collaboration with the parents. Communication contributes to understanding and addressing fears, misinterpretations by parents. Only 20% of teachers have a good relationship.

It is thus obvious that parents and teachers share a huge responsibility. Together they form the desire of children to learn and work. Good communication between them is essential for success, in order to motivate children to learn and to develop their interest in this direction.

**Figure 3: How is the communication between teachers and parents of preschoolers?**  
(a.very good, b.good, c.satisfactory)



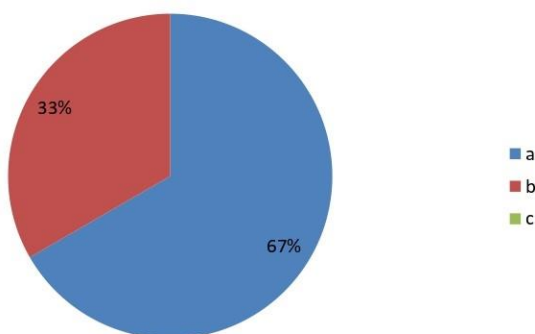
Communication solves almost any problem. When the parent is constantly interested in the evolution of his child, it will be easier for him to identify the weaknesses of the little one and help him to overcome his difficulties of understanding.

It is very important that the relationship between parent and educator has a positive aspect for the good development of the child.

Regarding the existing relationships between teachers and parents in this period of online education, 67% of teachers responded that they have a collaborative and respectful relationship with parents, only 33% of teachers had a calm and positive relationship.

Parents and educators must be the perfect teammates in educating the child. A good parent-educator relationship helps parents to know the educational evolution of the preschooler and to come to his aid, helping, at the same time, the teacher. An interpersonal relationship evolves over time only on the condition that the parties ensure an understanding of the partner and adequate responses to requests of a cognitive and affective nature.

**Figure 4: What kind of relationship exists between teachers and parents of preschoolers?**  
(a. of collaboration and respect, b. calm and positive, c. does not exist)



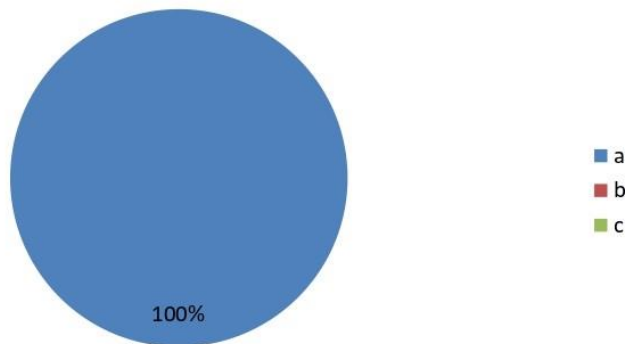
The teachers made known the regulation of organization and internal functioning of the educational units during the meetings with the parents. The regulation was made available to everyone whenever it was necessary, in order for the proper functioning of the educational units, to know the rights and obligations of each one.

During the quarantine period, if we refer to the efficiency of distance learning, the activity of preschoolers was certainly the most affected of all levels of education, being a real challenge (for older preschoolers) or even impossible for younger ones. However, parents received tasks from educators regarding the organization of time and activities, advice for effective communication, based on landmarks known to children and with a strong emphasis on emotions. It is also important how the constant communication between parent and educator was organized, the games and toys that attract the preschooler to meet the parents and children with activities customized to the interests of the children.

The tools and strategies used for remote connection were different: through video, videos with interactive activities, songs, simulations, applications, etc., which the educators sent to the parents for the children or through video conferences in small groups. However, more important than the selected methods was the objective of the interaction during this period, namely the direct connection with the preschooler. Many educators and parents have realized that it is not so much the teaching projects

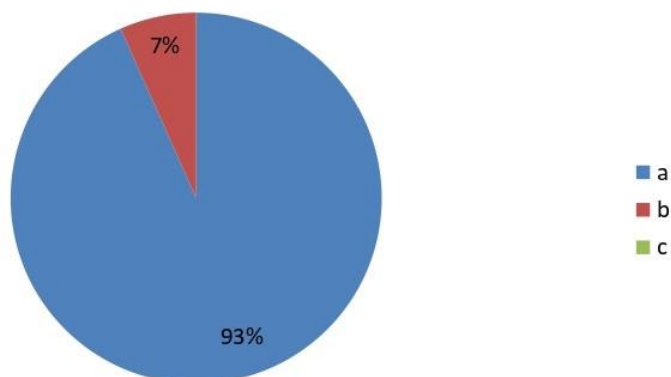
or the written curriculum that matter more, but the emotional state of the children and parents is a priority in this period of isolation. The educators instructed the parents that it is important for the children to start the day with video games / cartoons, in order to diminish the risk of demotivation towards the activities with subsequent higher educational value.

**Figure 5: Did you present to the parents the regulation of organization and internal functioning of the educational unit?**  
(a. yes, b. no)



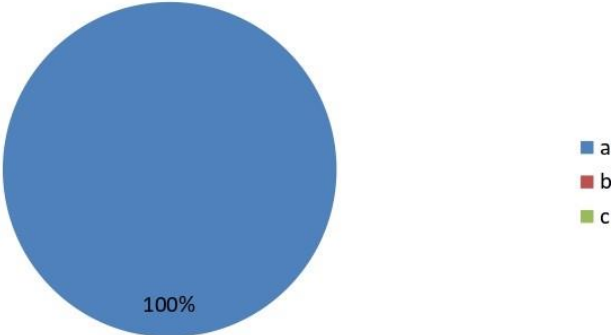
Regarding the existing interpersonal relationships between teachers, the majority of teachers (93%) considered that they have a relationship of cooperation and communication with other teachers in their school, and (7%) considered that they had a relationship rejection, probably from colleagues. People differ from each other in intellectual ability, physical ability, available energy, education, training, experience, personality, interests, aspirations, etc. Although these individual differences set the limits of their performance, motivation is an important factor in determining how and to what extent each person uses their skills and directs their efforts and turns them into performance.

**Figure 6: What kind of relationship is there between teachers in the school?**  
(a. cooperation and communication, b. rejection)



Teachers responded unanimously that they communicated with the help of technology. During a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthening communication, transparency and trust was crucial to implement measures to limit the spread of the virus.

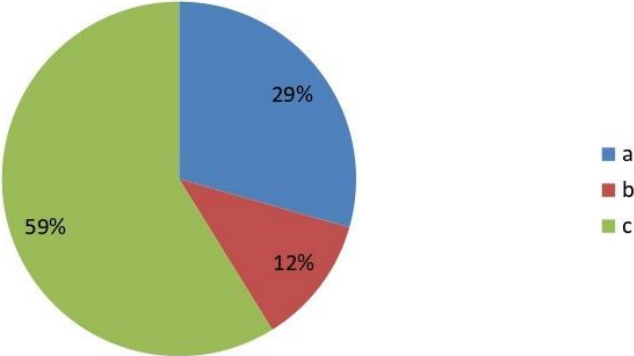
**Figure 7: Did you use communication technology?**



For a better communication during this period, various communication channels were used:

1. meetings or discussions in the online environment (Zoom, Skype, etc.);
2. E-mail;
3. the website of the educational units or the platforms where the online activities took place;
4. WhatsApp etc.

**Figure 8: How was the collaboration between teachers and parents of preschoolers during the COVID 19 pandemic achieved?**



For this item with three answer options, they had the opportunity to choose several options. 29% of all teachers responded that during the pandemic they wanted to provide useful information necessary for children’s development. 12% of teachers responded that they involved preschoolers in attractive activities during the pandemic that would arouse their interest in work. 59% of teachers tried to keep alive in the



pandemic the living relationship of communication with preschoolers through parents, in particular.

It is important to communicate systematically with parents and preschoolers, not just when needed. This creates a clear mechanism, communication will be expected, and parents will be encouraged to participate and become more involved in their children’s lives.

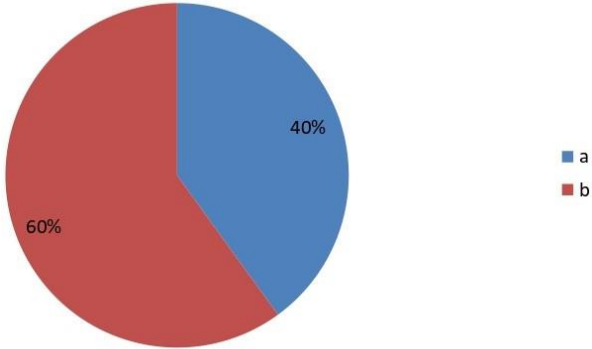
They tried to use tools, platforms, web pages, etc. with the help of which they tried to carry out instructive-educational activities so as to reach the objectives proposed for this period. Preschoolers cannot handle using their phone, laptop, etc. on their own. The presence of an adult was needed each time (to read the instructions for the game; to start the presentation, the video, the game; to read the story; to ask the questions related to the story, etc.).

Teachers in preschool education have been in a difficult situation and have tried many applications and platforms with which to carry out instructional-educational and assessment activities. The following applications and platforms could be used in kindergarten: Virtual walls (Padlet), which are digital applications, which offer display space for text, image, video, websites; Wordwall- is based on the game, very interesting and attractive for children; Kahoot - is based on quiz game (questions and answers); Kinderpedia - is a platform for monitoring the child's progress based on concrete data and facts and last but not least the ABC Academy platform. (Cucos et al., 2020: 139)

**Table 1: Name two positive or negative effects on online collaboration between teachers and preschoolers.**

ANSWERS	NUMBER OF ANSWERS
Positive effects: -preschoolers learned to use means of communication -preschoolers spent more time with their parents	60
Negative effects -preschoolers showed dependence on the means of communication they used during COVID-19	90

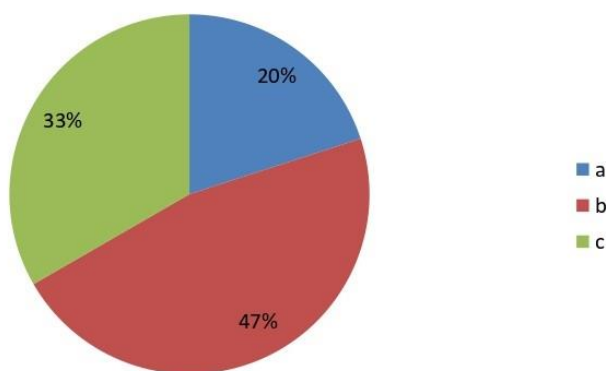
**Figure 9: Name two positive or negative effects on online collaboration between teachers and preschoolers**



Appropriate solutions have been sought to make the transition to online teaching. The educational platforms recommended institutionally for conducting online learning were: G Suite for Education. (Google Classroom), Microsoft Office 365 for Education, Adservio, Edmodo, EasyClass, ClassDojo. (Cucos, 2020: 106)

With applications in the G Suite for Education package, teaching, learning and collaboration across the school can be improved. The G Suite for Education package contains modern digital tools that improve the teaching, learning and collaboration processes in the school by integrating new technologies in the teaching and administrative activity. Google for Education tools are recommended by teachers as one of the best applications for collaboration and feedback and can be used in the classroom along with other digital teaching and learning tools that turn the educational act into an interactive and interesting experience.

**Figure 10: Do you consider that your professional rights have been violated in the school where you work?**  
(a. yes, b. no, c. maybe)



In proportion of 20%, the teachers highlighted the fact that their professional rights were violated in the educational unit where they work.

47% of teachers consider that their professional rights have not been violated.

33% consider that their professional rights may have been violated, but they did not know or did not realize at the moment.

### 5. Research conclusions

Following the research, we found that it is necessary to involve teachers, but also the family, in the development of interpersonal relationships between child-child, child-teacher, teacher-family, teacher-director.

I believe that the activity of preschoolers was certainly the most affected of all levels of education during the quarantine period if we look at the effectiveness of online learning. Compared to schools that have been able to migrate in real time to online education models, preschoolers' needs for connection and direct contact with adults and other children, their low ability to concentrate and their level of cognitive and emotional development have made online learning a real challenge, even impossible

for the youngest of them. A great number of parents were challenged to carry out the educational activities that had to be carried out in kindergarten.

We found through this sociological survey, the fact that the opinions of teachers, family and unit directors differ depending on the relationships established between them.

A basic rule in creating and managing a pleasant and at the same time efficient work environment involves delimiting personal and professional problems. Interpersonal relationships represent the context of shaping and formation, and then the gradual crystallization of personality traits, which are nothing but internalized interpersonal relationships.

In the act of communication, teachers must be responsible for the quality of relations with parents, but also with the director of the school. Quality interpersonal relationships are important for maintaining a work environment that facilitates trust, learning and development.

Following the research, we found that the hypothesis was successfully confirmed, because the relationships created between teachers, parents and the director of the unit were based on respect, cooperation and teamwork to fulfill their tasks and obligations regarding the development the educational act, and the collaboration of the teachers with the parents of the preschoolers was favorable, both partners having in the center of attention the acquisition by the preschooler of the school acquisitions. In the educational institutions, there was a collaboration and communication relationship between the teachers and the director of the unit to form a united team.

Parents talked frequently with teachers, looked for solutions to support children, and participated in activities to improve living conditions. The long time spent by children in kindergarten, as well as the pace of changes in child development determine a special concern that parents show about informing about the evolution of children.

Teachers play a multiple role, being for preschoolers mediators between them and others around them. Directors must be human and professional role models for all subordinates, being the people who have the greatest responsibility in the organization and functioning of the entire activity within educational institutions.

A positive perception of education leads to actions favorable to education, to the inclusion of preschool units in strategies, medium and long term family projects. On the contrary, a negative perception increases the distance between the family and them, accentuates the tendency to overestimate the costs and risks with education and to diminish the benefits that education brings. The type of perception that a family has on the education system depends on how it relates to them.

The human being is complex, and the need to communicate, transmit or receive signals, messages is a fundamental feature of him/her, defines his/her life, coordinates his/her actions.

The evolution of culture and civilization, of the human being, is implicitly linked to the evolution of the communication process, the existence of interpersonal relationships, as well as the multiplication and diversification of modes and means of communication.

I can say that communication skills are an important proof of mutual respect. Each person must be able to listen to another person and demonstrate that they

understand what the other wants to convey, they must also respect themselves, which means that they can express or convey their own opinions/interests regardless of the function they own it.

By the involvement of the parents is meant all the activities that include ensuring the fundamental needs and self-safety of the child as well as the elaboration of the directions of organization and financial support. In this area, parents must act voluntarily.

Education is a set of measures applied systematically in order to form and develop the intellectual, moral or physical characteristics of children.

The results of this research confirm the existence of interpersonal relationships involving teachers and families in children's education, as well as effective communication between teachers and principals that express a clear understanding by all these partners of their role in children's education.

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