

TRADITIONAL AND MODERN FORMS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN KINDERGARDEN AND FAMILY: TOWARDS A NETWORK SOCIETY

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Summary: The diagnostic survey method was used. The research covered a group of 122 teachers from selected preschool institutions of the Lubelskie Voivodship and 122 parents. The results show that traditional forms of cooperation, i.e. group meetings and phone conversations are still widely popular.

Material and methods: The researchers also focused on learning about the preferred forms of cooperation between parents and teachers and identifying those factors that may hinder the cooperation.

Results: There is a social belief among both teachers and parents that cooperation between kindergartens and families is necessary because it allows children to be better prepared for life in the constantly changing social conditions.

Conclusions: Cooperation between parents and teachers is not always satisfactory for both sides. Communications and creates distance according to respondents are: excessive self-confidence, self-exaltation, excessive ambition, prejudice, and selfishness.

Keywords: pre-school, kindergarden, parents, traditional and modern forms of cooperation, network

Introduction

The concept of a network society is characterised by two major features. The first is the presence of network communication technologies that are digital in nature, allowing the distribution of information and knowledge that form the basis for the economic, social, cultural and political systems. The second feature is the reproduction and institutionalization of these practices within and between societies (Castells, 2011).

At the economic level, the network society is based on the transfer of information, where the flow of information between groups or institutions is devoid of time and space boundaries. In the new society, network access and control flows enable people to have and exercise power (Każmierczak, Szumiec, 2021). Also Bendyk puts forward a similar thesis and claims that networks are a form of operation of modern society and the basic pattern of social structure (Bendyk, 2004).

Forming a network society seems globally possible nowadays, as the presence of digital technologies and the Internet is universal. According to Polewko, there are currently over 5 billion Internet users in the world, out of which 4.76 trillion are the number of social media users (Polewko, 2023). Koch reports that in Poland the number of Internet users increased by 2.9

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million between 2022 and 2023, which constitutes an increase of 8.5 percent. In January 2023, there were reported as many as 36.68 million Internet users, that is 88.4 percent of the entire population (Koch, 2023).

With the emergence of informational technologies in the 1970s, the ways and accessibility of communication changed dramatically. Mutual relations and cooperation of many partners of the socio-economic sphere, including schools, kindergartens and families, started to gradually rely on a new medium, the Internet. This revolutionary invention initiated the emergence of a period in history referred to by Castells as the Information Age, which is based on a network structure and which has replaced the industrial society. Revolutions in the fields of communication, computer science, electronics and genetics called for the redefinition of society. This post-industrial society is based on services and information (Jurek, 2011).

Cooperation can be defined by a number of specific characteristics. For instance, the main aim of cooperation is to bring noticeable benefits. Additionally, the decision to cooperate is influenced by the individual's perception of the number of beneficiaries, that is the wider their circle, the more likely the cooperation. What is more, cooperation also relies on the ability to communicate and the participants' attitude towards each other as we tend to cooperate more willingly with partners we find agreeable, or if previous positive experiences encourage further cooperation (Kamińska, 2019). The above mentioned factors also play a role in the cooperation between parents of kindergarten teachers and the children's parents.

In literature concerning the relations and communication between parents and preschool teachers, the terms *partnership*, *cooperation*, and *collaboration* are often used, and these concepts are treated as synonyms. According to Lulek (Lulek, 2008), both teachers and parents use these terms interchangeably. The cooperation in question is based on the alliance of the family, the kindergarten and the immediate social environment, in the spirit of appreciation of the numerous benefits that such cooperation provides leading to the child's development (Mendel, 2002). In general, the terms *cooperation* and *collaboration* can be used interchangeably to describe joint activities of the family environment and kindergarten teachers to assist the development of individual children, the kindergarten group, and the entire preschool community in the process of education and care.

With the emergence of information network society, the key responsibility of both a modern family and kindergarten is to prepare children for functioning in a dynamically changing world. Emphasis should be placed on the gradual and systematic implementation of the multitude of ideals, values, and beliefs, and on providing the right conditions for the child's growing individualism. In their efforts to raise the youngest generation in the spirit of democracy and pluralism, both family and educational environment have to recognise the visible changes dictated by the transition from the industrial economy to a society based on knowledge, technology and information (Jeziorański, Opozda, Rynio, 2012).

The parents' role is a key determinant of a child's educational opportunities, because the family constitutes a microcosm that transmits social values and conditions educational achievements. Some of the most important tasks of the family include: familiarizing the child with the socially accepted rules of conduct, developing ethical concepts and the attitude of caring for others, modelling tolerance and understanding towards the behaviour and the individuality of others as well as assessing and interpreting these behaviours in accordance with the adopted principles of social co-existence. Additionally, the family is responsible for ensuring the intellectual development by creating appropriate conditions for the child's growing interests and aspirations, as well as motivation for continuous learning (Badora, 2001).

The aim of preschool education is to support the overall development of pupils by caring for them and shaping their way of acting and thinking in a reasonable way through the process of teaching and learning, which enables the child to discover their own possibilities. The kindergarten's responsibility is also to enable children to accumulate experiences leading to the love of truth, goodness and ethics. As a result of such support, the child becomes mature enough to enter subsequent stages of education. Finally, the institution supports the child's overall development by ensuring the physical, emotional, social and cognitive growth (The 24th February 2017 National Education Minister's Act, 2017). In short,

the course of social and educational development of the child depends on the level of cooperation between the family and the kindergarden at the onset of their education (Nyczaj-Draż, Głazewski, 2005).

It cannot be denied that the parents, pupils and teachers centered around a kindergarden form a strong community that exists for mutual support and cooperation to achieve a goal, which is providing the pupils with the care and education they need at the pre-school years. The flow of information within such network seems to be facilitated by modern technologies and the Internet, offering yet another way to communicate. As noticed by Paprocka, there is a growing need to search for new ways of communicating and cooperating within the kindergarden – family network (Paprotna, 2000).

Forms of cooperation between kindergarden and family

The easy flow of information between the family environment and educational institutions has never been easier. With the use of the Internet technologies, preschool teachers create and run groups on social networking sites, like Facebook, Messenger, or WhatsApp. Through these platforms, parents can share multimedia like videos or photos and express their opinions. This also serves to seek and provide information, or to share news about important events. By reporting events involving children on an ongoing basis, teachers authenticate their opinion of the facility as child- and family-friendly. Kindergarden groups operating on social networking sites also serve to exchange information between teachers and parents, as well as between parents themselves. As part of cooperation with parents, the kindergarden staff provide current information on the most important issues related to the institution by placing it on the facility's website (Mielczarek, 2006, p. 32; Paprotna, 2000, p. 100-101).

According to the CBOS (Public Opinion Research Centre operating in Poland) data, in 2022 a record number of respondents declared that they had shared photos or videos online. The popularity of communication via the Internet has also strengthened conversations via the platforms mentioned above, as well as communicating on forums and other social networking sites (CBOS, 2022).

While cooperation between parents and kindergarden relies more and more on modern technologies, the traditional forms of personal contacts are still popular. For instance, parents still attend open classes, during which they observe their children while playing and working within the peer group. This form of cooperation is an opportunity to confront the parent's ideas, for instance, about the child's social skills (Mielczarek, 2006).

Preschool celebrations also give opportunities for cooperation. Their aim is to strengthen the relation between the family and the kindergarden and to present joint achievements. Preschool celebrations provide an opportunity to showcase children's talents, develop their self-confidence and strengthen parent-child relationships (Skoczylas-Krotla, 2006).

An important role in cooperation between the kindergarden and the family is played by the Parent Committee, which, among others, is responsible for implementing the educational plan of the institution. The committee represents the kindergarden externally, presents proposals for activities for children, and supports the work of the preschool management (Paprotna, 2000).

Both general parents' meetings and individual meetings are regularly held. During general meetings parents learn about the management's plans for the school year, the implemented teaching programs, expenses and the qualifications of the teaching staff. Individual meetings, on the other hand, aim to discuss any matters of concern to teachers and parents, for instance the child's educational achievements or behaviour. The advantage of individual meetings is that they are carried out without witnesses, which can promote authentic dialogue (Paprotna, 2000).

Apart from meetings, parents can also give short lectures to children about their profession, they can cooperate by participating in the newsletter and family festivals, which are, on the one hand, an opportunity to strengthen family ties, and on the other hand, they are often combined with artistic or sports performances by children. These forms provide an opportunity to engage several generations, in cooperation. What is more, many kindergardens organise parents' corners to announce joint project, or to suggest new games or interesting books. Additionally, parents can find there professional advice concerning the development and upbringing of children (Paprotna, 2000).

Methodology of the study

The main objective of the study was to analyse the nature of cooperation between teachers and parents in the process of caring for the pupils, as well as the factors conditioning this process. Bearing in mind the definite link between the influences of the family and the kindergarten teachers on the development of the pupils, there was a need to investigate the expectations of both groups with regard to mutual cooperation, as well as to define the attitudes of the study participants regarding their collaboration for the sake of the children. The researchers also focused on learning about the preferred forms of cooperation between parents and teachers and identifying those factors that may hinder the cooperation.

According to the conducted diagnosis as well as own experience, four major issues have been investigated:

1. What forms of cooperation are used most frequently by preschool teachers and parents?
2. What are the attitudes of the study participants towards their mutual cooperation?
3. What barriers hinder the teacher–parent cooperation?

The research was conducted between January and June 2022 in the Lubelskie Voivodeship, in selected kindergartens, whose head masters declared their participation in the study. The respondents were a group of preschool teachers (N=122) and a group of parents (N=122) of children in preschool care.

According to data of the Central Statistical Office in Lublin, at the end of September 2021, there were 1,339 preschool education services in the Lublin Voivodeship. Vast majority of them (1070, that is 79 percent) are managed by local governments (Statistical Office in Lublin, 2023). It was therefore assumed that 10 percent of the total number of institutions would be representative in the study, which is consistent with the Polish assumptions for selecting the survey sample. As a result, the head masters of 107 randomly selected kindergartens in the Lubelskie Voivodeship were asked to participate in the research. In the group of surveyed teachers working in kindergartens, 122 of them (N=122) returned correctly completed questionnaires. As for the group of surveyed parents of children attending selected institutions, 122 questionnaires (N=122) were returned.

Taking into account the number of correctly completed research tools by both parents and teachers, it was assumed that the results would not be generalized, but would concern the participating groups. It was therefore concluded that the conducted research should constitute the first stage of the research, which will be deepened in the second stage planned for implementation in the school years of 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. The conclusions and recommendations developed on that basis will be made available to preschool institutions that participated in the research.

Due to the research issues, the diagnostic survey and the questionnaire method were selected. The lack of a standardized research tool prompted the development of the researchers' own tools, where a different one was addressed to parents and a different one to the teachers. Before these tools were used, pilot studies were carried out to calculate the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient, understood as the internal consistency of the tool. Its value was 0.72, which in the social sciences is considered appropriate and guarantees the reliability of the tool. The questionnaire was distributed with the help of kindergarten teachers, and the returned documents were checked for correctness, sorted and subjected to further statistical analysis.

The study participants

The study involved two groups of participants and it was conducted among 61 kindergarten teachers and 122 parents of kindergarten pupils. The first group consisted of kindergarten teachers, all female (100 percent), which is in accordance with the current trend within the profession. All the kindergarten teachers (100 percent) had more than 5 years of teaching experience. Most of the teachers (74 percent) were between 30 and 50 years of age. Within the second group of study participants, which involved the pupils' parents, the majority were women – the children's mothers with a higher degree, professionally active (82 percent). As for the age of the surveyed parents, 70 (percent) were

between 31 and 39 years of age. More than half of the group (59 percent), had older children in primary school.

The study findings

When analysing questionnaires filled in by preschool education teachers, it was found that most of the respondents are satisfied with the cooperation with parents (89 percent as opposed to only 11 percent of teachers who seem to be dissatisfied with the cooperation). Without a doubt, the satisfaction with the collaboration is essential as it is only by mutual trust and support that further, long-term cooperation can be guaranteed.

It is crucial to emphasise that the involvement of parents in regular activities taking place in kindergarten may be beneficial regarding the cooperation between parents and preschool teachers. In order to assess the level of parent’s awareness of what is happening in their children’s kindergarten, the teachers have been asked whether parents show any interest in kindergarten affairs. The collected data is presented in Figure 1.

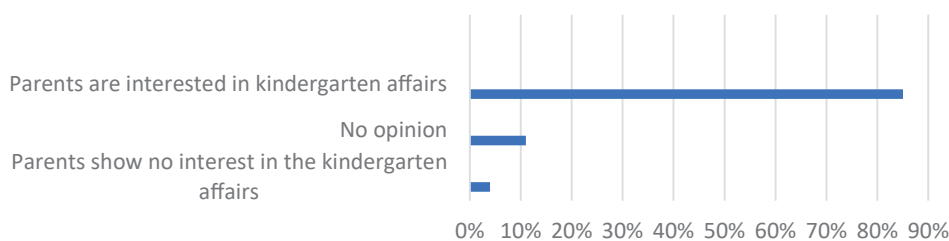


Figure 1. Parents’ interest in kindergarten affairs

Source: Own study.

According to the teachers’ responses (85 percent of the respondents) parents showed their interest and commitment in what is happening in kindergarten, while only 4 (percent) of the teachers were of the opinion that parents do not show any interest in the child’s education at this level. 11 percent of teachers believed that it is difficult to say whether parents were interested in kindergarten activities or not.

With reference to the question addressing the forms of co-operation with parents, the teachers’ answers revealed a variety of options. The collected data is illustrated in Figure 2.

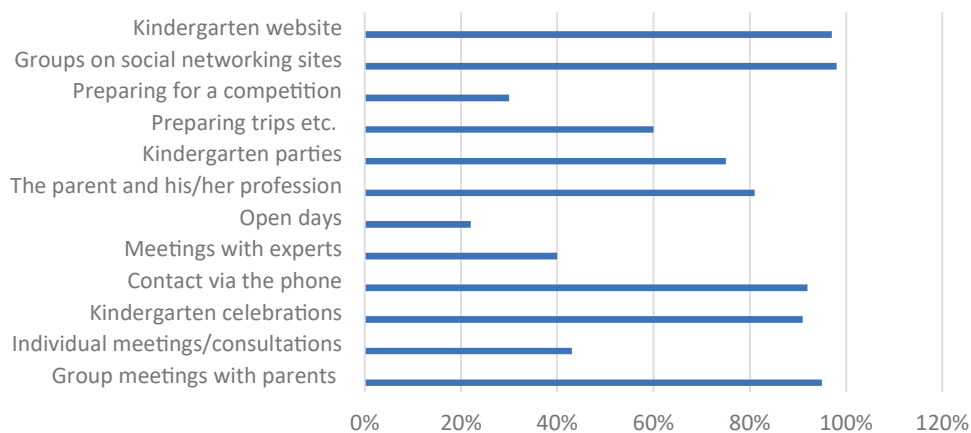


Figure 2. Forms of co-operation between teachers of preschool education and parents

Source: Own study.

It can be visible that the majority of the respondents indicated that the teacher–parent cooperation is based on establishing and running groups on social networking sites i.e. on Facebook (98 percent of the respondents) and using the kindergarten website or Facebook account as an invaluable source of information (97 percent of the respondents). A similar number of surveyed teachers (95 percent) mentioned organizing group meetings and telephone contacts with parents (92 percent of the respondents) as well as organized meetings with individual parents who give lectures to children concerning their profession (81 percent).

As part of cooperation with parents, according to all the responses given by the teachers, the kindergarten organizes meetings with experts as the most common form of supporting parents in their children’s upbringing (100 percent of the respondents). Such meetings involve consultations with speech therapists, educators, psychologists or other therapists. The overwhelming majority of respondents (97 percent of teachers) also mentioned organization of workshops and trainings aiming at supporting those parents who need further assistance. A very important form of support offered to children and their families is psychological and pedagogical assistance. The surveyed teachers unanimously indicated (100 percent of the respondents) that the kindergartens organize and provide psychological and pedagogical support to children. The indicated assistance is provided, inter alia, during specialist classes or ongoing work with the child, integrated activities of teachers, specialists and parents, as well as consultations for parents and teachers.

Finally, one of the crucial factors in the scope of the researchers’ interest was the analysis of the factors hindering the kindergarten teacher – parent cooperation. Without a doubt, the personality of individuals involved in such a cooperation plays a significant role. Individual characteristics of both parents and teachers determine the level of integration or disintegration in educational activities. Table 1 reveals the findings in this respect.

Table 1. Factors hindering cooperation with parents (according to teachers)

No.	Types of responses	Response rate (%)
1.	Parents’ inappropriate attitudes	42.00
2.	Parents’ rare contacts with the kindergarten	17.00
3.	Parents’ lack of objectivity and credibility in the information concerning their own children	14.00
4.	Parents’ unwillingness to take in teachers’ comments	11.00
5.	Parents’ feeling superior, especially in terms of their financial status and position held	9.00
6.	Parents’ excessive selfishness and ambitions influencing their actions	4.00
7.	Parents’ deficiencies in pedagogical knowledge	3.00
Total		100.00

Source: Own study.

According to teachers, poor cooperation with parents is caused by their inappropriate attitude (42 percent of the respondents) and rare contacts with the kindergarten (17 percent of the respondents). Another important factor mentioned in the study was lack of objectivity and credibility in the information provided about their own child (14 percent of the respondents).

The next surveyed group were parents of children attending the selected kindergartens. Among others, the researchers were willing to discover the perspective of the parents in connection with the functioning of the kindergarten and their relationship with preschool teachers. Thus, the question was posed whether parents actively cooperate with kindergarten teachers in their actions. From the answers submitted by parents it may be concluded that all the parents take part in the life of the kindergarten (100 percent of the responses). Thus, it can be deduced that the attitude of the parents towards the institution such as kindergarten is positive. The data is illustrated in Figure 3.

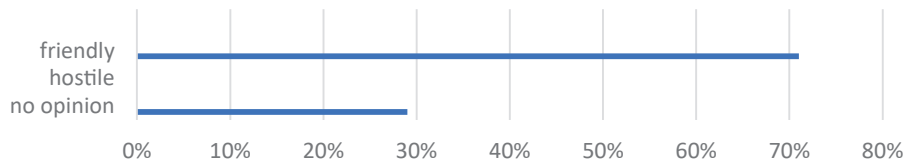


Figure 3. Parents' attitude towards the kindergarten

Source: Own study.

As shown in Figure 3 above, according to the vast majority of respondents 71 (percent) of the answers obtained, the kindergarten is considered a parent-friendly institution. The remaining respondents declared that they had no opinion on this subject 29 (percent) of the surveyed parents. What is interesting is that none of the surveyed parents reported a hostile approach towards their child's kindergarten, which may be rewarding, however, the fact that approximately 30 (percent) of the parents have neither negative nor positive attitude towards the institution may indicate the existence of some unresolved issues. It could also mean the parents' reluctance towards this institution, or may be related to the lack of parents' time to stay in time.

The parents' positive perception of the kindergarten has also been confirmed by the research results. The great majority of the respondents 80 (percent) regard their cooperation with the kindergarten as good and the remaining 20 (percent) of the surveyed as very good.

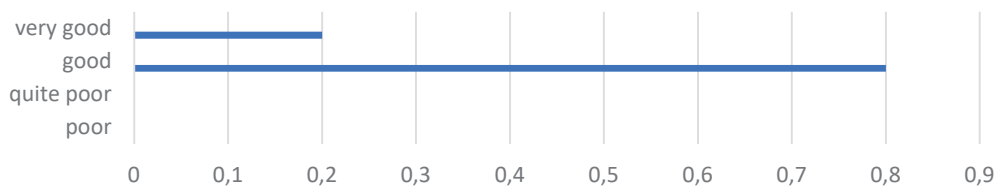


Figure 4. Parents' assessment of their cooperation with the kindergarten

Source: Own study.

The conclusion is that parents have a great influence on the cooperation of both environments, which in their opinion has a positive impact on the child's development. Hence, another question was asked about forms of cooperation with the kindergarten parents prefer. The collected data is illustrated in Figure 5.

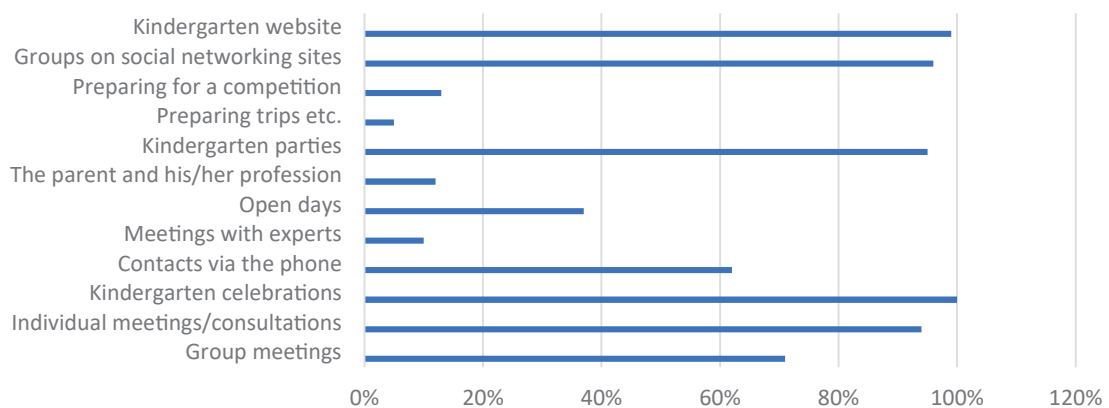


Figure 5. Preferred forms of cooperation with the kindergarten (according to parents)

Source: Own study.

From the analysis of the collected data, it can be concluded that the preferred forms of cooperation include contacts between parents and the kindergarten via the website (99 percent of the respondents). Parents cooperate with the kindergarten using existing groups on social networking sites, for example Messenger, WhatsApp or Facebook (96 percent of the answers). According to parents, the leading forms of cooperation also include group events and celebrations in kindergarten (95 percent) as well as individual and group meetings (94 and 71 percent respectively).

It is visible that parents prefer cooperation with a preschool institution using on-line tools (the website or groups on social networking sites). When asked whether the kindergarten group had an account on a social networking site, i.e. Messenger, WhatsApp or Facebook, the vast majority of parents (93 percent of the respondents) indicated that their child's kindergarten group has an account on a social networking site, as opposed to the remaining (7 percent of the respondents), who indicated that their child's kindergarten does not offer this form of cooperation. 95 percent of parents stated that they belong to groups created on social networking sites, while 5 percent of the respondents claim that do not use this opportunity at all. It poses some difficulties because it may indicate the phenomenon of parents' digital exclusion.

As for the reasons why the social networking group accounts were created, the answers are given in Table 2 below.

Table2. Functions of the group on social networking sites

No.	Types of responses	Response rate (%)
1.	Receiving up-dated information about daily events taking place in the kindergarten	51.00
2.	Ideas exchange	16.00
3.	Commenting on variousevents	13.00
4.	Passing on information to parents about upcoming kindergarten events and celebrations	11.00
5.	Sendingrequests to parents	9.00
Total		100.00

Source: Own study.

It is clearly visible that approximately half of the respondents 51 (percent) use the social networking account to obtain current information about daily events taking place in the kindergarten. The remaining functions of such groups are exchanging ideas 16 (percent) of the respondents and using the opportunity to communicate about various events both by the parents and the teachers 13 (percent) of the respondents.

Additionally, being a member of the preschool group enables parents to receive information about upcoming events in the kindergarten, e.g. holiday celebrations, meetings and outings. It is also possible for the teachers to send requests to parents, e.g. regarding what to wear for a ceremony, bringing necessary items to classes, collecting money from parents or preparing children for upcoming competitions.

Other forms of cooperation include parents' participation in meetings organized by the kindergarten. All of the surveyed parents 100 (percent) of the respondents claim that they had the opportunity to express their opinions on issues related to children during such meetings. They also understand that the possibility of participation and decision-making resulting from attending parent' meetings is important as they can co-decide on the crucial issues concerning the group.

Parents were divided when it came to assessing the organization of meetings in the kindergarten. In the multiple-choice question, only 37 (percent) of the surveyed parents claimed that meetings with the teacher had a clearly defined goal. 85 (percent) of respondents stated that such meetings are usually held in a friendly atmosphere and that they obtain relevant information. However, 8 percent of parents considered the meetings with teachers as a waste of time.

Most parental relationships in kindergarten are formalized and based primarily on representation in the form of a Parents' Council or other leaders of the parental community. The parents are aware of

the existence of the Parents' Council in the kindergarden and its responsibilities are familiar to them 100 (percent) of answers.

Finally, the research findings revealed the parents' opinions about the factors hindering their cooperation with preschool teachers (presented in Table 3 below).

Table 3. Factors hindering cooperation with the kindergarden (according to parents)

No.	Types of responses	Response rate (%)
1.	Inappropriate attitude of teachers – unkind and impolite	43.00
2.	Teachers creating an unfavourable atmosphere for joint activities	20.00
3.	Discrepancy of views on the goals and methods of child's upbringing	18.00
4.	Teachers' reluctance to personal contacts	13.00
5.	Teachers being excessively critical of parents' educational activities	6.00
Total		100.00

Source: Own study.

Nearly half of the responding parents indicated observing inappropriate attitude of teachers towards them, especially lack of kindness and forbearance 43 (percent) of the respondents. 20 percent of the parents mentioned the fact that teachers create an unfavourable atmosphere for joint activities. A similar number of respondents pointed out the discrepancy of views on the goals and methods of their child's upbringing between them as parents and the teachers 18 (percent) of the respondents. 13 (percent) of the surveyed parents pointed out the unwillingness of teachers to meet them in person and 6 (percent) of them noticed the teachers' excessive criticism of parents' educational activities.

It is also important to emphasise that teachers themselves use certain strategies to improve the cooperation with parents. The teachers encourage those parents who refuse to be involved in the activities the kindergarden offers through discussions 78 (percent) of the teachers as respondents or by delegating some responsibilities to the parents as a way to motivate them 18 (percent) of the teachers. They also suggest grouping parents in order to complete a specific task 4 (percent) of the teachers. Teachers explain that the reasons for parents' lack of involvement can be justified by lack of time, excess of responsibilities, lack of confidence in their abilities, and laziness.

Discussion and conclusions

Modern preschool education requires the cooperation of all the parties involved in the children's development, especially the parents and teachers. The current research made it possible to formulate a number of general conclusions concerning such cooperation, as well as factors determining this process:

1. There is a social belief among both teachers and parents that cooperation between kindergartens and families is necessary because it allows children to be better prepared for life in the constantly changing social conditions. Most of the surveyed teachers and parents claim that this cooperation is successful. This seems to confirm findings by Klim-Klimaszewska (N=480), who also indicates that parents are satisfied with the work of the kindergarden their children attend, they willingly participate in the life of the institution and are involved in organising celebrations and events (Klim-Klimaszewska, 2018).
2. The research indicates that cooperation between teachers and parents is based primarily on mutual exchange of information and on mutual assistance. This cooperation is carried out mainly through forms such as maintaining the kindergarden's website and creating groups on social networking sites. The indicated forms of cooperation are in line with the changes taking place in the field of computerization, digitization and virtual communication. The modern generation of parents and teachers are eager to cooperate via the Internet, thus becoming members of the network society, however, it needs to be stressed that there are parents who do not have a social media account and may have difficulty obtaining information in this way.

Other forms of cooperation indicated by parents and teachers include participation in parents' meetings and kindergarten celebrations, but also contacting the institution through the Parents' Council. According to a research by Bielecka, conducted with a group of parents of kindergarten children (N=70), the respondents cooperate with the kindergarten by participating in group and individual meetings, by participating in events and celebrations, and through open classes or on-line (Bielecka, 2022). Referring to the forms of cooperation, it is worth mentioning the nationwide project of the Ministry of National Education entitled "School of Cooperation: Students and parents as the social capital of a modern school". The aim of the project is to implement good practices that make it easier for parents to take up activities at school or kindergarten. The main forms of support for the cooperation include using online platforms and guides for students and parents (Nerwińska, 2017).

3. Cooperation between parents and teachers is not always satisfactory for both sides. What seems to hinder communications and creates distance according to respondents are: excessive self-confidence, self-exaltation, excessive ambition, prejudice, and selfishness.
4. The reluctance of parents to have direct contacts with their children's educators has also been reported. As indicated in the survey, some parents avoid face-to-face contact, show little interest in the problems of the educational institution, and seem to blame the school leaders and teachers for lack of encouragement. Some parents seem indifferent towards the kindergarten, showing a misunderstanding of their own role in the education of their children.

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