

RELATIONS BETWEEN COLLEAGUES AND THE PRINCIPAL ROLE IN THIS RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

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The importance of positive relationships among colleagues and their impact on several aspects is globally recognized. Time is one of the main and most challenging factors of cooperation (Promethean, 2023). Usually, principals keep their distance from staff, this can lead to misunderstandings, therefore, improving functional communication strengthens interpersonal relationships (Plotinsky, 2022). How cooperative are professionals in pre-university educational institutions in Albania? The aim of this article is to highlight the importance and the benefits that come from the cooperation between teachers and principals. The study discusses how the relationship between teachers and the role of principals in these relationships, affects school performance. It is based on the literature review, also on the combined use of qualitative and quantitative methods. Most of it is focused on analysing the data collected from the questionnaires. The results showed that collaboration between colleagues is beneficial because they share their reflective experiences, evaluate their beliefs about teaching and learning, and build knowledge together. Professionals share materials and provide moral support to their colleagues. The principals of educational institutions play an important role, as they must provide resources that will free teachers from the kind of burdens that can interfere with and interrupt the collaboration process.

Keywords: Cooperation, Colleagues, Pre-University Education, Strategy

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the school has undergone a change in system and structure, programs, and ideas. Albania is one of the countries with the longest transition and also one of the developing countries, and as such, its educational system has been part of various transitions and reforms undertaken to improve quality. These reforms and almost all the given

recommendations emphasize the structural side of the system and the way the process works, curricular changes and improvements, teaching methods, etc. In our schools, today we talk about teacher-pupil, teacher-parent, and vice versa relationships in both cases, as well as the school-community relationship. Of course, these relationships are very important and significant for the school, but it seems clear that an equally

important element has been forgotten, the teacher-teacher relationship, the creation of a good climate of cooperation and the exchange of experiences between them, which in contemporary and international literature is seen as a strong point in improving the performance of the school.

The role of the state is very important in promoting reform in education (Liberatore, 2021). The *Framework for School Quality Assessment* (Agjencia e Sigurimit të Cilësisë së Arsimit Parauniversitar [ASCAP], 2020) in Albania has defined four areas of quality, which are directly related to the entire activity of the school and determine its performance as a whole. These areas are school leadership and management, quality of teaching and learning, student assessment and achievement, and student well-being and behavior (ASCAP, 2020). Even in this document drawn up by the quality assurance agency in pre-university education, the relationships of teachers with each other inside and outside the school are not included, but the relationships of teachers with other actors and partners outside of it are foreseen.

The various studies developed in this direction conclude that teachers and leaders of the schools are more interested in the cooperation of teachers, nowadays than before.

Historically, teachers worked independently, and not much importance has been paid to the relationships between them. Today, the cooperation of teachers with each other, the sharing of knowledge between them, the discussion of ideas, and the joint contribution to solving problems are becoming more and more important. Those who believe in the cooperation of teachers think that they influence each other by improving school achievements and student results. Some of the teachers' interactions can be: working in teams, sharing responsibilities, giving different opinions and comments, as well as forming and increasing trust in each other.

Therefore, more and more teachers are being asked to work in a team, and school leaders are to be the leader of this team. For years, school leadership has been a priority of education policies around the world. The role of school leaders has become a determining factor in improving its results. But what happens in Albania? The position of the head of the school is a "political" position, which means that it has nothing to do with his skills or preparation, but how much he contributed to the party that wins the electoral elections. This is an unwritten rule, but one that is known and accepted. Even the changes of leaders in different schools depend precisely on the party and politics. This often causes mistrust among the staff and conflicts between teachers and leaders, as well as the creation of different groups within the staff of the same school. Although the leader's position has a political color, school leaders managed to successfully manage unexpected situations and support their teachers and students during the pandemic period, which highlighted many difficulties in the Albanian education system (Loloçi & Halilaj, 2022). Many studies undertaken have as their object the discovery of the main reasons behind successful schools and at the end of this research, it has been found that the greatest achievements of schools are closely related to their

successful management. So far, there has not been a single case where the improvement in student achievement of a particular school has not been the result of its leadership by talented principals (Louis et al., 2010).

When teachers work in groups, they have a significantly greater influence on decision-making and policy formulation within the school (Johnson, 1976).

Some other studies have resulted in the following points:

- The higher the support among teachers, the higher the self-concept among students and the lower the incidence of depression among them (Reddy et al., 2003).

- Cooperation between teachers with each other and the school director improves the positive climate during work (Rutter & Maughan, 2002).

Many studies have concluded that good organization of the school affects growth and satisfaction at work. Similarly, the professional staff, the level of cooperation (professional, social, emotional, etc.), and the level of autonomy of the staff (in decision-making and policy-making, for the school and the class) in the school influence and change the level of satisfaction (Price, 2012; Stearns et al., 2015).

According to a study by Chaidemenos et al. (2023), conducted on unethical behaviors among colleagues at school, it was found that the behaviors that occurred most often were corruption, fraud, theft, conflict of interest, misuse of information, discrimination of colleagues, sexual harassment, treatment of inappropriate colleagues, mismanagement of organizational resources and finally, misconduct.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 examines the relevant literature bringing a description of effective strategies of cooperation between colleagues and the key points of this cooperation. At the end of this section, the definitions for cooperation are given, according to the reviewed literature. Section 3 describes the methods and instruments used in this paper; also, it gives a description of the population and the sample drawn from this population. The programs with which the collected data were processed are given at the end of the section. Section 4 analyzes the data collected from the questionnaires on the general perception of teachers, the cooperative climate in the school, the role of the school principal, the current situation of cooperation between colleagues, the different forms that teachers use during cooperation with their colleagues, as well as the time they have at their disposal as a determining factor for this cooperation. Section 5 discusses the importance and benefits of cooperation, taking into account the results obtained from the questionnaires, as well as the reviewed literature. Section 6 presents the limitations of this work, as well as recommendations for increasing cooperation, and frames the role that the school principal should play and the actions that he should take.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Planning cooperation time as a professional job for achieving goals by focusing on real and achievable tasks. Surprisingly, various studies have shown that time is an important factor for teachers and the cooperation between them. The planned time is a decisive factor in the frequency of cooperation between teachers (Patrick, 2022). Its absence is defined as one of the main challenges of this cooperation (Promethean, 2023). In order for teaching and cooperation to have the right place in the entire work process in the school, the necessary time must be planned and determined for cooperation between teachers within the regular time that teachers stay at school (Eaker et al., 2004).

Louis and Marks (1998) found that teachers form more stable and productive communities in schools where they are more involved in educational decision-making, and, in particular, schools that schedule regular blocks of time for teachers to meet and planned courses and assignments together. Teachers who were involved in collaborative processes reported that they had great improvements in the joint creation of teaching materials, in joint assessments, as well as in the joint examination of students' work (Nelson, 2014). Such tasks allow teachers to pool their knowledge and experiences and adjust their practice in real-time.

For there to be an effective collaboration between the teachers, each of them should plan joint work time with other colleagues to share experiences and to discuss teaching and decision-making in the classroom, the different teaching methods they use, their improvement and improving student results (Bouchrika, 2023). School leaders plan shared time in different ways. Some have planned it once a week and some others have planned a full working day for the collaboration. Another way can be after the educational process. Whatever way is determined, cooperation can be fruitful only if the goals and points of discussion are well-defined. Such a thing can lead to the creation of cooperative groups that encourage teachers in their professional development (Carrol et al., 2021).

Creating a vision and truly shared purpose. The sense of belonging that teachers have affects the way and extent of their investment in joint work and cooperation between them. Such belonging can be achieved if teachers are guided by a common vision and the same goals. These three components: teamwork, vision, and purpose, can make teachers part of the whole process (Caskey & Carpenter, 2014).

Gathering together teachers of different profiles and fields to change teaching practices. Most teachers in all subject areas report changes, but science and social studies teachers were more likely to report changes in how they teach than in what they teach, suggesting that not everyone will be perfect teachers, but will be more conscious and strategic about the development of the lesson within their field (Nelson, 2014).

Use discussion and dialogue. Whether teachers are integrating curriculum, analyzing data, or studying a new practice, teams must understand the roles and differences between dialogue and discussion. They are equally important to the group process. The discussion moves the conversation forward. In discussion, individuals express their

opinions in order to create consensus or make decisions. The purpose of the dialogue is the exchange and expansion of knowledge. Dialogue invites multiple perspectives, values the exploration of biases and assumptions, questions the status quo, and generates new ways of knowing and being. Dialogue requires active listening, a willingness to state beliefs, an ability to withstand the tension of ambiguity, and faith in the transformative potential of the process (Caskey & Carpenter, 2014).

Emotional support for teachers. The appearance of COVID-19 and the pandemic situation also have an effect on the emotional state of teachers. The Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence (YCEI), in the survey it conducted, concluded that teachers were afraid of coming into contact with the virus while they had to work to meet the needs of their families (Bouchrika, 2023). However, even with its passing, the teacher is a human being who faces the problems of life at work and in the family. To avoid exhaustion and offer emotional assistance to teachers, schools should provide opportunities for staff supervision sessions. In Albania, supervision has a negative connotation as it is seen as a way of controlling the work of teachers and leaders, while supervision itself has to do with supporting the staff so that they do not go into a "burnout" state. Currently, the main obstacles that prevent teachers from working together effectively are stress factors associated with their mental and physical health.

From an observational point of view, the teaching team seems to work cooperatively and has a relationship of mutual trust and respect. In general, presenters report very positive emotional experiences during the collaboration process. Teachers talk about feeling supported by team members during difficult or stressful times and that the collaborative environment also offers opportunities to reduce frustration (Smart, 2012).

Develop a sense of community. At its core, collaboration is relational. Getting to know colleagues, understanding their passions, and taking the time to connect on a personal level can help members gain mutual respect. Establishing shared values and commitments can unify the group and provide purpose for their collective work (Caskey & Carpenter, 2014). Other ways to develop community include creating traditions, celebrating accomplishments, and recognizing individual contributions.

Identify group norms. Collaboration can be uncomfortable or stressful at times. When we are transparent about our work and our beliefs, our colleagues can see our limitations, as well as our strengths, putting us in a position of vulnerability. Sharing and trusting with colleagues takes courage and humility. A climate of trust can help create the safe environment that is necessary for open communication (Caskey & Carpenter, 2014).

Sharing effective teaching methodologies. Teachers possess the capacity to improve their work by exchanging their experiences. This creates trust in those who share the experience and improves knowledge in others (Bouchrika, 2023). Sharing positive practices involves several steps:

1. *Define the problem:* Identify the problem, its causes, and define what success looks like. Success should be defined in attitudes or behaviors that are measurable.

2. *Determine who should share their expertise:* Identify teachers in your school who exhibit behaviors or achievements related to the outcome you desire. The basis for their identification should also be the use of clear, data-driven methods.

3. *Discover best practices:* Identify strategies that successful teachers are using in their classrooms. Video recordings of classroom sessions where these instructional strategies are used can be useful in analyzing the success of such strategies.

4. *Design the intervention program:* Schools should decide on a methodology that allows them to replicate successful practices in their classrooms. For example, they can also record videos of their teaching sessions to identify strengths, areas for improvement, and other ways to adapt instruction in their classrooms.

5. *Evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention:* The progress of the learning intervention should be measured with analytical tools that collect quantitative and qualitative data.

6. *Share the results:* Schools should make the intervention program accessible to a wide audience so that it can be replicated. For teacher instruction videos, schools can create an archive of materials so that they are accessible to those who want to improve their teaching strategies.

Acknowledging the authorship of changes by providing space and support for teachers to design and update materials in accordance with their students to meet the goals. Teachers are using a wide range of resources. The transition to new standards along with digitization has led to an explosion of sharing and adapting learning materials, some on education-specific platforms, but much more through the use of wider technologies such as YouTube, Pinterest, and Twitter (Nelson, 2014). Teachers can identify and create effective teaching materials tailored to their students. School leaders can also give autonomy to networks of teachers to create materials they deem most valuable and relevant to their students, but of course, this must be accompanied by policy changes and guidelines for implementation.

Working through conflict. Dialogue can result in disagreements at times. It would be wise to establish a strategy for managing and overseeing conflicts and disagreements. Teachers can contribute by allocating time and creating a supportive and safe environment for their peers. They should also be aware of their feelings and prioritize their well-being.

Teachers themselves have the possibility to utilize their own discretion, to determine when to intervene to manage a created conflict and when not, as well as when they should create the necessary space for contemplation and calmness. Although the created conflicts are often unpleasant, they can lead to the development and generation of ideas (Caskey & Carpenter, 2014).

In the report published by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), *Team Up for 21st Century Teaching and Learning: What Research and Practice Reveal about Professional Learning* (Carroll et al., 2010), from the 5 studies that this report examines, it has been found that when teachers have the time and the right tools at their disposal, they are ready to

cooperate, thus improving teaching methods and student results. This report highlights six points for success:

1. *Shared values and goals:* Team members have a shared vision of students' learning needs and a clear understanding of how their collective teaching experience can be orchestrated to meet these needs. They identify learning challenges that the team can focus on to improve student success.

2. *Collective responsibility:* Team members share responsibilities according to their experience, knowledge, and skills. They hold each other accountable for their success and are collectively responsible for the improvement of each student supervised by the team.

3. *Meaningful (authentic) reviews:* Team members hold themselves professionally accountable for student success using assessments and data that give them real-time feedback on learning and teaching effectiveness. These assessments add value and are not necessarily formal assessments.

4. *Self-directed reflection:* Highly effective teams create a feedback loop on goal setting, planning, standards, and assessments that are oriented toward student learning needs and consistent with teachers' professional development needs.

5. *A reliable environment:* If a team is given the time, space, resources, and direction for their teamwork, they can turn a mediocre school into a successful learning institution. Space and time are "sacred"; they are not used for anything else. Even the best teachers cannot have much impact working alone.

6. *Strong and committed leadership:* Highly effective instructional teams are supported by principals who create a climate of openness and trust, a climate that encourages team members to make decisions to improve instructional effectiveness that are directly related to student needs. This support must be balanced by positive and appropriate pressure aimed at continuous improvement of the school's performance, according to the learning needs of the students.

In order to improve student achievements and school performance, effective cooperation between the pedagogical staff and their leaders is necessary. On the contrary, if the leaders of the school orient towards formal and not real cooperation, we will have a very damaged climate and culture in this institution (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

An effective school principal has a strong and far-reaching influence. They are equally important as teachers in student achievement, in creating a productive school climate, in facilitating cooperation, and in managing staff and resources (Grissom et al., 2021).

Leaders can improve cooperation with teachers by involving them in decision-making on the issues most important for teachers. The three ways to involve them are 1) involvement in recruitment and giving the responsibility to guide and orient new teachers; 2) individual and mutual training, through recognition by the teachers of the work, practice, and difficulties of the leader and vice versa by the leader of the teacher; 3) communication, principals are often physically distant from teachers, even when they are in the same room, which can cause unnecessary friction or misunderstandings.

Increasing opportunities for functional communication fosters teacher expertise by opening stronger interpersonal connections (Plotinsky, 2022). The distribution of leadership can lead to a promotion of cooperation, which plays an important role in the creation of individual profiles of teachers (Özdemir et al., 2023). It has a direct or indirect influence on the innovations brought by the teachers, which are also reflected in the motivation, satisfaction, and cooperation with others and even in the change of the teachers' behavior (Buyukgoze et al., 2022).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this article is to highlight the importance and the benefits that derive from the cooperation between teachers and school principals, not only in the professional aspect but also in the socio-emotional support, to present effective strategies and the key points of cooperation between teachers.

This article analysed the function of the director to create a positive climate and to promote positive relationships between teachers. The study observes how these two components affect school performance, the cooperation among teachers, and the involvement of the director in this relation.

The whole study is based on the combined use of qualitative and quantitative methods, aiming at creating a picture as accurate and broad as possible. The importance is given to the review of the literature, being careful in the selection of contemporary literature, articles published in scientific journals with impact factors, taking into account the adaptation to the Albanian context. The quantitative method was carried out through the survey technique. Most of it is focused on the analysis of the data gathered from electronically distributed questionnaires.

Description of the instrument: The questionnaire is composed of 4 parts, and respects the ethical code, preserving the confidentiality and privacy of the respondents, as well as ensuring them that the data will be used only for the effect of this study. It is composed of structured questions and multiple choice ones, including a wide range of questions and respecting the time taken by respondents to complete it. Part I of the questionnaire contains 6 questions from which the demographic data is gathered, such as gender, age, level of education, years of work in education, and the fields they cover.

Part II of the questionnaire contains 23 questions with alternatives based on a 5-point Likert scale (A = "Strongly agree", B = "Agree", C = "Neutral", D = "Disagree", and E = "Strongly disagree"). This part aims to collect information on the level of cooperation between teachers and the principal of the school, the purpose and objectives of the meetings among teachers and the principal, as well as the role of the teachers and the principal in these meetings and during their stay in school.

Part III of the questionnaire contains 2 questions presented in tabular form, in the first table the criteria of the Likert scale are respected as A = "Always", B = "Often", C = "Occasionally", D = "Sometimes", and E = "Never". This part aims to collect information about the different forms of cooperation that teachers use in their work.

The second table, in this part of the questionnaire, deals with the different networks that teachers use to be in contact with each other, such as professional development communities, critical groups of friends, social networks, and joint planning time.

Part IV of the questionnaire contains 6 questions, 2 of which have alternatives and the others on the Likert scale, 3 of which have 5 options and the last one has 7 options. This part aims to collect information about the time of cooperation, its planning, and organization. The last question of this part aims to understand the importance of each of the components in the framework of cooperation and improvement of relations between teachers.

Description of the population: According to Instituti i Statistikave (INSTAT) data, in 2018, one teacher taught an average of 17.4 students, while in 2019, this indicator decreased to one teacher for 17.1 students. In the following years, the indicator was expected to decrease more, as a result of the rapid decline of the student population. Meanwhile, in the 2021-2022 academic year, this index went to 16.1 students per teacher (INSTAT, 2022). From the national data, there is an unfair distribution of the teaching workload. In rural areas and small municipalities, the number of students per teacher is lower than in large cities where this ratio is more than 20 students per teacher (Shqipëria Jonë, 2020). In the academic year 2021-2022, 453,989 students and children were enrolled in official pre-university education, marking a decrease of 2.5%, compared to the academic year 2020-2021 (INSTAT, 2022). The decrease in the number of students has also been accompanied by a reduction in the educational staff. In 1991, there were 43,700 teachers across the country, while in 2018, their number was 29,000, a 33% decrease since the first year of transition. Albania entered the transition period with 2200 8-year and secondary schools, while in 2018, there were 1134 schools, while today, the number of schools in the whole country is 1050 9-year schools and 346 secondary schools, while the number of teachers is 33058 (INSTAT, 2022).

In this study, 2875 teachers from the public (state) and private sector participated. In a geographical division of Albania, it was found that 1541 (53.6%) of teachers are from Central Albania, 829 (28.8%) are from Southern Albania, and 505 (17.5%) are from Northern Albania. The General Directorate of Pre-University Education, in Albania, is divided into 4 Regional Directorates, in that of Durrës, as the largest Regional Educational Directorate in the country and with the largest number of schools and teachers, of which 873 teachers are included in this research. The Regional Educational Directorate of Fier, from which 719 teachers are included, the Regional Educational Directorate of Lezhë with 597 participating teachers and the Regional Directorate of Korçë with 686 participating teachers.

Of all the participants, 1214 or 42.2%, are teachers in higher secondary education, 999 or 34.8%, in lower secondary education, and 662 of them or 23% are teachers in primary education; 672 of the participating teachers have up to 10 years experience in education, 948 of them have 11-20 years of experience in education, 735 of

the participating teachers have up to 30 years of experience and 520 teachers have 31 or more years of experience in education.

Regarding age, we can say that the largest number of participating teachers (1054) belong to the age group of 40–49 years old, 568 teachers belong to the 50–59 years old age group and 463 of them belong to the older age group, 60+ years old, while 790 teachers are 20–29 years old.

Data analysis: Google Forms creates the possibility of a general analysis of the data, but the data collected for a good part of the drafted questions also required processing through the Excel program, for a better presentation and more accurate interpretation.

4. RESULTS

Creating learning communities among teachers who collaborate with each other can influence the results of students (Bloom & Stein, 2004). According to Bloom and Stein (2004), teachers who collaborate are able to address students' needs effectively and achieve positive academic outcomes by working together, sharing resources and strategies, and solving problems collectively.

4.1. Teachers' general perception

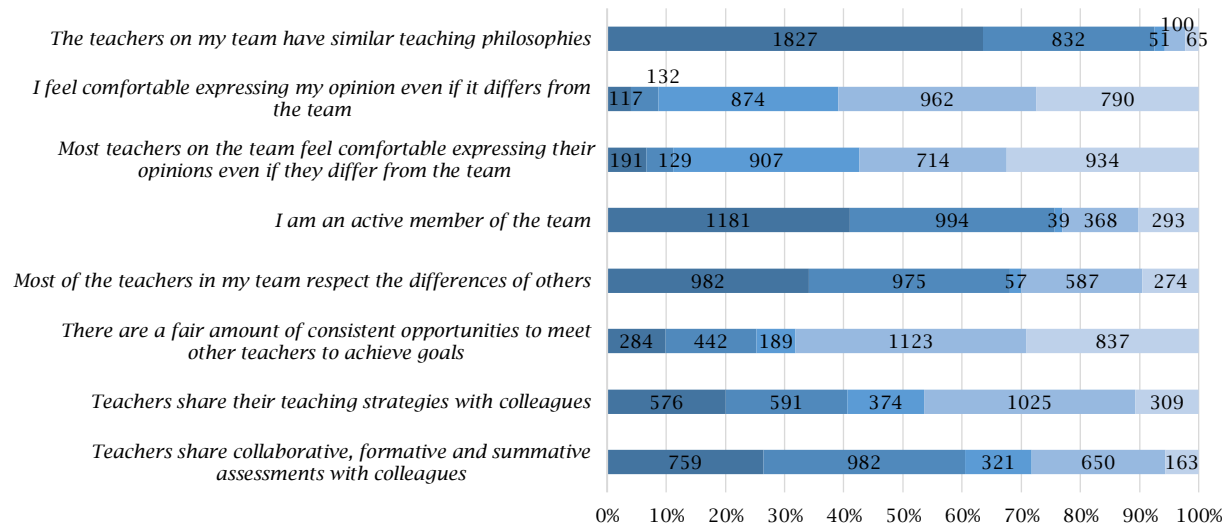
In the questionnaire completed among the teachers, the statement *"My work with other teachers is useful for me"*, received complete agreement from 90% of the respondents; 94% of them strongly agree with *"My work with other teachers is beneficial for my students"* and 91% of them strongly agree with the statement *"Our students have improved their results because of the cooperation of teachers"*.

However, the answers differ when it comes to the goals and objectives of meetings. Thus, 74% of them agree and strongly agree that *"The purpose of working in cooperation with other teachers is clear"*, 21% disagree and strongly disagree, and 5% of them are neutral. Fifty-eight (58) percent of respondents disagree that *"The objectives of meetings with other teachers at school are clear"*, 40% agree or strongly agree, and 2% are neutral; 64.8% (1865) of them agree and strongly agree that *"The objectives of meetings with other teachers are usually achieved"*, 32.9% (948) disagree and strongly disagree, and 2.3% are neutral. Regarding the statement *"Team members determine most of the content of our teacher meetings"*, the respondents are divided by these answers: 33.8% (972) of them agree and strongly agree, 3.6% (103) of them are neutral, and 62.6% (1800) of them disagree and strongly disagree.

4.2. Teachers' perceptions of the climate of cooperation in schools

The graph below shows the perception of teachers regarding the climate of cooperation in their schools. As can be seen, 92.4% (1827 + 832) of the respondents say that the teachers have the same teaching philosophy, but 61% (962 + 790) of the teachers say that they feel uncomfortable expressing their opinion if it is different from the others. With a small difference, 57.3% (714 + 934) of them, say that even most of the other teachers do not feel comfortable expressing their opinion even if it differs from the opinion of others, while 75.7% say that they are active members of their staffs, and 68.1% say that the majority of teachers in their staff display regard for individual diversity.

Figure 1. Teachers' perceptions of the climate of cooperation in schools



Sixty-eight (68.2) percent of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree that in their schools, there are many sustainable opportunities to meet other teachers to achieve goals, and 46.4% of them disagree and strongly disagree that teachers share their strategies teachers with other colleagues, but 60.6% (759 + 982) of them say that teachers distribute comparable evaluations, both formative and summative, with their peers.

4.3. The role of school principals

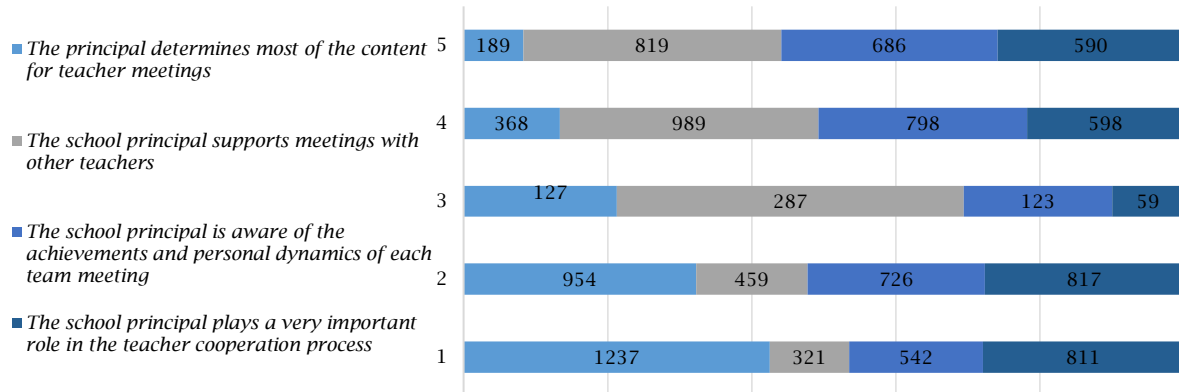
The graph below expresses the perceptions of the teachers regarding the principal role in the process of cooperation between school teachers and as it can be seen, 76.2% (1237 + 954) of them say that the principal of the school determines most of the content for teachers' meetings; 62.9% (819 + 989)

of the respondents say that the principal of school does not support collaborative gatherings with fellow educators outside their school.

Regarding the statement “The school principal is aware of the achievements and personal dynamics of each team meeting”, the teachers are divided into two groups with a small difference, 44.2% (542 + 726)

agree and strongly agree with this statement, and 51.7% (798 + 686) teachers disagree or strongly disagree; 56.6% (811 + 817) of teachers agree and strongly agree that the director of the school has a very important function in the process of cooperation between staff members.

Figure 2. Teachers’ perceptions about the role of school principal



It is the responsibility of the school principals to guarantee effective cooperation, as well as to plan time for such cooperation during the working day (DuFour & Eaker, 2008). It is recommended that from time to time, the school principals should offer relevant training for the staff members. According to Gamage et al. (2009), successful principals devote significant time to teachers who contribute to positive student outcomes by promoting them and providing a collaborative climate, and cultivating stronger and more trusting relationships. The overall culture of the school can be greatly damaged if principals lead teachers in unrealistic and ineffective cooperation processes (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

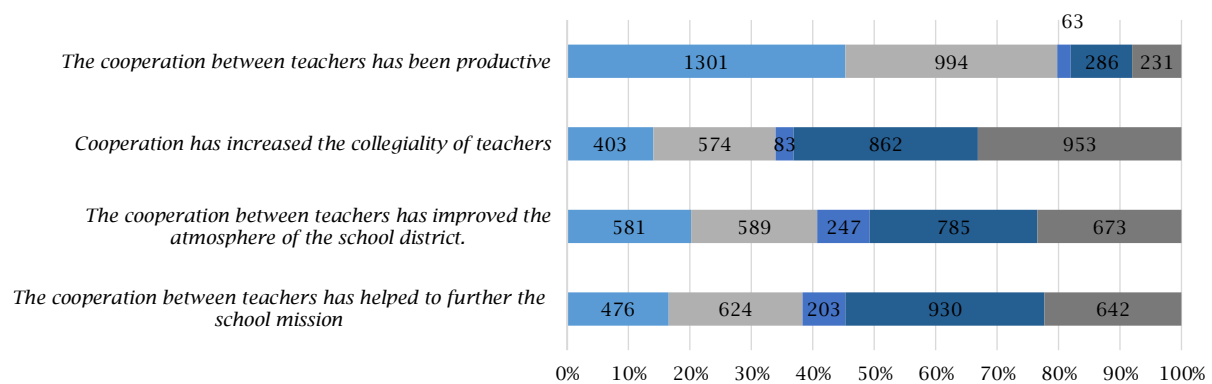
4.4. Evaluation of the current cooperation in schools

Teacher collaboration mitigates the effect of end-of-year burnout while providing teachers with stimulating enthusiasm (McClure, 2008). Collaboration

develops over time and must include the integration of trust for the school to function effectively. While principals should not take responsibility for group decisions, they should provide time and space for faculty to share thoughts, explore resources and challenges, and then make their own decisions (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

Seventy-nine point nine percent (79.9%) (1301 + 994) of the respondents say that the cooperation between the teachers has been productive, 63.1% (862 + 953) disagree and strongly disagree that the cooperation with the teachers has increased their collegiality; 50.7% (785 + 673) of them affirm that they disagree and strongly disagree that the cooperation between teachers has improved the atmosphere in the school, while 40.7% (581 + 589) agree and strongly agree that this cooperation has improved the atmosphere in the school.

Figure 3. Evaluation of the current cooperation in schools according to the teacher’s point of view



Fifty-four percent (54.6%) (930 + 642) of the respondents disagree that the cooperation between teachers has promoted the mission of

the school, while 38.3% of them agree and strongly agree with this statement.

4.5. The frequency of using different forms of cooperation

The following table shows the frequency of use of different forms of cooperation between teachers. Only 27.6% have often exchanged teaching materials and 18.1% have exchanged them always; 14.8% have often exchanged exam questions. Only 35.8% of them have tested new ideas and teaching methods; 73.4% of them have never been or have rarely been part of colleagues' observations; 89.9% of teachers have never or rarely dealt with homework; 72.6% of them have occasionally been part of interdisciplinary

discussions about student performance; 72.3% of them have never or rarely cooperated for the substitution of lessons; 71.5% of them rarely cooperated for the following lessons; 98.3% of them have never or rarely advised or monitored new teachers. Only 27.2% of them cooperated occasionally or often for the promotion of slow learners; 79.1% of them have never or rarely cooperated in the preparation of written exams; 68.9% of them cooperated occasionally or often for counselling on the assessment of student performance and 95.9% of them cooperated often or always for the promotion of high-performance students.

Table 1. The frequency of using different forms of cooperation

<i>Cooperation forms</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
Exchange of learning materials	152	327	1082	793	521
Percentage	5.3	11.4	37.6	27.6	18.1
Exchange of exam questions	743	996	390	425	321
Percentage	25.8	34.6	13.6	14.8	11.2
Preparation of individual lessons	648	893	478	374	482
Percentage	22.5	31.1	16.6	13.0	16.8
Joint planning of whole lessons or projects	421	689	759	821	185
Percentage	14.6	24.0	26.4	28.6	6.4
Planning of interdisciplinary lessons	107	203	459	947	1159
Percentage	3.7	7.1	16.0	32.9	40.3
Common application of lessons	110	246	671	893	955
Percentage	3.8	8.6	23.3	31.1	33.2
Testing new teaching ideas and methods	258	985	1029	421	182
Percentage	9.0	34.3	35.8	14.6	6.3
Peer observation	1023	1087	265	247	253
Percentage	35.6	37.8	9.2	8.6	8.8
Dealing with homework	2041	543	107	99	85
Percentage	71.0	18.9	3.7	3.4	3.0
Interdisciplinary discussion of student performance	60	317	2086	412	0
Percentage	2.1	11.0	72.6	14.3	0.0
Preparation of substitute hours	989	1089	675	97	25
Percentage	34.4	37.9	23.5	3.4	0.9
Follow-up lessons	72	2057	542	178	26
Percentage	2.5	71.5	18.9	6.2	0.9
Monitoring and counseling of new teachers	852	1974	45	4	0
Percentage	29.6	68.7	1.6	0.1	0.0
Joint promotion of slow learners	324	1756	710	71	14
Percentage	11.3	61.1	24.7	2.5	0.5
Preparation of written exams	1437	836	582	18	2
Percentage	50.0	29.1	20.2	0.6	0.1
Advice on assessing student performance	12	32	1002	978	851
Percentage	0.4	1.1	34.9	34.0	29.6
Co-promotion of high-performing students	5	13	101	2104	652
Percentage	0.2	0.5	3.5	73.2	22.7

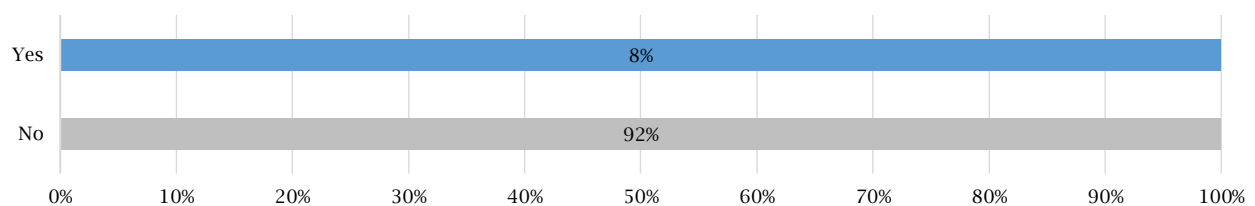
4.6. Time as a determining factor of cooperation

Various studies have revealed time as an important factor in the cooperation between teachers. Many studies have shown that the organization of time within the regular working hours and outside of school greatly affects the opportunities and potential for cooperation among teachers and insufficient time has been characterized as one of the challenges in realizing cooperation among peers.

Figure 4 reflects the teachers' responses to the question: "Does your school promote/support time for teacher collaboration?".

Ninety-nine percent (92%) (2645) of teachers say that in their schools the setting of time for the cooperation of teachers is not promoted or supported.

Figure 4. Promotion of cooperation time



With similar percentages, answers are also given to the other two statements “There is a sufficient and defined time for cooperation and meetings outside the school” and “There is also

a sufficient time for strengthening social relations between teachers”. The answers are reflected in the two graphs below.

Figure 5. Sufficient and defined time for cooperation and meetings even outside the school

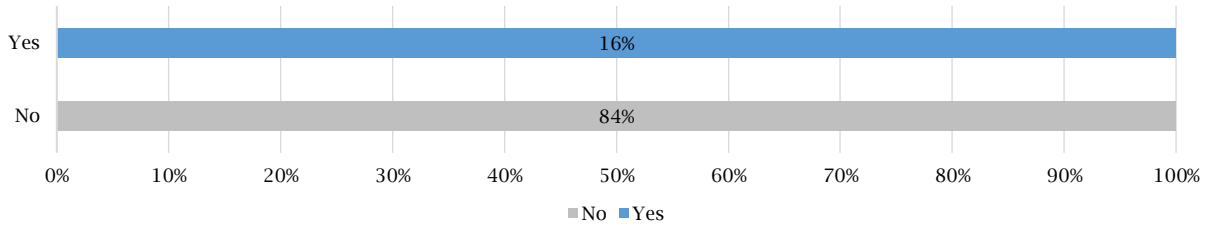
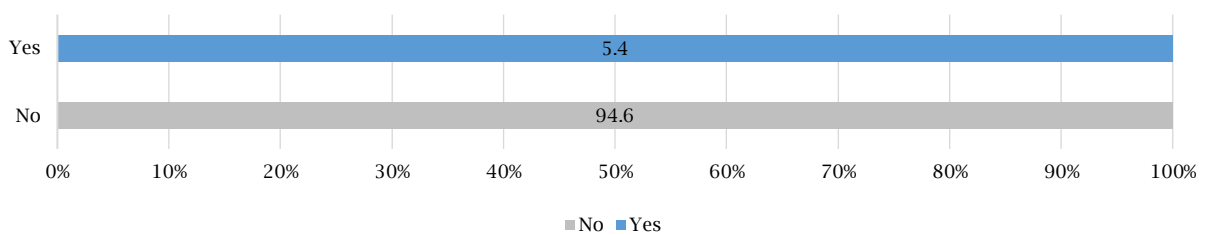


Figure 6. Enough time to improve social relations between teachers

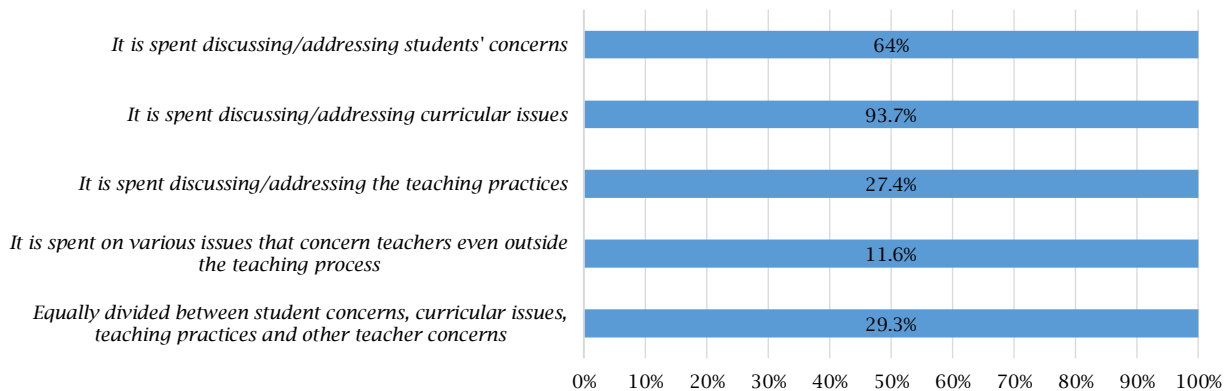


As can be seen, 2418 teachers have expressed that there is not a sufficient and defined time for cooperation and meetings outside the school between the teachers, so in this aspect, no importance has been given to the time they can spend together outside the school building. Thus, 2719 of the respondents expressed that there is not enough time for strengthening social relations between teachers, ignoring the social part which also affects the cooperation between them for the teaching process and its improvement. Teachers’

answers differ when they are asked about the way time is spent in the teachers’ meetings that they hold at school.

As can be seen from Figure 7, the majority of teachers, 93.7% (2694) stated that most of the time in teachers’ meetings is usually dedicated to discussions about various curricular issues, and only 11.6% (334) of teachers stated that most of the time is spent on various issues that concern teachers even outside the teaching process, not paying due importance to their concerns.

Figure 7. Allocation of time in teachers’ meetings



To the last question about the importance teachers give to time that should be devoted to the special components in the framework of

cooperation and improvement of relations between them, teachers list them as follows:

Table 2. The importance of the components in the framework of cooperation and improvement of relations between teachers

<i>Components</i>	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Slightly important</i>
The improvement of social relations between teachers	96.2%	2.2%	1.6%
Discussion/addressing of various issues that concern teachers even outside the teaching process	94.8%	4%	1.2%
Collaborations and meetings outside of school	10.6%	83.4%	6%
Planning and preparation of activities outside school hours	17.5%	78.7%	3.8%
Discussion/addressing of teaching practices	14.8%	77.5%	7.7%
Discussion/addressing student concerns	3%	10.1%	86.9%
Discussion/addressing of curricular issues	5.4%	8%	86.6%

The teachers have evaluated as “very important” the social relations, including the emotional, psychological, etc., as well as the problems or issues that concern them outside the school. Then they give importance to problems or issues related to their work at school and work outside school.

5. DISCUSSION

Teaching can be tiring and emotionally draining. Everyone tries to find a balance between work and family life, but regardless of this, stress is part of work and colleagues, so other teachers are invaluable sources of support and relief from this stress. When teachers support each other, they build a trusting and sensitive cooperation process thus creating a stable and professional relationship. When teachers are supported, they provide the same support to their students (Arkansas State University, 2020).

Collaboration among teachers creates opportunities for personal and professional development and can be beneficial for both educators and students.

The results of a study conducted with students on the subject of mathematics in Nigeria revealed that a group of teachers (who worked together) had a noticeable impact on student results in mathematics. Also, students who were taught by a teacher who participated in cooperative activities achieved higher results than those who were taught by a teacher who was not involved in such activities (Saka, 2021).

But the benefits that come from the cooperation of teachers are not only related to the results of students, which is a direct factor in school performance but they are also related to other elements that indirectly affect a good or not good performance. As such, we can mention the storm of creative ideas during which different ideas are generated while individual differences are accepted and respected. It also encourages teachers to share their ideas and to add and improve their knowledge by drawing on the thoughts and knowledge of other teachers. Teachers can change and improve their teaching methods on a level that they had not even thought of until that moment or were reluctant to implement (Bouchrika, 2023).

Cooperation can help teachers and professional growth. Thus, teachers, especially young ones, can be helped by other teachers who possess the skills that others need at this moment. They can watch and inform one another how they can improve their work. Teachers can use interaction, dialogue, feedback and exchange of ideas to create good relationships among themselves. Collaboration increases the effectiveness of teachers in implementing the best teaching strategies, making lessons more attractive and interesting (Bouchrika, 2023).

Important benefits for teachers such as a greater sense of belonging, increased confidence, and a sense of efficacy come as a result of collaborative lesson planning and discussion of ways to improve future lessons (Bruce et al., 2011).

In particular, cooperating teachers are more likely to talk with their colleagues about classroom problems, teaching methods, or teaching programme. So, teachers learn from one another (Reeves, 2003).

For several years, teacher collaboration has been an enduring component of shared time, professional communities, and critical peer groups. Although each model differs, they share some features, including enhancing teacher education, targeting specific issues, promoting a sense of collegiality, minimizing teacher isolation, and expanding teachers' knowledge of teaching and learning. The main and perhaps most important aspect is improving student achievement (Caskey & Carpenter, 2014).

6. CONCLUSION

This study certainly has its limitations. If this study will be referred to in other future studies, these limitations should be taken into account:

The study was limited to a specific country, Albania. The same study conducted in other countries may give other results regarding the cooperation among teachers themselves and between teachers and principals.

Participated teachers, in this study, come from different areas of Albania, which means that different regions had different survey return levels and different levels of involvement. Regions that have had a higher level of involvement may influence the study findings.

The methods used do not allow the authors to observe teachers during teaching and cooperation in the school or outside it. The teachers' observations would have helped the authors to better understand the responses and to define if a successful cooperation was taking place.

Responses on the level of cooperation were measured by teachers' and principals' perceptions. Here, we also take into account their subjectivity, since a several factors could have impacted the answer, such as their preferences and aversions towards the principal, students, teachers, or the overall school environment.

Questionnaires are distributed online in google form, which makes it impossible to control “one questionnaire, one teacher” and also has its own limitations in the processing and analysis of the collected data.

School principals, vice-directors and teachers must collaborate and dedicate themselves to a shared culture of collaboration. They should dedicate time to organization of cooperation inside the school. DuFour (2011) suggested that collaborative team members must realize that they cannot achieve increased student results if they do not cooperate with each other.

School leaders should plan and organize cooperation among staff members so that they can be included in open professional communities. Such inclusions will gradually lead to the acceptance of the goals and awareness of the many benefits of cooperation between teachers, increasing step by step the belongingness and confidence of teachers.

Another point that school leaders should consider is the workload of their teachers. The different activities that are foreseen or planned for the staff should offer more space for discussion, which would require new planning of time allocation within working hours, but this should be done in cooperation with the teachers.

According to DuFour (2011), inviting teachers to cooperate is not effective. It is a careful and strategic execution of leadership plans to successfully influence the collaborative process and progress.

If the teachers will cooperate with each other and give up the traditional and individual work with which they have operated until now, the performance of the students will improve (Leonard & Leonard, 2003).

The investment in time to do this kind of practical, applied work should be accompanied by redesigned instruction that is more coherent and

structurally sound (Nelson, 2014). McHenry (2009), in her study on the relationship between the behavior of leaders and the cooperation of teachers, concluded that although teachers are the key players in the act of collaboration, school leaders have an important responsibility in creating in which this type of cooperation to be successful.

School leaders should be aware of and accept the diversity of their teachers also in terms of their goals and interests. This will affect their motivation at work (Louws et al., 2018). In order to motivate teachers and attract them, it can be started with an orientation and clarification period for teachers, without forcing them to make rapid changes in their work routine.

To improve teaching methods, it is essential to educate teachers about the benefits of cooperation among them (Sjoer & Meirink 2016). School principals must also provide resources that will free teachers from the kinds of burdens that can interfere with and disrupt the collaborative process.

Special importance should be given to the socio-emotional aspect of teachers, to the various problems they have in their life outside of school, as well as to finding ways and resources to support and facilitate them in finding solutions and choices.

In conclusion, we can say that in order to have better principals in our schools who will change expectations, mindsets, the way a school works and its environment, they must be the instigators and leaders of cooperation and support in all areas, professional and personal, of their teaching staff. If these become a reality, then we will have a successful school.

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