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# A Case Study about Digital Channels in Teacher- Parent Communication: The Case of Estonia

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### Summary:

Digital communication is any type of communication that relies on the use of technology which this is the most commonly used communication channel today where most information is provided. This study analyzes of what the teacher-parent communication channel preferences in regarding to the child's academic progress, opinions and related experiences. The methodology used is focus group interview conducted in 2012 in six Estonian schools teachers and parents. In addition, advantages and disadvantages of digital channels, how the Estonian teacher's and parent's digital competence and the extent of overlapping channel preferences between all schools of Estonia is indicated and shown in the study.

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### Rationale:

In Estonian primary school they have open themselves to introduce communication channel to it's students, teachers and parents . Technology affects the way individuals communicate, learn, and think. It helps society and determines how people interact with each other on a daily basis. In order to know what communication channel fits to the preferences of the parent and the teacher this study is conducted. In the overwhelming using of internet in the children of Estonian, the teachers and parents should also be able to access internet efficiently to well monitor the child academic progress and how they socialize as well. We have here digital communication where students and teachers in today's classroom have the ability to communicate, collaborate and share with others beyond the walls of their school building, all thanks to technology (Julie, S. 2021).

In using digital communication channel in education is called home base education. In this time things are easy to adjust if you don't have much time to go to school due to some priorities we have here home base education. Homeschooling is allowed as part of Estonia's compulsory schooling in two cases: parental choice and medical necessity. In the case of parental preference, the child can be home schooled until age 12. In the case of medical necessity, homeschooling is permitted throughout the entire phase of compulsory education. (Blok, H. & Karsten, S. 2011). In Estonia home base education is the new system of education that needs to prioritize with. In order to have easy and efficient way of teachers and parents they need to have an access to the digital communication to have a collaboration towards each other.

The teachers and parents way of using digital communication is to connect with the parents that they can use different platform to communicate to each other. They can talk in phone call, chatting, texting or even emails. Schools that can encourage parental communication are setting themselves up for success. Not only could doing so impact the child's education, but parents will be happy that they can be more involved, and teachers will feel supported by the parents. Through digital communication things can be one click away.

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### Objectives:

The aim of the study is to know and analyze the preferred communication channel of Estonian primary school teachers and parents regarding teacher-parent communication channels, involving digital channel and the experiences and attitudes connected therewith. The communication channel that is chosen is based on the influence and the interest of the child. This study also highlights how to well evaluate the different channel of communication in base on the type of school and between teachers and parents of the same school.

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### Methods:

The methodology used of this study is semi-structured focus group interview. According to Denscombe (2007, p.115), "focus group consists of a small group of people, usually between six and nine in number, who are brought together by a trained moderator (the researcher) to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a topic". A focus group interview provides a setting for the relatively homogeneous group to reflect on the questions

asked by the interviewer. This method will focus on how the participants obtain their experiences and opinions. The language used by the participants was mother tongue.

The schools were selected with a strategic aim to represent small schools (up to 200 students), medium-sized schools (up to 500 students) and big schools (over 500 students), and city and country schools in varying geographical locations of Estonia. The sample consists of primary school teachers from six schools (n=44) and the parents of primary school students of the same schools (n=39).

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### **Advantages and Challenges of Digital Channels**

Using digital channels has pros and cons. According to Elizabeth Burns, Electronic communication is fast, cost-effective, and convenient, but these attributes contain inherent disadvantages. The technology that enables people to keep in touch at all times also can invade privacy and cut into valuable relaxation time. Devices such as cell phones with mobile communication technology and portable laptops enable people to stay in touch with friends and co-workers at all times. It also encourages productivity. For example, someone who has to meet a professional deadline could save valuable time by working on a laptop on the train or bus trip to work. Electronic communication is convenient and usually instantaneous. It dispenses with the need to mail or fax documents that can be safely backed up online or on portable electronic devices to protect against loss or theft. Someone with a complicated health problem might gain invaluable information from an authoritative medical website. Universities can save time and money by posting study materials on campus websites. Technology has revolutionized the way we communicate in our personal and professional lives, but it also causes potential problems. Spending too much time online can be socially isolating. Failure to protect your computer from hackers can compromise personal information. Communication technology is a useful tool, but by taking simple measures to protect online security and spending time offline with real friends, we don't let it dominate our lives.

The digital channels shown in the study are as follows: e-school, e-mail, and mobile phone. As stated in the study, e-school is one of the important aspect in terms of education because the parents can able to watch their child and they can know what will be the progress of their child since it is e-school but the problem part of this e-school is that some of the students can't able to learn of what will be the lesson all about and we can't deny that some of the parents are not sufficient in using Internet. Moreover, e-mail is one of the easiest way in transferring messages. Parents can able to send messages to the teachers about the progress of their child. The negative side of e-mail is that it is less interaction when they are having written communication. The mobile phone is the used digital channels in most schools. It is easy and not time consuming for teachers and convenient for parents as well. The bad side of it is that if you don't have load then you can't call nor text the teacher or other people.

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### **Major Findings/Impacts**

The findings/impacts of the study are as follows: Teachers' and parents' understandings of the role and necessity of school-home communication, Teachers' and parents' communication channel preferences, The extent of overlapping channel preferences, Teacher's and parents' digital competence.

#### ***Teachers' and parents' understandings of the role and necessity of school-home communication***

Parents considered home-schooling as essential and it focuses its role in socializing the child and academic progress. Parents saw home-school as a great tool because of their child's success. Homeschooling is a progressive movement around the country and the world, in which parents educate their children at home instead of sending them to a traditional public or private school.

#### ***Teachers' and parents' communication channel preferences***

The channel preferences that are used to communicate with teachers and parents are as follows: e-school, e-mails, skype, blogs, diary, face-to-face meeting, phone calls, SMS and Facebook. The analysis of channel preferences shows that in city schools or big city schools, two or three channel preferences of teachers and parents, whereas in country schools or medium size and small there was one commonality or none at all.

#### ***The extent of overlapping channel preferences***

The channel preferences of teachers and parents may differ from each other. Big city schools channel preferences of teachers and parents was meeting in school and e-school, other teachers from medium to small cities preferred calling and email, calling and e-school, respectively.

Preferences may differ it may depend on their capacity for example when some cities preferred e-school they should consider becoming media literate not just for the teacher and students but also for the parents as they will be having communication with the child's teacher. Meeting in person or face-to-face is also a choice of some teachers, parents can be considered in a small city who does not have a strong internet connection. In this case, overlapping channel preferences depends on their capacity in handling situation whether they choose e-school or meeting in person. It also depends on where the school is located and at this time internet connection is the fastest way where we can communicate but there are still some areas that do not have that strong and stable connectivity.

### ***Teacher's and parents' digital competence***

Digital competence is the set of skills, knowledge and attitudes that enable the confident, creative and critical use of technologies and systems. It is the skill set that enables a person to be a confident digital citizen, to interact and collaborate digitally, to produce work digitally, and to be confident in handling data and computational thinking (problem solving). From the study, they provide internationally comparable empirical background, they use data from the representative survey EU Kids Online, which studied 9-16 year-old Internet users and one of their parents in 25 European countries (N= 25142; in Estonia N= 1005; see Livingstone et al. 2011).

The study shows that the country Estonia belongs to the group where parents are less knowledgeable about using the Internet compared to the children. 95% of Estonian parents who use the Internet for surfing the net at home, 45% of them used for educational institution, and In 2010, only 7% parents used Internet for mobile phone or smartphone. 53% parents considered themselves to be fairly or very experienced Internet users, 35% considered themselves to be fairly inexperienced and 5% to be completely inexperienced.

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### **Guide Questions:**

#### ***What channel/medium was used in resolving the problem? Why was this channel chosen?***

The medium/channel used in resolving the problem in Estonia is that the teacher and parents mentioned e- school, email and the mobile phone (SMS and calling) as the most suitable digital channels. The reason why these channels chosen because this is the most fastest and easiest way to communicate to the parents regarding to the child's progress.

#### ***Was there a criteria used in the selection of this channel? Discuss the criteria.***

Yes, there was a criteria used in selecting the channel used in this study. The criteria of the study is that the participants selected wisely and properly if what is the most preferable communication channel or digital channel they wanted to use upon communicating other people especially teacher-parent dilemma.

#### ***What nature of DEVCOM materials was exhibited in the situation?***

The nature of development communication materials exhibited in the situation was purposive where the study has its own purpose or objectives to meet. It is also pragmatic where the participants able to attain or meet successfully the objectives or purpose of the study. It is Mass-Oriented which the paper has target people were the intended audience is the primary teacher and parent of Estonia. Scientific in Outlook is also shown where the study was systematically research or it used by scientific method and the information gathered on the study is accurate and complete. It is very relevant especially in today's situation where the setting we have right now is under online. It is Value-Laden where the least and the most important information of the study is indicated as well.

#### ***In your opinion, did the chosen channel fit the needs of the audience or the participants?***

In our opinion, the chosen channel of the study fit the needs of the audience or participants especially to the teachers because their skills are already sufficient where they don't need to practice more. However, there are some parents in Estonia that are not digital competence or media literate but most of parents know how to use cellphone by texting and calling. Even though that there are parents is not good at it but still there is room for improvement for being media literate of Estonian parents as well as in the preferred communication channels and the related attitudes.

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