

# Time to rethink the teacher-family alliance? Central issues in the “pandemic” literature on home-school cooperation

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Submitted: May 7, 2022 – Accepted: July 14, 2022 – Published: August 25, 2022

## Tempo di ripensare l'alleanza scuola-famiglia? Temi centrali nella letteratura sulla cooperazione scuola-famiglia ai tempi della pandemia

COVID-19 added a new dimension to the relationship between school professionals and students' families: a virtual one. To explore this shift and the associated challenges, we performed a bibliometric analysis of research literature published on the topic to the end of 2021. Our guiding question was: what kind of themes are emerging in literature on the school-family relationship in association with COVID-19? Our search of Scopus, Web of Sciences and ERIC retrieved 286 articles. Using VOSviewer, we conducted a bibliometric analysis based on article keywords to map the field, producing a visual representation of networks of themes. Four clusters emerged: “educational players”, “distance learning”, “partnership” and “social context”. Unsurprisingly, the analysis suggests a shift in the roles of parents and teachers, with the digital sphere becoming central to their relationship. Beyond this, the crisis has cast light on both existing problems and the potential of a partnership based on a genuine sharing of responsibility.

Il rapporto scuola-famiglie, con la pandemia da COVID-19, ha guadagnato una nuova dimensione: quella virtuale. Al fine di esplorare questo cambiamento e le sfide ad esso associate, è stata condotta un'analisi bibliometrica della letteratura pubblicata in merito fino alla fine del 2021. La domanda che ha guidato la ricerca è stata: quali temi vengono toccati dalla letteratura dedicata al rapporto scuola-famiglia al tempo della pandemia da COVID-19? La ricerca è stata condotta su tre database: Scopus, Web of Sciences ed ERIC. Sono stati individuati 286 articoli. Al fine di mappare il campo di ricerca, l'analisi si è servita di VOSviewer; ciò ha permesso di rappresentare anche visualmente le reti tematiche presenti in letteratura. Sono emersi 4 temi: “attori educativi”, “distance learning”, “partnership”, “contesto sociale”. Come prevedibile, l'analisi degli articoli ha rivelato la centralità assunta dalla sfera digitale nel rapporto scuola-famiglie, mentre ha avuto luogo uno spostamento di ruoli tra genitori e docenti. Di là da ciò, la crisi pandemica ha sia evidenziato i problemi già esistenti sia lasciato intravedere le potenzialità di una partnership basata sulla reale condivisione della responsabilità educativa.

**Keywords:** School-families relationships; Covid-19 challenges; Emerging issues; Bibliometric analysis; Parental involvement.

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## 1. Introduction

The sharing out of responsibility between parents<sup>1</sup> and teachers — as the adults tasked with caring for “the newcomers” (Arendt, 1961, p. 176), as custodians of the home and school, the two safe spaces in which it is given to young people to grow, sheltered from the world, protected and separated in the intimacy of the four walls around them — is an issue that remains to be fully resolved (Dusi, 2012). Historically, the relationship between these two agencies has been marked by complexity and numerous obstacles. Parents and teachers relationship has attracted academic attention, at a national and global level, for decades (Waller, 1932), and interest in the subject has grown in recent years (Addi-Racah, Dusi, & Tamir, 2021), a reflection, perhaps, of the additional challenges inherent to dialogue between these two educational institutions and its increasing importance.

Against this backdrop, with its existing complexity of roles, functions and duties, the years 2020 and 2021 witnessed the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The spread of the *Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2* (SARS-CoV-2) caught the health systems of numerous countries by surprise. From one day to the next, our everyday way of life was brought into question, leaving us as undefended onlookers in the face of the health crisis, abandoned to our own devices and trapped, isolated from one another, in our own homes. The majority of the social activities we were used to were interrupted, and educational practices had to be redesigned, placed on a sort of emergency footing so that young people, from infants to young adults, would not be entirely deprived of the teaching and socialization that, even in a virtual form, were deemed essential to their development. Although the suspension of public education had been experienced in specific contexts (due to strike action, civil unrest, war, famine, etc.), this was the first time that it had occurred on such a global scale (Williamson, Eynon, & Potter, 2020), with nearly 90% of the student population affected worldwide (UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF, 2020a).

The “temporary” closure of schools produced a chasm in the social and cognitive life of both students and their families and teachers. The COVID crisis provides further proof, were it needed, that the lives and progress of families with children and those of school professionals are closely intertwined. With crises and conflicts synchronized across the different fields of life (Graham, 2020), parents, teachers, school management and students of all ages are faced with numerous new challenges.

However, although this precarious situation has underlined the limits of existing structures and given rise to new necessities, it also offers the opportunity to recast the school-family relationship, more than ever, in terms of a shared responsibility.<sup>2</sup> “A crisis forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgements [...] [It provides] the opportunity for reflection” (Arendt, 1961, p. 174).

This also holds for researchers, who have had no choice but to engage with the family-school relationship at a time of uncertainty, instability and change in school systems and educational practices. The purpose of the present study is to reveal the research themes addressed in the literature that relate to family-school relationships and COVID-19, and — based on these findings — identify fruitful avenues for research going forward.

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1. Throughout this article we use the term “family” in as broad and inclusive a sense as possible, in acknowledgement of the multiple forms of family present in society, and the fact that numerous different figures can play a significant role in a young person’s upbringing and education. As such, when we use the term “parent(s)”, we are referring to any adult that performs the role of “parent”, in that they are responsible for a child’s development and learning and interact with teachers and the school (including biological, adoptive and foster parents, grandparents, legal guardians and other caregivers).
  2. Fundamentally, this new way of understanding the parent-teacher relationship acknowledges the fact that i. both these figures share responsibility for the education of young people, albeit parents are the main guardians; ii. it is not possible to care for students if there is not also care for parents; iii. education, in all its complexity, requires an alliance between all the adult who take care of the children.

## 2. Emergency Remote Learning: A new challenge for the school-families<sup>3</sup> relationship

COVID-19 presented parents with new, and significant challenges. Forced to reinvent themselves as co-teachers and teachers, they had to take traditional forms of education that are rooted in the physical vicinity of faces and bodies — and the physical contact, embracement and, indeed, comparison and contrast that this entails — and rethink them as remote modalities of learning. Such is the digital divide, it was necessary to employ multiple channels to deliver remote learning, from online classes and learning packages based on textbooks, worksheets, printouts, educational television programmes, etc. to other online teaching resources and videos. “Of 127 countries reporting, 68 per cent use some combination of digital and non-digital approaches in their education responses to school closures (TV, radio and take-home packages)” (Dreesen *et al.*, 2020, p. 1).

In some countries and regions — Turkey, Jordan (Weldali, 2020), New Zealand, Queensland (AU) (Drane, Vernon, & O’Shea, 2020), New Jersey and Washington DC (USA) (Rauf, 2020), England (BBC, 3.4.2020) — educational content was delivered through television broadcasts. In South America, radio, television and mobile-phone and other virtual platforms were employed (Garcia Jaramillo, 2020) while schools in Palestine turned to the Messenger and WhatsApp platforms to distribute materials for asynchronous learning (Hamad, 2021). There are many other examples, such as the use of email (for instance, in Poland, Parczewska, 2021); home learning packs and/or online support (in Northern Ireland, Bates, Finlay, & Bones, 2021); recorded and/or livestreamed lessons (in Italy, Pastori, Mangiatordi, Pagani, & Pepe, 2020, and in England, Greenhow, Lewin, & Staudt Willet, 2021).

Bozkurt & Sharma (2020) contend that the move to learning at home, mainly through a combination of technologies and digital formats, might be characterized as *Emergency Remote Education* (ERE). They argue that the term “distance education” implies a practice that is a matter of choice, that is therefore planned, implemented and grounded in theoretical and practical knowledge which is specific to the field and its nature.<sup>4</sup> Emergency Remote Education, in contrast “is about surviving in a time of crisis with all resources available, including offline and/or online” and, for this reason, might be defined as a “branch of distance education as in the case of online learning, e-learning, m-learning, or homeschooling” (Bozkurt *et al.*, 2020, p. 2). In these circumstances, the “primary objective is not to re-create a robust educational ecosystem” but “to provide a temporary access to instruction and to instructional supports” (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020, p. 9).

In its different forms, Emergency Remote Education (ERE) presented a huge challenge to teachers, parents and students. Almost overnight, caregivers had to reconfigure the home setting, their time, and their priorities. As such, on top of the restrictions imposed in the interests of public health and safety, the everyday lives of families with children were further disrupted by the need to implement emergency education measures at home (Lee, Ward, Chang, & Downing, 2021), with even greater strain placed on families with more than one school-aged child. Caring for young children — from primary-aged children to young adolescents — already presents particular challenges, including in terms of supporting their schooling and learning. Having to support several young people with different educational needs who are contemporaneously engaged in remote learning places demands on their caregivers’ organizational capabilities and the availability of suitable spaces. In addition, i) many caregivers were required to carry on with their own work, in most cases in more complicated situations, and ii) with those working from home spending more time in the domestic setting, the psychological strain experienced by most people during the pandemic was amplified. Both these factors led to increased levels of stress and negative impacts on the mental health of young people and their parents alike (Davis, Grooms, Ortega, Rubalcaba, & Vargas, 2021; Yamamura & Tsutsui, 2021).

3. The use of the plural “families” here as a modifier, rather than the standard “family”, is a deliberate choice by which we hope to call attention to the plurality of family forms and cultures with which school institutions and teachers are required to develop a relationship of collaboration.

4. UNESCO defines distance education as “any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or in time from the learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between teachers and learners is through an artificial medium, either electronic or print” (2002, p. 22).

For the students, the impact of these, hitherto unused, educational tools have varied depending on a range of factors, from the age of the students themselves to the skill of the teachers and the institutional support provided (issue of laptops/tablets, etc.), not to mention their family circumstances and home-life conditions. They had to learn how to organize their time and to discipline themselves (Barhoumi *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, it appears that courses taught entirely online are less able to sustain motivation among students, leading to increased levels of drop out and larger education gaps between different demographic groups. Vulnerable students are faced with additional challenges (Protopsaltis & Baum, 2019), not least in psychological terms (UNESCO, 2020), in which numerous, intersecting factors come into play: e.g. family support (lower levels of numeracy and literacy among adults — Outhwaite, 2020); digital divide/low quality internet access (for instance, in England, an estimated 700,000 students did not have home access — Greenhow *et al.*, 2021); available forms of teaching (live online lessons vs. recorded/emailed content — Parczewska, 2021; Pastori *et al.*, 2020); language barriers (Rani, 2020), and the students' own facility with technology and any special needs they may have (Neece, McIntyre, & Fenning, 2020; Majoko & Dudu, 2020; Yates, Dickinson, Smith, & Tani, 2021). Some students, in fact, appreciated the flexibility of remote education and the possibility of adapting the pace of learning to their own abilities, although the absence of their classmates had a negative impact (Kostelecká, Komárková, & Novotná, 2020).

Teachers and institutions were also thrown into this new reality almost overnight, with the majority of teachers having to adjust their approach to, and role in, their students education amidst a climate of psychological and emotional uncertainty. New tools were required: i.e. digital whiteboards, online learning tools, audio and video lessons (i.e. in Pakistan, Bhamani, Mackhdoom, Bharuchi, Ali, Kaleemi, & Ahmed, 2020). As part of the response to the pandemic, depending on the specific circumstances, institutions were closed entirely or at least partially, with schools moving to blended or purely remote teaching (Diéz Gutiérrez & Gajardo Espinoza, 2020). Many teachers tried to embrace information and communication technologies (ICT) and learning and knowledge technologies (TAC), which had previously only been used, if at all, as complementary tools, and to master remote teaching methods in a short period. In only a few contexts do we see that schools had already prepared the foundations for digital learning, for instance in Norway, where teachers achieved relative proficiency in the digital technologies employed (Carrion-Martinez, Pinel-Martínez, Pérez-Esteban, & Román-Sanchez, 2021). In particular, supporting children and their parents proved a significant challenge for preschool teachers and teachers of students with disabilities (Jones, 2020).

Against this complex backdrop, parental involvement (PI)/parent engagement (PE)<sup>5</sup> and the relationship between schools and families of all backgrounds have been pushed to centre stage, with both the interdependence of the realms of school and family, and the critical importance — for the wellbeing of young people and adults alike — of educational practices based on collaboration and the sharing of responsibility emerging more clearly than ever.

### 3. Parent-school relations: Theoretical background

The academic literature exploring multiple dimensions of the less-than-straightforward relationship between teachers and parents runs back over decades. Research on the relationships between schools, families and communities constitutes a meta-field that spans multiple disciplines and sectors. Speaking broadly, there is general agreement in regard to the positive effects of effective collaboration between teachers and parents (Fan & Chen, 2001; Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). These effects are felt by all of the parties involved. Students benefit in terms of academic achievement (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Barger, Kim, Kuncel, & Pomerantz, 2019), parents and teachers receive support and learn-

5. In the literature, the preferred terminologies reflect both the evolution of ideas about the relationship between schools and families and the authors' conceptual frameworks. According to Desforges and Abouchaar, PI is a "catch-all term for many different activities including 'at home' good parenting, helping with homework, talking to teachers, attending school functions, through to taking part in school governance" (2003, p. 12). Some authors affirm that PI and PE can be thought of as a continuum (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) while others consider PI more significant than PE (Mapp, Johnson, Strickland, & Meza, 2008). Addressing the distinction among home-based and school-based elements of parental participation, Jaynes (2018) remarks that this debate is still open.

ing opportunities of their own, and the local area benefits from the development of a sort of educational community (Auduc, Duffez, Maréchal, & Marty, 2019; Pati, 2019). When asked, parents and teachers both express the belief that mutual collaboration is useful to education and learning. All the same, the question of family-school relationships is one that is far from being fully resolved, not least given the complexity of the real-world situation in which the specific circumstances of every family, teacher and student are unique.

The result is, in effect, a vast field of enquiry in which a broad selection of theoretical approaches have been directed at an equally expansive range of questions, from the potential impact on a student's education of parents/families (Shumow & Moya, 2019) and teachers' training in and understanding of the school-family relationship (Thompson, Willemse, Mutton, Burn, & De Bruïne, 2018) to the implications of cultural heterogeneity and socioeconomic status in the encounter with the school institution (Ishimaru, 2019; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Lareau & Horvat, 1999), along with discussions of existing education policy and proposals for promoting collaboration between home and school (Epstein, 2011).

Although earlier research on the school-family relationship has focused disproportionately on white, middle-class families and mothers (Crozier, 1999), other literature — especially more critical writing — has brought far greater focus and recognition to issues such as: the heterogeneity of family compositions (Boutte & Johnson, 2014) and the multiplicity of the cultures they represent (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Yosso, 2005); the forms of participation adopted by caregivers (Hill, Whitterspoon, & Bartz, 2018; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007); and the widespread deficit thinking that has characterised the encounter between the school and families from minority groups (He, Bettez, & Levin, 2017; Ishimaru, Torres, Salvador, Lott, Williams, & Tran, 2016; Haneda & Alexander, 2015).

Recently, the literature also moved towards the paradigm of “shared responsibility”, a concept first addressed some decades ago by Joyce L. Epstein (1986, p. 20; 2019). This shift can be discerned in the research itself, in education policy and in legislation (Dusi & Pati, 2011), albeit the picture that emerges is conceptually varied (Paseka & Birne, 2020). In terms of practice, we find the theoretical rhetoric at odds with approaches that still bear the mark of traditional models, in which the idea of a partnership is understood in terms of establishing relationships with individual parents, rather than on a participative-community level, in which all families are involved in the planning process, and there is the potential for tailored, made-to-measure solutions.

#### 4. A changing relationship

It is to be expected that the parent-teacher relationship would change during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the sudden transition to learning at home leading to a new division of responsibility between the two parties. Home-schooling was no longer a family choice but, rather, a parental obligation. In this new situation, parents were presented with an excess of duties but were left without the necessary support and equipment, and indeed the required pedagogical competence (Burke & Dempsey, 2020; Santagati & Barabanti, 2020). This was a source of great stress and left most parents feeling overwhelmed and incapable of assisting their children in terms of motivation and specific tasks, and at greater risk of burnout (Griffith, 2022).

However, there is more to the parental experience than anxiety and loneliness (Pastori *et al.*, 2020). Many found themselves pushing their own creative limits, exploring shared forms of problem solving, spending more time, and strengthening their relationship, with their children.

Inevitably, parental involvement increased during the phase of home-based schooling and led to greater interaction between the realms of home and school. In some cases, this brought an improvement to the relationship between teachers and parents (Jones, 2020) or served to highlight its importance, while in others it made the relationship more complex. Indeed, not all parents maintained contact with teachers (Ewing & Cooper, 2021).

The means of communication with families — at a unique moment, when it was needed more than ever — had to change. During the pandemic, teachers were required to make adjustments in their interactions with parents. Maintaining ongoing contact was an essential factor in the successful continuation of children's learning (Doyle, 2020). The most widespread tools of traditional communication (students' diaries, circulars, notices, etc.) were unsuitable. Some schools had already started using channels

such as SMS, WhatsApp, email or — as in Italy — an online register, or online learning management system (the Mashov system) — as in Israel (Yavich & Davidovitch, 2021) — but these had always been used alongside other tools. During the COVID crisis, digital communication became the only way forward. Face-to-face meetings, one of the communication forms most appreciated by families (Dusi, 2019), were replaced by virtual encounters. At the same time, it became increasingly difficult to maintain tailored relationships (León-Nabal, Zhang-Yu, & Lalueza, 2021). Overall, amidst all these complex psychological, emotional and pedagogical challenges, the way schools and families communicated was altered and pushed into uncharted territory.

## 5. Literature review: Aim and research question

With a view to exploring the new challenges that students, parents and teachers faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular those related to the family-school partnership, we performed a bibliometric analysis of research literature published on this topic up to the end of 2021. The question that guided our research was: What are the dominant themes in the recent literature on parent-school relationships associated with the COVID-19 pandemic? It was hoped that answering this question would reveal new domains associated with the dynamics of the family-school encounter.

### 5.1. Methodology

This study employed bibliometric analysis to map the central terms and themes in the emerging literature concerning parent-school relations and the COVID-19 crisis. Science mapping is a well-established methodology in various fields but has only recently been employed in education (Hallinger & Kovačević, 2019). Bibliometric analysis is concerned with the knowledge accumulated in a large number of studies, so may prove useful in identifying and illuminating topics that are significant for decision making and practice that have not been fully examined, plus new directions for future knowledge production. Although COVID-19 is a relatively new phenomenon, there is a growing literature that relates to COVID-19 and education in general and parent involvement in particular (around 300 peer reviewed journal articles between 2020–2021). Hence, we maintain that there is a sufficient accumulation of research to merit analysis.

To conduct bibliometric analysis, we can use article keywords to map the state of the field and reveal trends across areas of research (Lee, Lee, Lee, & Chang, 2018; Karakuş, 2018). Bibliometric instruments allow researchers to assess and analyse research output based on statistical analyses of large numbers of publications and research. In our analysis, we offer visual representations of the network of themes and their relationships based on co-word analysis. These visualisations are based on the network of themes and their relationships (co-word analysis) that constitute the conceptual space of the field's various domains. Visualisations are considered a particularly effective way of mapping the central topic in the field, and can reveal established and emerging areas (Lee *et al.*, 2018). To analyse the co-word data, we used VOSviewer (Van Eck, Waltman, & Glänzel, 2017), a software package that produces accessible, easy to interpret maps and finds extensive use in multiple fields (e.g. psychology, management).

This bibliometric analysis is followed by an additional phase in which we return to several, randomly-selected articles — from among those analysed with VOSviewer — using an extensive, line-by-line, open-coding methodology to examine and interpret the contexts in which the terms used for the co-word analysis actually appear. This provides a deeper understanding of how the terms are used, and how each article relates to or illustrates the overarching themes that emerge in the analysis process (Segev, 2022); this is in accordance with Zupic and Čater who argue, “bibliometric methods are no substitute for extensive reading and synthesis [...] it is up to the researcher and their knowledge of the field to interpret the findings — which is the hard part” (2015, p. 458). In regard to our discussion here, the additional thematic analysis allows us to provide illustrative examples of how the dominant themes are manifested in specific articles; these examples are included in the discussion below of the four coloured clusters that emerge in the co-word analysis.

## 5.2. Article selection protocol

The review searched three data bases for relevant articles: ERIC, Web of Science and Scopus. In each data base, the search was conducted based on titles, keywords and abstracts using this search string:

(Parent\* OR Famil\*) and (Teacher\* OR School OR "School Teachers" OR Principal\* OR "School Staff") and (Partnership OR "Parent\* engagement" OR "Family Involvement" OR "Parent\* involvement" OR "Participation" OR "Family-School Interaction" OR "Parent-school cooperation" OR "Parent-school Partnership" OR "Family-school-community relationship" or "Parent\*-teacher\* relation\*" or "Family-school relation\*" or "Parent\*-school\* collaboration\*" or collaboration or cooperation) and (Pandemic OR COVID19 OR COVID-19 or corona\*)

We based our search on peer reviewed articles published in academic journals in all languages and covering all years up to the end of December 2021. The articles were retrieved on 14 January 2022. Table 1 presents the protocol that led to our final data set of 286 articles.

Table 1 – Summary of article selection protocol

Data source	Search covered	Number of articles
SCOPUS	Social science+ articles+ journal; in abstract, title and keyword	163
Web of science	Articles+ education educational research; topic (titles, abstract keyword);	102
Eric ProQuest	Peer review, articles abstract, keyword or title	117
Total number of articles		382
Total after excluding duplicates	Examining for duplicates using Mendeley; 96 articles were duplicates	286

The search yielded a total of 382 articles; after deleting duplicates (n=96) in Mendeley, we arrived at a final figure of 286 articles. Most of these articles (275 of 286) dated from 2020 and 2021 (11 articles were published between 1964 and 2019; these were concerned with health issues).

## 5.3. Findings

As the above information indicates, we conducted a *keyword co-occurrence* analysis. Keywords represent what the authors consider the most important terms in their paper and may be used to detect trending research topics over time (Anand *et al.*, 2021). Keyword analysis helps reveal the central topics studied in a field and makes it possible to map the links between these topics in a visual representation.

The analysis revealed 1559 terms, of which 106 reach the threshold of at least 5 occurrences (the default option). COVID-19 (with 180 occurrences) and Pandemic (with 92 occurrences) were identified as the two most central keywords. However, to help identify terms relating to current parent-teacher relationships, these two terms were excluded from the analysis. Our final keyword co-occurrence analysis was therefore based on 104 terms. Figure 1 presents the 10 most frequent terms (keywords) revealed by the analysis.

Figure 1 indicates that, in the articles addressing parent-school relationships within the context of COVID-19, terms associated with distance learning, electronic technology or online learning are prominent. In this context, over the period of interruption to school-based education, the focus was on new technology-based modes of learning. Further, attention was given to partnership in education (with 19



reasonable as in many countries the move to distance learning occurred when the schools were forced to close.

Figure 2 also reveals four clusters, distinguished in the visualisation by colour, that represent four groups of terms that share common themes or research topics. We have labelled these: *educational actors/players*; *distance learning*; *partnership* and *social context*.

We tagged the *red cluster* at the right side of the map *Educational players*. This cluster is composed of 35 terms and is organized in three foci, reflecting three dominant educational players: *school*, *teachers* and *Parental involvement*, close to which we find *children* with fewer occurrences. However, in the research related with COVID-19, there is a weak linkage between these terms, indicating that, while in PI studies researchers were interested in parents, teachers and schools in conjunction, they looked at them in separate instances. For example, we found studies that focused on the effects of COVID-19 on teachers' working conditions and practices. Hargreaves and Fullan (2020) reported that COVID-19 undermined traditional psychic rewards, weakened the student-teacher relationship and gave parents a distorted view of teaching online. Within this virtual context, however, teachers reported being depended more than ever on the involvement of parents and needed their help to ensure effective distance learning (Beattie, Wilson, & Hendry, 2021).

Other studies looking at the families' perspectives indicated that parents found themselves cast as "Do-It-Yourself teachers" (Castaldi, 2021, p. 208). This produced mixed responses from parents. For instance, Ahbabi (2021) investigated parents' perceptions of homeschooling during the COVID-19 crisis in the context of the United Arab Emirates with a view to understanding their actual experience and found they were satisfied with online learning.

Günbas and Gözükcüçük (2020) reported that parents in Turkey were also able to see the benefits of online learning as it allowed them to follow their children's learning process, and enabled their children to continue their studies in a safe, healthy home environment. In contrast, in Canada, where parents of elementary-school children were required to assist delivery of the curriculum through remote learning, we find reports of dissatisfaction, stress and increased workload. Parents also reported that the planning, on the schools' part, was "shallow", criticized the schools' unreasonable demands and regarded remote learning as less effective than in-class learning (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). In a similar vein, Hamad (2021) indicates that Palestinian mothers of primary school children, who were required to help their children with online learning, found the experience extremely challenging, due largely to lack of preparation and access to technology, ineffective, uninteresting, and demotivating online instruction, and a lack overall of preparation for such a crisis on the part of the authorities. It was suggested that to face these challenges schools would have to take a more dominant role in helping families (Ribeiro, Cunha, Silva, Carvalho, & Vital, 2021).

The *green cluster*, labelled *Distance learning*, is composed of 26 terms. At the centre, is *distance education* with 54 occurrences. Other prominent terms are *school closure*, *early childhood education*, *educational technology* and *electronic learning*. From this cluster, it would appear that, over the period of interruption of school-based education, there was particular interest in new, technology-based practices for maintaining education through *electronic learning* or *on-line courses* and the challenge this proposed at all educational levels, from *early childhood education* (e.g. Barnett & Jung, 2021; Zhang, 2021) to *higher education* (Bubb & Jones, 2020). From the terms *teaching methods*, *teacher attitudes*, *teacher literacy*, *teacher role*, in the upper part of the cluster, it would appear that distance learning raised questions regarding the very role of the teacher. On this question, based on an heterogenous sample of educators from the kindergarten setting to eighth grade maths teachers, Aguilar, Rosenber, Greehalgh, Fütterer, Lishinski, and Fischer (2021) examined shifts in teachers' use of social media platforms with the advent of COVID-19, revealing idiosyncratic patterns of usage, and reporting the use of social media as a means of coping with stress and obtaining support with matters of teaching and learning.

Another feature of this cluster is a concern with *parent participation* and *parent-school relationship*, which appear in the lower reaches of the cluster. Multiple studies looking at parents' experiences in various countries found that they were required to invest more time in their children's schooling and extend their role to managing their children's online learning, motivating them and, essentially, operating as teachers despite a lack of training (Budhrani, Martin, Malabanan, & Espiritu, 2021 for the Philippines; Drvodelic, Domović, & Pazur, 2021 for Croatia; Ribeiro *et al.*, 2021, in Portugal). A Croatian

study (Drvodelic *et al.*, 2021) reports that, during Emergency Remote Education (ERE), parents of primary school students expressed a positive perception of the work of their children's teachers. Similar to other researchers, however, they also report that ERE itself — with the school closure and “suspended educational services for children” (Fontanesi *et al.*, 2020, p. 579) — contributed to overload and stress and disrupted everyday family duties. These perceptions were more common among parents who lacked confidence in supporting their children's learning (Bates *et al.*, 2021) and in certain countries more than in others (Thorell *et al.*, 2020).

One finding suggests that the relationship with parents was an important factor in the *success* or otherwise of primary school teachers' work during the pandemic and point to that teachers benefit from being more attentive to parents (Ehren, Madrid, Romiti, Amstrong, Fisher, & McWhorter, 2021). However, in another study we find that teachers reported a lack of parent involvement in addition to difficulty in communicating with parents and the realisation that parents were not able to provide their children with the support they needed (Francom, Lee, & Pinkney, 2021). A survey conducted in Northern Ireland, meanwhile, reveals that parents considered it very important to maintain contact with their children's teachers but sometimes felt they received very little guidance from schools (Bates *et al.*, 2021). Manca and Delfino (2021), also indicates that a collaborative relationship between parents and teachers was helpful in facilitating the sudden transition to distance learning. On the whole, the research indicated — as might be expected — that the move to online learning increased the need for collaboration between teachers and parents (Fettermann & Tamariz, 2021; Varela & Fedynich, 2021).

The *blue cluster*, tagged *Partnership*, is composed of 24 terms, with two relatively dominant terms: *partnership in education*, with 19 occurrences, and *elementary secondary education* with 18 occurrences. Other terms refer to stakeholders in the education system — community, school district, families — for whom the pandemic presented new challenges. These include the need for crisis management, planning, and educational change without neglecting questions of equality and well-being. This cluster is largely concerned with policy making during the COVID-19 crisis, which would appear to be associated with the issue of distance learning, as we see from the partial overlap with the green cluster. For example, Housel (2021) argues for an anti-deficit approach based on a strong, respectful, collaborative partnership between families, schools, and communities for the benefit of students' education.

Sundaram *et al.* (2021) examine actions taken by headteachers in the UK to tackle COVID-19, including ways of communicating with parents about their children's return to school and offering guidance about regulations and distancing. Cheng (2020) analyses documentation pertaining to the “School's Out, but Class's On” policy on online learning during school closures implemented in 2020 by the Ministry of Education in the People's Republic of China. The study stresses the importance of school-parent communication in the circumstances. Castillo, Makris and Debs (2021) present a broader discussion involving parents, students, and policymakers on the changing role of education in relation to equity and the purpose of education in the wake of COVID-19.

The research examined are indicative of the sorts of fundamental issues that emerged with the arrival of COVID-19 in the field of education. These include the need to rethink the function of technologies in education in times of crisis and redefine practices and roles in teaching and learning. Eder, for instance, proposes a “do no harm approach” quoting United Nations best practice documentation:

policymakers should ensure that plans and programs do not harm anyone, and that all learners stand to benefit from intervention measures. In the case of remote instruction, if only some group [sic] of learners will benefit while the rest does not, then it should not be rolled out (Eder, 2020, p. 169).

This suggests that there is a need to revise educational policy in a way that looks far beyond the widespread economics-based approaches that have taken hold in recent decades (Mayo, 2016).

The *yellow cluster* — tagged *Social context* — includes 19 terms that focus primarily on *elementary school* and on the *barriers* faced by, and *attitudes* of, *parents* of different social backgrounds (particularly in terms of *socioeconomic status* and *racial differences*) in dealing with the challenges created by the COVID-19 outbreak. Here too, some of these challenges are concerned with distance learning, as reflected in the overlap between the green and yellow clusters. Parents had to adapt the home environment and their own schedule and priorities around the immediate educational needs of their children. With

regard to inequality, Atwell, Bridgeland and Manspile (2021) indicate that, during the pandemic, parents and teachers in the USA perceived low-income students and students at rural schools as being less likely to have access to social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. A lack of participation in remote learning (i.e. students not logging in or making contact) was identified in several contexts (Herold, 2020; Pastori *et al.*, 2020). This was a far more widespread phenomenon among students from low-income families. In a survey conducted by Kurtz (2020), a third of students in this category were found to not be engaging compared to students at schools in affluent districts, where the equivalent figure was 12%. There is evidence that disadvantaged students experienced lower exposure to synchronous lessons, had fewer conversations with their teachers and faced greater obstacles when it came to submitting their work (Cullinane & Montacute, 2020). This was not always the case, however. In a survey conducted in a Norwegian municipality, teachers suggested that vulnerable pupils had “never received such close follow-up” (Bubb & Jones, 2020, p. 216).

Focusing on the different school programs delivered during school closures to students in urban and rural areas in Ethiopia (mainly radio and television programmes), Belay (2020) points out the several inequalities faced by rural students compared to city students and their higher risk of drop-out. Housel (2021), calls for the acknowledgement of existing institutionalized barriers or internalized biases that impact the participation of disadvantaged groups, for instance immigrants in the USA. He suggests that, in order to engage immigrant parents, schools need to get to know families and create school and community-based activities where school personnel, immigrant families, and other families in the community, can collaborate and share resources.

Social differences were also reported by Zhang (2021) who examined primary caregivers’ involvement in their preschool children’s education in Wuhan, China, where the pandemic started. It was found that having younger children, lower socioeconomic status, poorer physical health, and higher levels of household chaos were associated with less home-based involvement. The studies highlight the importance of understanding the barriers and benefits of caregivers’ home-based involvement when designing interventions and policies to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on children and their families. The same line of thought is reported by Weber, Helm and Kemethofer (2021), which examined social and ethnic disparities in the reading achievement of Austrian primary school students. They found that social and ethnic disparities have grown during the lockdown period. However, contrary to the expected outcome, parental involvement in distance learning was not associated with social and ethnic difference in reading.

## 6. Discussion

The present study provided an analysis of the emerging research literature on the parent-school relationship during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still in progress, with numerous studies currently ongoing. Our objective was to identify the primary topics that research on the school-family relationship during the period of lockdown engendered by the pandemic brought to the fore. For that purpose, we conducted a search of peer reviewed papers published, in the great majority, in 2020 and 2021 in three databases: Scopus, Web of Science and ERIC. After removing duplicates, 286 papers were retrieved. Our bibliometric analysis affords some reflection on the dominant “narratives” in recent research, which we find focus on parents, teachers and schools as the key players (it is worth noting that “students” did not feature in the keywords as a key actor except in relation to “special needs”).

Our reading of the (co-word analysis) visualisation and detailed examination of randomly selected papers highlights the fact that the outbreak of COVID-19 brought certain, fundamental changes in the school-family relationship; for this very reason, it represents a potential turning point in the parent-teacher partnership. Below, we underline a number of the emerging issues:

First, *rethinking roles and reorganising the division of educational activities between schools and families*. Our findings show that research on parental involvement relates mainly to distance learning without addressing schools or teachers directly (red cluster). This reflects the major shift in parent-teacher relationships during COVID-19. Parents had to expand their role to encompass the maintenance of at least a *remote* form of learning at home, while also coping with changes in teaching and learning practices. This shift suggests that we broaden the discussion of parental involvement to include not only the

home, school and community, but also digital spheres, in which we see an additional pattern of involvement during the COVID-19 crisis, with parents encouraged to engage with didactic and pedagogical questions from which teachers, pre-COVID, had preferred to exclude them (Addi-Raccah & Grinsh-tain, 2018). Although earlier studies (Borup, Stevens, & Waters, 2015; Burdette & Greer, 2014; Smith, Reinke, Herman, & Huang, 2019) had looked at questions of distance learning and the use of digital technologies in parent-school relations (Addi-Raccah & Yemini, 2018), it was not a central issue. Under the regime of Emergency Remote Education, both families and schools had to reorganize their educational activities. This presented a significant challenge, with schools, teachers and parents required to coordinate their activities and interactions (Kostelecká *et al.*, 2021) to ensure the continuation of the students' education and keeping them focused on schoolwork (Bates *et al.*, 2021) while finding a balance between the life of the home, their children's schooling, and their own work.

Second, *expanding school-families communications*. With the school closures, the reasons for communication changed. No longer was it a case of teachers sharing the children's achievements with their families, or informing parents of planned event. Rather, the purpose was to show parents what happens in a (virtual) classroom: the very process of teaching and learning. The already delicate communication between teachers and parents risked being soured by i) the caregivers' unfamiliarity with the pedagogies applied at school; ii) the experience of emergency remote teaching and learning (in an already stressful set of circumstances created by the pandemic); iii) the caregivers' (in)ability to reproduce the teaching methodologies at home; iv) the lack of distance teaching training and equipment on the part of the institution. However, in many cases, parents faced these challenges with marginal assistance from the educational institution/school or teacher (see Thorell *et al.*, 2020, which analysed parents' experiences across seven European countries). The parental perceptions revealed in our bibliometric analysis are supported by the results of a survey conducted across 59 countries by Reimers and Schleicher (2020), in which few teachers reported that the strategies put in place by the institutions ensured that parents and caregivers were supported in assisting their children's learning. Actually, structured support can be provided via effective and appropriate school-home communications (green and blue clusters), while taking into consideration the broad socio-economic and cultural contexts and policies.

Third, *digital divide and social inequalities*. Issues of digital divide and other barriers continue to shape the parent-teacher relationship and patterns of family involvement. The literature (yellow cluster) indicates that Emergency Remote Education does not create inequalities, it just makes them more evident or, at worst, amplifies them (Roncaglia, 2020). Distance learning highlighted educational inequities between families with different socio-economic backgrounds and inconsistencies in levels of home-school communication (Lucas, Nelson, & Sims, 2020). What also emerges, however, is that the crisis can be viewed as a "mixed bag": a stressful situation, yes, but also an opportunity for parents from diverse social groups to participate in their children's learning and to reinforce the bond between them. The analyzed studies call into question existing deficit approaches, highlighting inequalities, a lack of structures and the need for systemic intervention. The results should help precipitate new ways of thinking among teachers and a way of working with parents from different sociocultural and economic backgrounds that values and harnesses the fund of knowledge possessed by such families.

## 7. Considerations for Future Research

The new role assigned to parents in the period of home-based learning, with the contingent revision of the schools' and the teachers' function and ways of communicating, may have multiple repercussions for the future development of the family-school relationship. On one side, these changes offered parents the opportunity to understand better the demanding task expected of teachers, while allowing teachers a greater view of the intimate space of family relationships and a glimpse of their inherent dynamics and resources. On the other, it may have generated additional confusion about the parties' respective roles and functions within an already delicate equilibrium.

However, issues of inequality continue to be central in parent-teacher relations. At first glance, the research literature appears to address the same issues as it did prior to COVID (Addi-Raccah *et al.*, 2021). However, there has been a shift in interest to a digital environment, the expansion of the domain of parental responsibility and the redefinition of the role played by teachers.

Overall, the narrative that emerges from this recent research literature is that COVID-19 accelerated the emergence of a “new” domain of parent involvement related to new learning technologies and the need for policies that support the reconfiguration of the school-family relationship on a model of genuine educational alliances. The data underline that the relationship between parents and schools/teachers does not exist in a vacuum, but rather forms part of an eco-system. In this context, policymakers, school leaders and the wider community all play an essential role in promoting *responsibility sharing* and reciprocal support on the part of schools and families.

While COVID-19 has the potential to be a catalyst for reshaping family/parent-school/teacher relationships, there are further questions to consider. Will the current dynamics in education last in a way that brings sustainable change in parent-school relations? What are the implications of the current pattern of parental involvement for students’ well-being and academic success? What is the long-term effect of COVID-19 on the parent-school relationship in terms of social differences and inequality? Times of crisis reveal opportunities and risks, and it is essential that these are explored.

## 8. Limitations

This review presents a number of limitations. Our search only encompassed three databases and, specifically, peer reviewed studies published during 2020 and 2021 in English at a time when the phenomenon under observation is still ongoing. As such, the potential for publication bias should be kept in mind when considering the results of our analysis.

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