

# The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Child-Parent-Teacher Triad Functioning and Migrant Children's Distance Learning in Poland

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## Abstract

This paper is aimed to present the investigation of the functioning of the Child-Parent-Teacher triad partnership of migrant families during the COVID-19 schools' shut-down and implemented distance learning. Its purpose is also to assess the shift of roles in the Child-Teacher, Child-Parent, and Parent-Teacher dyads functioning by drawing on 47 semi-structured interviews with migrant children, their parents and teachers in Poland. Migrant children and their parents from private and state schools reported different dyad functioning due to the shifted control and unequal distribution of labor among three agents. This research first presents the model of the triad functioning before the pandemic and then illustrates the changes during distance learning. Findings indicate that migrant children experienced the strengthened empowering in contributing to their relationships with teachers and parents. The results point to the substantial difference in the distribution of labor and responsibilities between migrant children in private and state schools. The outcomes illustrate that migrant children in private school experienced little changes in the arrangement of the educational process during the lockdown and reported agreeable support from the school, which enables them to maintain the satisfying school-family partnership. Meanwhile, children and parents from the state schools claimed a considerable shift of the duties and responsibility distribution, the main share of which was put on children, who through exerting own agency sought to retain school-family cooperation.

## Keywords

distance learning, COVID-19, child-parent-teacher triad, migrant children

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## 1 Introduction

Experiencing migration during childhood affects the social, educational, and psychological aspects of a child's development (Aronowitz, 1984; Slany et al., 2016). Migrant children are known to be more prone to educational setbacks, which may be further exacerbated by concurrent crises (Stodolska, 2008). Distance learning, which took place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, became a new vulnerability factor for migrant children and their parents by accentuating migrants' economic status, insufficient cultural and societal knowledge and foreign language skills, as well as a deficit of social support from the non-migrant family members and friends (Popyk, 2021b; Bol, 2020; Di Pietro et al., 2020; Doyle, 2020; Gornik et al., 2020; Markowska-Manista & Zakrzewska-Olędzka, 2020).

To study migrant children's learning processes during distance education, we examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the functioning of the Child-Parent-Teacher (CPT) triad. The data we used derives from a child-centred qualitative study dedicated to *transnational transitions* (Pustułka & Trąbka, 2019) and the formation of the sense of belonging in migrant children in Poland. Transnational transitions (Pustułka & Trąbka, 2019) illustrate migrant children's transitions and adaptation/socialization process from one social, cultural, educational context to another, as well as the transition to become a migrant child. The research was conducted with migrant schoolchildren aged 8–13 ( $n=20$ ), their parents ( $n=19$ ), and their teachers ( $n=10$ ) in the first phase of the COVID-19 lockdown in the Spring and Summer of 2020.

We adopted the Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model proposed by Epstein (1986) to investigate the ways the pandemic affected children's learning and the functioning of both the whole Child-Parent-Teacher triad and its individual elements. Our study presents an integrated Child-Parent-Teacher triad model, which illustrates the roles of Child-Parent, Child-Teacher, and Parent-Teacher relationships in children's learning processes during COVID-19 distance education.

This paper presents the shift of engagement/support roles from the school/teacher to the parents, who were the least engaged during traditional learning due to their low cultural, linguistic, and social knowledge of the residence country (LaRocque et al., 2011; Schneider & Coleman, 1993). Moreover, the study highlights the substantial role of a migrant child's agency (Prout & James, 1997; Qvortrup et al., 2009) in CPT triad functioning and the educational process. This factor is often overlooked in studies, with prevailing attention given to the child-parent and child-teacher roles (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein, 1986; Hornby, 2011).

This paper contributes to the discourse on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown and the resulting distance learning process on migrant children, as well as the

modification of family and school roles in education. Additionally, it enriches the existing child-centred studies by highlighting the importance of the child's agency in the educational process and building relationships with parents and teachers.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 *Overlapping Spheres of Influence in Families and Schools*

Family and school are the two major institutions that contribute to a child's social and cognitive skills (Deslandes, 2001; Epstein, 1986; Handel, 1990; Hornby, 2011; Johnson et al., 2002). These two institutions define the role of each agent (child, parent, and teacher) and create grounds for their collaboration and partnership. Additionally, family and school determine the child-adult (child-parent and child-teacher) relationships that are central in childhood education and development (Bandura, 1971; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009; Gordon & Browne, 2015; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

To present school and family engagement and collaboration, Epstein (Epstein, 1986; Epstein et al., 2009; Sanders & Epstein, 2005) introduced the model of Overlapping Spheres of Influence. She adopted Yuri Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1978) and organizational theory to demonstrate the way school and family establish separate, shared, and sequential responsibilities (1986). The author claimed that shared responsibilities are the most efficient for both the school's and the family's functioning, as well as for the child's education. Besides, they foster communication and collaboration not only between the individuals but also institutions. The responsibilities of both institutions encompass engagement, support, and complementarity.

Common responsibilities and aims form a framework for parent-teacher partnership (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001) based on the *control* and *division of labor* (Epstein, 1986). This labor division anticipates that the school activates the resources to engage and assist parents with the children's education and interacts with children both inside and outside the school by organizing the learning process, creating a safe and friendly atmosphere, and contacting parents (Gordon & Browne, 2015). At the same time, parents should take responsibility for developing children's learning skills throughout the whole process of education (Hornsby, 2011; Sanders & Epstein, 2005).

Mutual relationships and partnerships of schools and families also create "a social climate for student learning and culture for students' success" (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001, p. 16). Nevertheless, the institutional partnership often fails due to bilateral disagreements. On the one hand, teachers often do not empower parents and children through considering their actual resources and skills (Deslandes, 2001), as it could demonstrate teachers' incompetency and status (Popyk, 2021b). What's more, families' cultural backgrounds and experiences are undervalued in educating children, because it would require

the revision and reevaluation of the existing teaching approaches (Herudzińska, 2018). This makes teachers ‘initially resistant to increasing family involvement,’ (Sanders & Epstein, 2005, p. 215) as it may undermine their competencies (ibid). Such attitude comes to define parents’ and children’s roles in the educational process (Deslandes, 2001).

On the other hand, parents themselves vary in their involvement with the school lives and learning processes of their children. This is particularly notable among low-income, ethnic minority, and migrant families (LaRocque et al., 2011; Lareau, 2011), who are often overwhelmed with establishing the economic situations of their families or lacking sufficient knowledge and skills to support their children’s education (Bargłowski, 2019; Janta & Harte, 2016; Reay, 2004; Ryan & Sales, 2013). This has been particularly visible with the overlapping crises of migration and the pandemic (Guadagno, 2020).

Nevertheless, Epstein (1986; Epstein et al., 2009) stated that in order to support education and development, educators should perceive students as children and create family-like schools, which provide better programs and opportunities for children through viewing each student as a child with special needs and skills. It also requires engaging each parent in the educational process and school life regardless of their backgrounds and competencies (Epstein et al., 2009). Meanwhile, parents should identify their responsibilities and shared interests and create a school-like home, where children are also perceived as students, with their educational needs and potential. Parents should engage in children’s knowledge building and achieving success processes (ibid). The author presents the school and the family as the two main institutions (apart from a third one, community) that contribute to children’s cognitive skills development, such as attention, memory, and logic. The role of the child is perceived as secondary, determined by the actions and attitude of the adults.

By drawing on the concept of children’s agency (Alderson, 2016; James & Prout, 2015), we claim, however, that children themselves play an equal role in education, initiating and regulating child-adult interactions and relationships. Moreover, children play an active role in establishing and maintaining parent-teacher interactions and relationships. For this reason, children’s education should be perceived as an overlapping of three integrated spheres: family (parents), school (teachers), and children, which construe the Child-Parent-Teacher triad.

As family and school are complex institutions (Deslandes, 2001; Epstein, 1986), the level of their contribution to the dyadic partnerships is influenced by four key elements: structure, status, engagement, and competencies. Figure 1 presents the interrelation between each element, which affect children’s learning. Family structure, namely the number and roles of family members, family relationships and type of communication is tightly connected with parents’ engagement in the children’s education. Kalmijn (2018) stated that immigrant children from families, where the father is not present or active in the family life, experience a negative effect on their well-being. Besides, siblings play important

role in children's well-being, socialization and learning (Baldassar & Brandhorst, 2021). The engagement also depends on parents skills and competencies, which are needed to support the learning process and maintain the relationships with children and teachers. Migrant parents, particularly labour migrants, are usually characterized as less engaged in the children's education than non-migrant parents. Among the main reasons are: insufficient familiarity with the foreign country's education system and school structure, low foreign language skills and foreign culture and society knowledge (Slany et al., 2016; Janta & Harte, 2016). Families' socio-economic status (SES) affects not only the families' income level, but also the choice of school, or amount of time spent with children. Lareau (2011) mentioned, that parents from the middle class use to spend more time with their children, particularly on reading and other educational activities. This, consequently, has a positive impact on children's learning outcomes and learning success at school.

### *2.1.1 School's status (private or state), and position in the national school ranking*

Teachers' competencies and engagement in the process of building relationships with children and parents are mutually defendant. The sufficient pedagogical, cultural and social skills and competence result in teachers' greater engagement in supporting children's education and building relationships with parents (Herudzińska, 2018). Teachers' eagerness to contribute to the dyadic contact also motivates raise competencies (Suryani, 2013).

Children's personal and demographic characteristics, agency, as well as their previous school and migration experience, affect children's participation in the dyadic relationships with parents and teachers. They also directly impact the learning process. Previous research (Qian et al., 2018) also illustrates that teachers and parents are likely to have different approaches and expectations towards children of different ages and gender. Qin (2006) mentioned that migrant girls usually have better grades and catch up faster at school than boys. Moreover, girls are more likely to be in teachers' favor than boys. Though, the expectations of parents and teachers are also higher for girls than for boys (Ravecca, 2010).

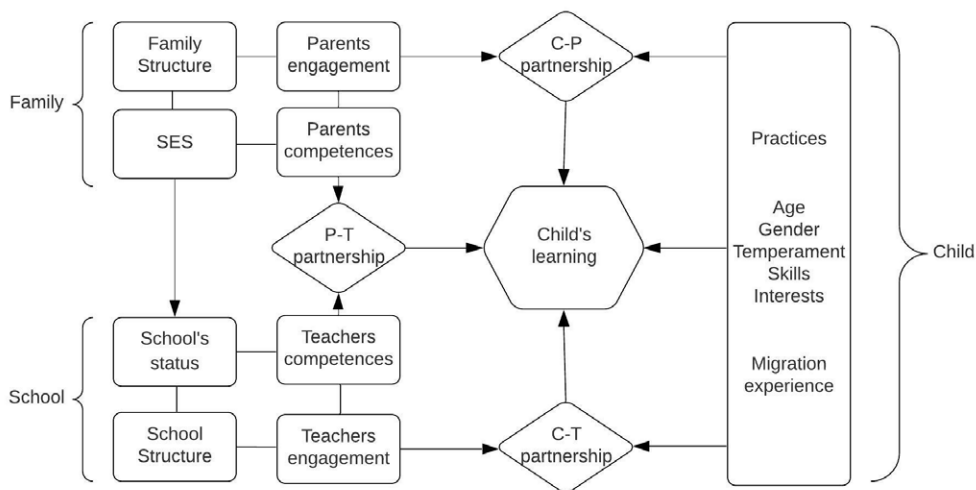


Figure 1: Child-Parent-Teacher triad pre-pandemic functioning and its impact on children's learning. Source: Own Elaboration

## 2.2 *Children's, Parents', and Teachers' Partnerships in the Context of Migration*

In the case of migrant children, the learning process is determined not only by the two primary agents, parents and teachers, but also by various accompanying factors, including migration experience, foreign culture, and linguistic knowledge (Cebotari, 2018; Darmody et al., 2016; Slany et al., 2016). Additionally, migrant children's education also largely depends on their personal characteristics (e.g. age, gender, temperament) and the chance and space for expressing their agency (Popyk, 2021a; Strzemecka, 2015). Migrant children also lack experience with cooperative learning (Johnson et al., 2002) due to scant peer contacts and the effect of transnational transitions on friendships (Pustułka & Trąbka, 2019) as children adjust to changes in place of residence, living context, and social and educational contexts. Transnational transitions require adaptation, learning cultural and societal norms and practices, learning a new language, and making up the curricula differences. The psychological, social, and educational consequences of the migration experience impact child-parent and child-teacher relations in a new context. Consequently, migrant children are in greater need of parents and teachers' engagement in their education.

Multiple studies (Amadasi, 2014; Iglicka, 2017; Popyk, 2021b; Slany et al., 2016; Strzemecka, 2015) indicate that school is particularly important for the education and development of migrant children, because school is the first institution children need to face

during transnational transitions (Pustulka & Trąbka, 2019). It is the “first complex and unknown labyrinth” (Nowicka, 2014) children need to come through.

For migrant children, a school can become either a place of inclusion and facilitated transitions or a place of marginalization. Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (2001), by studying migrant children in the USA, pointed out that contemporary schools struggle to support migrant children’s education because of overwhelmed teachers, overcrowded and hyper-segregated classes, limited and outdated resources, and other “decaying infrastructures” (p. 2), as well as a lack of “pre-service, in-service, and advanced education” for developing teachers competencies (Sander & Epstein, 2005, p. 216). Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (2001) indicated that migrant children from the labor migrant families come to a new country full of positive attitude and enthusiasm, which are valuable resources that should be cultivated, but they are exposed to “negative social mirroring” (p. 2), and can be “locked out” of “opportunities for a better tomorrow” (p. 3). Furthermore, vivid discrimination (personal, cultural, religious, etc.) at school negatively affects children’s well-being and prolongs the adjustment process (Vandell, 2000), which consequently impedes children’s education. The latter has been observed in Poland, in terms of schools being ill-prepared and prone to discriminatory practices (Grzymała-Moszczyńska et al., 2015; Kościółek, 2020). Although school education in Poland is free and obligatory, the process and responsibility of including migrant children, who require additional cultural, linguistic and educational support, is put on individual schools and teachers. Those, often lack the necessary experiences, skills, knowledge and resources to provide migrant children and their families with efficient support and education (Herudzińska, 2018).

Another challenge brought on by the growing number of foreign children in Polish schools, noted by the educators and pedagogues, was insufficient methodological and technical support for intercultural education and pedagogy (Iglicka, 2017; Szelewa, 2010; Torowska, 2016). Despite increased financial support from the Polish Government for educating return and foreign-born children, in 2020 the principals of 24 Polish schools disregarded various aspects of the legal procedure concerning migrant children (NIK, 2020). This included the impeded procedure of registering migrant children at the schools, e. g., requiring additional documents, residence registration; excluding children from the state exams, which could possibly lower the overall schools’ position in the national schools’ ranking. Besides, schools did not ensure educational support (such as extra Polish language and other subjects lessons), due to the insufficient teaching staff, overloaded teachers, not enough teachers of Polish as a foreign language (Herudzińska, 2018).

Language issues, together with cultural differences, have been the most common issues brought up in the Polish discourse on educating migrant children (Błeszyńska, 2010; Grzymała-Moszczyńska & Trąbka, 2014; Szelewa, 2010; Torowska, 2016). The low level of Polish language skills in migrant children qualifies them as “disadvantaged” in na-

tional schools because language incompetence causes hardships for teachers as they try to educate and communicate with foreign pupils (Iglicka, 2017; Nowicka, 2014). Besides, language is seen as an obstacle in solving cultural, educational, or pedagogical problems with children (Błęszyńska, 2010). That's why, migrant children in Polish schools are often perceived as those, who tend to cause "specific problems" (Nowicka & Połec, 2005, p. 31), as they require the teacher, school and the educational system to adjust the curricula and approaches of teaching. Moreover, language differences are one of the most common obstacles in maintaining contact with migrant children's parents. For this reason, these parents feel excluded from school life and prefer to remain "invisible" in order to avoid being judged and pointed out for their insufficient foreign language skills (Deslandes et al., 2012; García-Sánchez & Nazimova, 2017; Wærdahl, 2016). The exclusion of parents is exacerbated by their lack of familiarity with the school and its educational procedures (Schneider & Coleman, 1993) and insufficient parental involvement by schools (Sanders & Epstein, 2005), which tend to perceive parents as uninterested in children's education (Schneider & Coleman, 1993).

It is worth noting, however, that along with the growth of multicultural classes in Poland, teachers started to recognize the positive impacts of the presence of migrant children in their schools. The outcomes of recent research (Bulandra et al., 2019) conducted at some Polish schools demonstrated that multiculturalism can be perceived as an asset for Polish teachers and pupils. "Mutual merging" (p. 18) of cultures supports native children's openness to new cultural knowledge and traditions. Furthermore, migrant children often are described by teachers as hard-working and enthusiastic. This inspires native children to be more motivated to perform better at school. Similarly, through exposure to cultural conflicts, both native and migrant children learn to solve problems and negotiate effectively (Bulandra et al., 2019). Bulandra et al. (2019) also illustrated a shift from ethnocentric Polish schools towards more culturally diverse and tolerant teachers. This reflects slight changes in perspectives on immigration in Polish society (Okólski & Wach, 2020). Still, the aforementioned research focuses on the Polish schools' and communities' perspectives rather than on migrant children, their migration experiences, and their socialization processes.



### **3 Distance Learning in Poland and Child-Parent-Teacher Engagement**

In response to the spread of COVID-19, most countries worldwide immobilized migration (Merla et al., 2020). This was followed by school closures and the transition to distance learning. In Poland, distance learning lasted from March 15, 2020, until June 2021, with the exception of one month of face-to-face education in September 2020. For detailed descriptions of the education during the pandemic in Poland, see our previous works (Popyk, 2021b), which also include the migration profile of migrant families in Poland.

The first lockdown in the spring and summer of 2020 left schools and families with children in bewilderment and disorganization (Markowska-Manista & Zakrzewska-Oleđzka, 2020; Parczewska, 2020). Distance education and differences in child-parent and child-teacher relationships resulted in institutional (family and school) diffusion and the merging of spaces, as home became a place of activity saturation (Popyk, 2021a).

Experiencing changes in social and learning practices (Popyk, 2021b; Borkowski et al., 2021; Gornik et al., 2020), migrant children faced multiple burdens in both their learning and their social lives. They were unable to rely on either teachers' or parents' support, and they no longer had access to the tutors and assistants who taught them in person before the pandemic. As a result, distance learning led to an increase in the learning gap and the cumulation of educational disadvantages for migrant children (Bol, 2020; Di Pietro et al., 2020; Engzell et al., 2021).

### **4 Methods**

This paper is based on a qualitative study, which applies the child-centred mosaic approach (Clark, 2017) to the transnational transitions (Pustułka & Trąbka, 2019) of migrant children in Poland. A detailed description of the study's methodological and ethical issues can be found in our earlier works (Popyk, 2021a, 2021b). The study includes 49 semi-structured interviews with migrant children aged 7–13, ( $n=20$ ), their parents ( $n=19$ ) (there were two siblings), and their teachers ( $n=10$ ). The child participants' median age was 12. The residence time in Poland varied from 1 to 6 years, with an average of 3 years. There was an equal number of girl and boy participants. Child participants also attended one private (7) or different public schools (13); some of these schools were located in the city district of residence and some were dispersed over the city. The participants diverged according to their nationality: five of the child participants were Ukrainian, thirteen were Turkish, one was Romanian, and one was Lithuanian. The divergence in the participant groups was intended to enable the comparison of migration experiences between families

of various ethnicities. The analysis for this paper is based on 47 interviews, as the first one with a child and her parents took place before the pandemic started.

In the second group, the participants were parents. All of them stated that their families had regular financial income. This was mostly from the employment of fathers, as most of the mothers ( $n=14$ ) were housewives. One-third of the participants, however, stated they did not have valid residence permits and were in a process of acquiring visas or residence cards. This also made the families more vulnerable and their situations more precarious, as in Poland the lack of a residence permit and working permit prevent official employment, which results in having no state health insurance. Consequently, migrant families (from non-European Union countries) have to buy private health insurance or live without insurance, which was quite unsafe as the pandemic spread.

The third group of participants, teachers, were from private primary school. They differed in age (varying from 26 to 65 years old), gender (males = 3, females = 7), experience working with migrant children (mean = 5 years), subjects taught (Maths, English as a foreign language, Art, Science), and nationality (Polish = 6, Albanian = 2, Turkish = 2).

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee. All interviews were held online, following the required methodological and ethical considerations for conducting online interviews (Eynon et al., 2009; Weller, 2017) with vulnerable groups, such as children and migrants (Due et al., 2014; Morrow, 2012; Morrow & Richards, 1996). The interviews were held in five languages, namely Polish, English, Ukrainian, Russian, and Turkish (the last with the presence of a qualified interpreter), to ensure the participants' free and convenient conversation and avoid ambiguity during the study (Seidman, 2006). The interviews with children lasted on average 45 minutes, while the interviews with parents and teachers were about 60 minutes long.

The main themes addressed in the interviews were migration decisions and experiences of children and parents, family and school life in the home and in the countries of residence, reflections on distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, family life across borders during the pandemic, and future plans.

To study the child-parent-teacher triad during distance learning, the following subjects were analysed: learning under an immobility regime; school-family relations; children's, parents' and teachers' engagement in the online educational process; and social life and support during the lockdown.

The collected data from the qualitative study has gone through meticulous transcription of recordings (voice-to-text) (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and was uploaded to the coding and analysis software MaxQDA. I created the code tree and provided coding for all interview scripts. I applied both selective and complete coding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Additionally, the traditional paper and pen method was used to analyse the major

themes of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I have also used the interview notes, which were completed after each interview. These three sources of data (coded fragments, theme scripts, and interviewers' notes) were used to develop a baseline for analysing the data (Seidman, 2006).

This paper presents the analysis of all the themes, which have not been discussed in the previous papers based on this study. Besides, it is the only paper, which presents the responses of all three groups of the respondents (children, parents and teachers).

## 5 Results

The analysis of migrant children's education during the school closure illustrates the disruption of the family and school institutions' functioning (see also Di Pietro et al., 2020; Dietrich et al., 2020; Gornik et al., 2020) and the modification of the Parent-Teacher, Child-Teacher, and Child-Parent partnerships (see Figure 1). Furthermore, in times of distance education, migrant children's education relied mostly on their skills, knowledge, engagement, and individual efforts. Hence, the learning process was mostly based on imbalanced dyadic relationships with limited shared responsibilities and labour between family and school. The study demonstrates that the inter-institutional interactions between parents and teachers were also limited. As a result, distance learning reinforced the boundaries, which separated family and school cooperation.

The study provides evidence of the substantial role of migrant children's agency and engagement in establishing and maintaining relationships with parents and teachers. Additionally, the study shows the direct impact of children's agency, backed by socio-demographic variables such as age or gender, skills, interests and practices, previous migration experience, in contributing to the Child-Parent, Child-Teacher and Parent-Teacher relationships.

Each of the dyads' functioning during the first pandemic lockdown and school closure is discussed below.

## 6 Parent-Teacher Relationships in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Perplexed but Engaged

Parent-Teacher partnership during the beginning of the pandemic spotlighted issues related to the family's and the school's functioning, such as the family's socioeconomic status and the status of the school, which in the pre-pandemic period were less noticeable. Lower socioeconomic status (SES) families (LaRocque, 2002; Lareau, 2011; Schneider & Coleman, 1993), whose children attended state schools, experienced double pressure: to support their children's education more frequently and efficiently than in pre-pandemic times, as most of the educational work was passed on to parents and children (see also Bol, 2020; Gornik et al., 2020), and to provide their families with substantial financial support, as migrant families were particularly vulnerable due to their precarious employment and residence status (Guadagno, 2020). On the contrary, migrant families with a higher economic status could benefit from superior school engagement and preparation in a time of regime shift and crisis, as their children attended private schools, which were more organized and involved than public schools in Poland.

Furthermore, private school teachers and families each positively assessed parents' and teachers' efforts and engagement in establishing the new learning mode. They pointed to positive attitudes and bilateral empathy. For example, Ella, a private school early-childhood teacher (grades 1–3) noted that parents provided considerable technical support by ensuring children access to the learning platform and necessary technological devices (e. g. printer, scanner). However, she also noted that parents vary in their engagement and there are those, who are less eager to make efforts and reach out, instead of expecting teachers to ensure the whole learning process.

In general, parents have a positive attitude and try to be very responsive. They try to overcome all these technological difficulties at their homes, e. g. providing a printer, a computer, etc. They also help children to learn where to click or how to prepare learning materials. Of course, some parents will complain about having no printer. In that way, we come across and type everything in Microsoft Word documents, so parents and children can edit it without printing. This costs us [teachers] our own private time. But later, turns out that they [parents] actually printed everything. So this is such a strange confusion. But in general, the parents are disciplined, they keep an eye on these lessons, they turn on the link for the kids and reach out to be able to help, if necessary. (Ella, a private school teacher)

Another private school teacher, Anna, stressed the differences between state and private schools' functioning in Poland at the beginning of the pandemic spread and distance learning implementation. She noted that despite a tough beginning, private schools tried to reinforce the teacher's engagement and tried to carry on education with minimal changes in the curriculum. Anna's statement also discloses that parents have higher expectations towards the private school's education and organization of the learning process.

It seems to me that the learning process in our school goes very well. When I read some forums or comments on Facebook, it appears that teachers in state schools do not do anything, and children are overburdened. They [people] say it is not proper education, because teachers just send the materials for individual learning. And children have to complete the tasks. Our school is private, so there are more expectations for children and teachers. So we [teachers] provide learning online. We meet with the webcam and do the activities from the curriculum. (Anna, a private school teacher)

Similar experiences were reported by parents whose children attended state schools. They pointed to the impeded partnership between schools and teachers, who were overwhelmed with technical, administrative, psychological, and personal challenges as they navigated distance learning. This included the schools' technical readiness (e. g., sufficient number of computers, stable Internet), adjusting lessons plan, teachers digital skills of using a computer for various teaching programmes and applications, ensuring place and space for teaching, which often collided with the personal and family obligations of teachers. Additionally, public school teachers in Poland established unidirectional contact with parents, sending materials for individual learning and extensive homework; parents responded only to request a reduction in the number of assignments. It took state schools some time to develop the new educational mode, leaving children and their parents with a lack of clear instruction and support for four months (see also Popyk, 2021b). Additionally, two months of summer holidays were perceived to exacerbate the language gap between children in state and private schools. This became a prominent factor in widening the educational gap between non-migrant and migrant children, as the latter endured deficient parental educational assistance and support (Darmody et al., 2014; Gornik et al., 2020; LaRocque, 2002; Schneider & Coleman, 1993).

Nina, a mother of a 12-year-old boy from Turkey who had just switched from a private English language school to a state school run solely in Polish, pointed to the difficulties her son and family faced during distance learning. Her interaction with teachers was limited to receiving assignments, without any guidance:

First of all, I think that schools were absolutely not ready for this mode of education. Our school also could not switch to online mode. Many subjects, particularly those hard ones, just were explained and taught well. As children had just one lesson on the subject per week, it was not enough for them... For us, as this is a new school, a new language, pandemic and distance learning were a double challenge. First, the school tried to organize the learning process in a way of sending lots of homework and checking whether children completed and learned the material. And that homework was really extensive. But children do not understand that it was homework or what it was for. They complained a lot. We just could not handle it, so we were forced to ask teachers for help and reduce the homework size. (Nina, mother of 12-year-old boy from Turkey)

Emine, a mother of an 11-year-old girl from Turkey, mentioned the hardships she and her children met during distance education, pointing to language issues that exacerbated problems with individual material sent by the teachers. She also noted that teachers lacked the initiative to support children, including those who required more assistance because their parents did not possess the language skills to engage in the learning process.

Emine and her children were dealing with the school material by translating back and forth into/from their native language. This process is overwhelming for children and parents, leaving minimal time for anything other than school activities.

At first, we ask the teachers to send us the materials earlier to be able to translate everything, and only then I explain it [in the native language] and we complete the tasks somehow. Teachers usually treat us well and support us. But they do it only when we ask them to send the tasks prior to the lessons. If we do not contact and ask them, they do not express any initiative. (Emine, a mother of an 11-year-old girl from Turkey)

Therefore, in Poland, the first pandemic lockdown and distance education resulted in the disruption of Parent-Teacher partnership functioning, which is considered to be fundamental for a successful learning process (Gordon & Browne, 2015; Deslandes, 2001; Epstein, 1986; Suryani, 2013). What's more, Parent-Teacher relationships also affected Child-Parent dyadic functioning, which is presented below.

### ***6.1 Child-Teacher Relationships in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Role Shift***

Similar to parents, child participants also noted impeded contact and partnership with teachers and schools during distance learning. For migrant children, distance education was particularly challenging, as they were cut off from direct contact with the most important institution and people in their country of residence (Nowicka, 2014; Ryan & Sales, 2013; Slany et al., 2016). The school closure resulted in the role shift from teachers, who had previously served as educators and guides to the norms, values, and educational system in Poland and functioned as a first-hand Polish language learning bridge, to children, who were left with limited educational support from teachers and parents. Migrant children became the main initiators to establish cooperation with teachers, in order to fulfil their educational duties. Izabella, a 12-year-old girl from Ukraine stated:

It was easier for me, as I could translate everything from Polish and then learn, but every time I had to ask teachers to send some material earlier or wait until I completed it. I try to do all the tasks because if I get five minutes for not completing the assignment, I will have a bad mark for the semester. (Izabella, a 12-year-old girl from Ukraine)

Children also complained about homework being the most common tool for child-teacher interaction, which the migrant children in state schools believed was based only on the educational requirement to realize the curriculum and produce grades at the end of the school year. Hence, teachers' key aim was to send the materials for children to complete and return. Chasing for grades also illustrates the education system and requirements for schools in Poland. Distance learning at some point revealed that the major focus in education is placed not on the children's achievements and knowledge, but on fulfilling the state's requirements at the cost of children's actual knowledge and skills.

I do get a lot of homework sent by teachers. They're saying we need to complete the tasks, as we need to get grades. (Ellen, a 13-year-old girl from Turkey)

In contrast, teachers from private schools positively assessed children's engagement. At first, it was hard due not only to the organizational and institutional quandaries but also to the children's attitudes towards the extra learning activities. Anna, a private school teacher, pointed to the children's excitement about having online lessons and using technological gadgets, which they had limited access to previously.

The first few weeks were very tough. Because children, especially from the early grades, were so excited, causing noise and chaos. It was not comfortable, because we [teachers] were not even heard. But now it's much better. Children learned the rules and procedures; they know we treat online lessons as seriously as regular ones. So they try to be active and disciplined. (Anna, a private school teacher)

This was supported by the children's responses. They viewed virtual learning as a unique chance to spend time online, chatting with classmates and teachers. However, it appeared that this mode of education was not as fruitful and enjoyable as the traditional one. Children lost the ability to directly connect to their classes, due to the absence of physical contact, eye contact, and physical intervention from teachers. This is reflected in what Ezra, a 12-year-old girl from Turkey, and Bohdan, a 12-year-old boy from Ukraine, had to say about distance learning:

First, I thought that having online classes would be good, but I didn't like those classes so much and I don't learn things like this. I mean online lessons. I didn't learn many things. Teachers were mostly using presentations, but sometimes they were explained by themselves. It was too hard to understand in this way. (Ezra, a 12-year-old girl from Turkey)

It [online learning] is harder because when a teacher says something, I cannot understand it. The teacher doesn't have a whiteboard or any, other like the way to explain or tell us how to do the tasks. That's why we have to do everything on ourselves. (Bohdan, a 12-year-old boy from Ukraine)

To conclude, during the pandemic, migrant children experienced simplified learning, as they were able to translate the material into their native languages and learn it in that way. Though, this type of education placed more responsibility on children, as they had to work independently, self-manage, and negotiate their interactions and relationships with teachers. Consequently, the role of a teacher as a guide and instructor was shifted to children. This required children to exercise their agency (Alderson, 2016; Prout & James, 1997), and changed hierarchical child-teacher relations to more equal ones in terms of engagement and responsibility.

## 6.2 *Child-Parent Relationships in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Seeking Balance*

The outcomes of the study show that most parent respondents noted that, despite academic challenges, the first lockdown was an important time for developing relationships with their children, as they spent more time together and could assist them by preparing lunches or checking online learning platforms. Parents enjoyed being more engaged in their children's learning than they were when children were attending school in person. This was particularly true for migrant parents, who were likely to be stressed by sending their children to a school in a new country, with a new environment and new rules. Moreover, the migration experience and the feeling of being separated from their home, family, and relatives resulted in a desire to "reunite" with their immediate loved ones and stay together in that difficult post-migration period. Additionally, while parents were saddened by their inability to take care of distant family members, they were also "rewarded" with the chance to care for their children, who spent much of their time at school prior to the pandemic. Hence, the lockdown was viewed as a fairly agreeable requirement. Nurey, a mother of two schoolchildren from Turkey, and Olga, a mother of an 11-year old girl from Lithuania, stated the following:

The good sides are that I see my children all the time at home. I can ask what are you doing, I can know more about what they are learning. (Nurey, a mother of two schoolchildren from Turkey)

I see maybe only positive things. Children stay with us at home; we are not stressed. In my opinion, everything is even better than at school. (Olga, a mother of an 11-year-old girl from Lithuania)

During distance learning, parents were forced to become more engaged in their children's learning, as they had to ensure technical access and support them through online lessons. Furthermore, because children were overwhelmed with individual learning and homework, parents had to help them complete assignments. Inga, a mother of two schoolchildren from Turkey, described her experience as follows:

Children treat distance learning as holidays, I think. Only when there are actual lessons, they learn. Children also are at home all the time, where other activities take place, for example, housework: cleaning, cooking, dishwashing, and so on. Children get lost between learning and home time. This also affects their concentration and understanding ... I, for example, control everything by myself by checking Microsoft Teams [learning platform]. I log in and check grades, schedules, or homework and tell my children what they have to do. Because children cannot understand it by themselves. And I much value the time when children were going to school physically. (Inga, a mother of two schoolchildren from Turkey)

Most parents noted the lack of social contact and interpersonal skills development as the negative side of distance education. The school not only plays a role as an educational institution but also as a place for socialization (Gordon & Browne, 2015; Nowicka, 2014). It is designed to ensure learning with other children; this is particularly important for migrant children, for whom the school is often the only place to socialize (Strzemecka,



2015). Additionally, during distance learning, children were deprived of basic physical activities and sports. Migrant parents were concerned and anxious about how to provide their children with social development and adequate exercise and amusement during the lockdown.

First of all, social life is an important aspect for children. When they stay at home, they get used to being alone. This also affects the whole family, who feel lost and helpless. Parents do not know how to treat children, how to support and influence them. So I think it would be a great loss if distance learning will last long. (Serife, a mother of two schoolchildren from Turkey)

Esat, a father of two schoolboys from Turkey, shared his concerns about family troubles caused by the pandemic, pointing to school as not only a place for learning but also socializing, entertaining, day-to-day experiences:

For me, school is not only about having lessons and answering questions. It also ensures social life. So children learn not only from books, textbooks but also by observing teachers, building relationships with peers ... they really learn life at school. When children learn from their homes, they miss it. And that's the biggest disadvantage for me. Not only children are disadvantaged but also the whole family. Children close themselves off and seek entertainment at home, which they find in online games. In this way, children get used to living online lives. They learn nature from the book, without experiencing it. Moreover, they have access to energy and begin to make trouble for parents. So families suffer from these reasons because children do not have a place to blow off the steam. (Esat, a father of two schoolboys from Turkey)

Esat's son, Melih, also shared his anxiety about not being able to spend time with his father as he did before the quarantine. The boy appreciated his father's efforts to amuse him and his brother when they had to stay at home. He mentioned:

Before the quarantine, my father often took us to swimming pools or various amusement parks and playgrounds. And we were very happy. It was very cool. So we look forward to this time back. Overall, I'm happy, but we have to stay at home during quarantine, so I'm not too happy. But my father does everything he can to keep us entertained. (Melih, a 10-year-old boy from Turkey)

Quarantine also greatly affected families, in which fathers were temporarily living out of Poland. Mothers were responsible for their usual housework and family duties, as well as for supporting children's learning, entertainment and social life. One of the mothers of three children noted, that quarantine cut the only possibility to provide her children's entertainment while going shopping or to the park together. She felt overburdened, waiting for a new school year to start with the traditional learning mode.

I'm alone with my three kids, so this is difficult to go out. I have a car, thanks to God, so sometimes we go to the park or shopping center or a friend. And it was really good for us to relax. Now it's really difficult times for us to stay at home. And as my husband is not here, it's even more difficult. (Eva, mother of three children from Turkey)

In conclusion, migrant child-parent relationships were rather positively assessed by both children and parents. Both parties noted the enhancement of their ties at the beginning of

the quarantine. However, with time, parents became overwhelmed with children's challenges in learning, disrupted social lives, and excess energy, causing feelings of anxiety and helplessness. Parents could not ensure proper social contacts and activities for their children while simultaneously being overloaded with housework. Hence, the research indicated that parents tried to seek a balance between learning, social life, and entertainment to establish partnerships with their children (Epstein, 1986; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001), instead of just being guardians.

## 7 Discussions and Conclusions

This paper demonstrates that the COVID-19 pandemic affected migrant children's learning not only by forcing a change from traditional methods to online/distance learning but also by affecting Child-Teacher and Parent-Teacher relationships, as well as parents' and teachers' engagement and support.

The outcome of this study supports the previous research (Kościółek, 2020; Strzemecka, 2015; Wærdahl, 2016), which pointed out that migrant children's learning processes are complex, multisided, and largely dependent on multiple factors, the majority of which relate to the interaction between the school and the family (teachers and parents) and the functioning of the Child-Teacher, Parent-Teacher and Child-Parent dyads (Deslandes, 2001; Epstein, 1986; Suryani, 2013). This paper presents the shift in dyadic functioning and child-parent-teacher partnerships due to changes in the control and division of labor (Epstein, 1986).

Migrant parents whose children attended state schools reported that they experienced empowerment (Deslandes, 2001) from teachers, who had not taken their competencies and needs into account prior to the pandemic. Parents were enforced to arrange *school-like homes* (Epstein, 1986) and were empowered to take control (ibid.) of their children's learning processes and provide them with additional activities and entertainment as a school previously would have done (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). The school's level of control was reduced to delivering tasks and evaluating the processed school material.

Additionally, in cases of parental inability to provide efficient learning support, migrant children had to reinforce their own agency (Prout & James, 1997) and take over both parents' and teachers' responsibilities in seeking support to complete assignments and establishing independent learning during distance education.

At the same time, migrant parents and children from private schools claimed they received adequate support from the school and from teachers during the pandemic. Both teachers and parents reported a rational division of labor and shared responsibilities (Epstein, 1986), which encouraged engagement and strengthened the partnership.

Consequently, all three groups of dyads (Child-Parent, Child-Teacher, and Parent-Teacher) underwent change and development, which either strengthened the partnership (as with the Child-Parent, Child-Teacher, Parent-Teacher dyads in private schools) or aggravated the relations (as in the Child-Teacher and Parent-Teacher dyads in state schools). At the beginning of distance learning, children in state schools in Poland could not enjoy the amicable *social climate* (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001) and substantial school-family partnerships that ensure an auspicious learning process (Hornsby, 2011; Gordon & Browne, 2015; Sanders & Epstein, 2005; Suryani, 2013). This is likely to increase the learning gap and educational inequalities, not only between native and migrant children but also between different social groups of migrants (Gornik et al., 2020; Janta & Harte, 2016) in Poland.

Besides, as children stayed at home having few lessons per week and were overloaded with the assignments, parents took the responsibility for the learning process and endeavoured to keep children busy and amused. This caused the shift in the Child-Parent and Child-Teacher relationships. Overburdened parents underlined the value of education which takes place at school, where children are under the control of teachers and have a space for practising other activities and maintaining social contacts.

During distance learning, as noted by children and parent participants developed the family-like school model, where children were also treated as students. Parents acted as teachers, experiencing the weight of teaching and organizational duties. Besides, children themselves were given a space to become more active and responsible for their education process.

The study also reveals that teachers and schools, particularly the state ones, used to follow the traditional mode of educating children. Hence, when distance learning was introduced, most were neither personally, nor professionally prepared. This also points to the low preparation of public schools for the changing nature of the classes due to the growing number of migrant children in Polish schools. The paper indicates that the changes in the classroom ethnic composition and modifying the nature of educational needs require substantial reconsideration of the education system, curricular and school's approach. Which, in future, will make Polish schools more prone to upcoming changes.

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