



Contemporary means of communication in educational institutions

KEYWORDS

education, communication, electronic mail, websites, e-register

ABSTRACT

The subject of the paper deals with the issues of communication in educational institutions. Effective exchange of information plays a key role in achieving the desired results in every organization. This depends largely on the tools, language and the way the content is delivered. In the modern world communication is increasingly carried out by means of digital communication. Examples include e-registers, organizational sheets, electronic mail and websites, which have become the main tools for communicating information in educational institutions.

Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 207-215
ISSN 2300-0422. DOI 10.14746/kse.2019.15.13
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3783-2217>

Introduction

Every day we witness significant transformations in all areas of life. They affect the entire socio-cultural order. One of the elements of this order is education, which reflects it, co-creates it, remains under its influence and is subject to the process of shaping a new rationality – a postmodern breakthrough [Rusek, Górniok-Naglik, Oleksy 2008: 9]. A technological revolution is also taking place in educational institutions, and concerns both the educational and organizational spheres. These transformations largely concern the areas related to ICT.

Functioning in a modern school requires mastering the ability not only to search for information, but also to select, organize and critically evaluate the usefulness of the acquired content. Support has been provided by modern computer, network and telecommunication technologies, currently used when working with information and communication. In order to meet the current requirements of

civilization, all participants of the school organization should be competent in the effective use of these technologies. They are a necessary support in practically all processes taking place at school. Skilful use of ICT tools increases work efficiency, the quality of education and allows for more effective communication [Żebrok, Smyrnova-Trybulska 2015: 106].

The aim of the article is to indicate the changes that have taken place in educational institutions in recent years. These transformations are associated primarily with the emergence of new ICT solutions in these institutions, which in turn is associated with different ways of communication and the use of innovative techniques and tools in everyday work. A few concise paragraphs present the results of previous research on the areas related to the use of modern communication tools in schools. These are the observations of both the author and other researchers. Due to the limitations, this paper only signals the problem. The author touches upon the discussed issues and the results of the research are presented briefly. In addition, the article focuses only on the area of school organization and management, leaving the issue of the use of ICT in the teaching process for a separate analysis.

Communication in school organization

Issues related to communication are an important and topical subject, because the processes of information exchange have become an important element of the activity of every institution, including education. An efficient communication system is not only an inseparable part of the organization, but also a condition for a proper division of decision-making activities and is directly related to the basic functions of management: planning, organization, motivation, control.

In recent years, the development of ICT has contributed to many changes in the communication processes in organizations, including the popularization of electronic communications. It has become an essential element of the activity (equipment) of every educational institution, both in its didactic and administrative areas.

Each organisation is somehow connected to an environment that is classified according to the degree of variability and homogeneity, among other things. Recently, this space has been characterized by a high degree of uncertainty, therefore it is often referred to as a *turbulent environment* due to the dynamics of change [Webber 1990: 393]. It includes dimensions and forces, which have not been defined in a clear manner, among which the organization operates and which may

influence it. Educational institutions are a particular type of organisation. They operate as an open system, i.e. they exchange certain resources, including information, with the environment. Schools are situated in an environment that has an economic, technical, socio-cultural, political and legal dimension. A characteristic feature of the current environment is its variability, and the phenomena occurring in it are unpredictable. This gives rise to both opportunities and threats, and makes specific demands on the organisation. If one considers the *turbulent* feature of the environment, it concerns mainly the technological element. First of all, it concerns the processes that take place in the rapidly changing IT industry. Rapid changes are also taking place in learning technology. There is talk of an IT revolution that is taking place in the school environment, but its effects are also felt inside the school.

In the process of information exchange between people, A. Augustynek distinguishes several types of communication: interpersonal, intrapersonal, social, mediated [Haber 2011: 66]. The latter, i.e. CMC (computer mediated communication), which is mainly the subject of this paper, means communication through computers. This type of communication is also referred to as face-to (via the monitor) – face or face-to-monitor communication.

In the analysis of definitions one has to mention issues related to vertical and horizontal communication. This phenomenon is particularly visible in schools. It concerns the flow of information from the director to employees and back and communication between employees. The latter is referred to as a *grapevine* or an informal communication network in an organisation. The communication processes also take place between pupils, teachers and pupils, teachers and parents, etc.

In order for a school to achieve its objectives, it must be able to communicate effectively with all those involved in the school organisation. There is no doubt that the latest means of information exchange have significantly modified traditional ways of communication. The manner in which information is exchanged and communication tools themselves are changing radically. The Internet has become such a tool, providing virtually unlimited data transfer on a global scale. An important phenomenon in modern schools is the increasingly common resignation from traditional forms of communication in favour of digital communication (e-mail, e-register, e-intelligence). Websites, which have practically become an indispensable element of the schools' functioning, are also a popular form of content transfer.

It should be added that in order for communication to be precise it is necessary to communicate effectively, i.e. to send a message in such a way that the message received is as close as possible to the intended message [Griffin 1996: 554]. This is particularly important in relations with school stakeholders. An example

of ineffective communication can be communication by e-mail or text messages. A message is sent into the digital space without a guarantee of its reception. It is also worth considering the notions of *communication* and *communicating*, listed among the basic types of interpersonal communication. *Communication* is understood as sending a message into the information space with the intention of being received, while *communicating* is characterized by the existence of feedback, with a temporary reversal of roles [Haber 2011: 66].

Communication tools in contemporary schools

Electronic mail. In recent years, electronic mail has become one of the main tools for communicating information. It is an instrument that enables communication with the environment and provides easy access to information. The speed of information transfer, widespread availability, the ability to transfer multimedia files, the capacity of the channel and virtually no costs – these are elements that have significantly determined the universality of e-mails. The main advantages also include the lack of space and time limitations, communication does not hinder the location of the sender and recipient. Usually, this type of communication is asynchronous, which means that it does not require the coexistence of those communicating at the same time. The sender sends the information, which is cached in some place and then collected by the recipient [Wróbel 2014: 2/44].

This method of communication forces technological progress, but it should be remembered that it does not always meet the requirements of effectiveness. Excessive and incompetent use of electronic mail may cause a number of negative consequences – primarily disruptions in communication. It may consist in shortening the message, lack of non-verbal information and limited and delayed feedback [Wróbel 2014: 2/44].

Most respectable companies have their own domains, and therefore, individual mail addresses adapted to the position in the organization. Each message is addressed to the right person, reducing information overload and chaos. If the mail is not addressed to a specific recipient, it is very likely that it will not be read. Therefore, there is a risk that in a multitude of e-mails, an important message will be omitted.

Research carried out by the author¹ shows [Żebrok 2014: 211] that most schools do not have addresses assigned to particular departments, people, func-

¹ The aim of the research was to analyze the communication processes in educational institutions with the use of electronic mail in the area of the Bielsko-Biała Branch of the Board of Education. These topics result from the conviction that electronic mail is the basic and most common tool for

tions. Schools have one postal address, so the information usually reaches the computer in the secretary's office, thus delegating the manner in which it is disposed of to the secretary. The secretary becomes the decision-making person (he/she transmits the message to the school management, another recipient or deletes it). Often, the transmission of information is done by printing the e-mail content, which generates unnecessary costs. In most schools, messages are stored in a single folder, despite the fact that individual e-mails are addressed to different people (management, teachers, staff, authorising officer, pedagogue, psychologist, speech therapist, etc.). This makes it difficult to select and find the right content. Research also confirms that school directors often delegate mail service to secretaries, deputies, and less often to IT specialists. Many people have access to one mailbox.

First and foremost, electronic mail should be efficient. However, more and more attention is paid to such important features as speed, capacity, a friendly name. The offer of free e-mail accounts provided by various services is very rich, but it is often associated with the consent to receive unwanted messages and advertisements, and the possibility of data transfer is also limited. Free e-mail accounts are offered by such portals as Onet, Wirtualna Polska or Interia. Most schools use these companies. On the basis of the research [Żebrok 2014: 211], in the area of the Bielsko-Biała branch of the Board of Education, 466 schools (i.e. 71%) use free e-mail accounts out of all 657 analysed. Most addresses belong to the Onet group – 178. The most popular among free accounts is wp.pl (Wirtualna Polska) – 106 e-mail accounts. Among them, 8 belong to private persons (usually school directors). Only 60 schools have their own domain.

E-registers. E-registers have recently become very popular in schools. The possibility of keeping electronic records is specified in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 29 August 2014 on the manner of keeping documentation on the course of teaching, educational and care activities by public kindergartens, schools and institutions and types of such documentation (Journal of Laws of 2014, item 1170).

An electronic register is a computer software that is used to collect all kinds of information about the work of a school. Lesson topics, attendance, grades, learning process, personal data, etc. are recorded. Additionally, e-registers are equipped with various functions – they can print certificates, school ID cards, grade sheets, letters, synchronize data with other applications. The register is no longer just a tool for writing lesson topics and documenting student attendance. More and

the exchange of information in education. The author's intention was to try to answer the question about the degree of effectiveness and professionalism in using this tool. The research was conducted in 2013.

more often companies offer powerful tools to support the processes of school organizational management, often correlated with other applications. One of the most important advantages of the e-register is to improve attendance in classes. Computer software allows parents to be immediately informed about the pupil's absence from school. Most companies offer applications for smartphones, so when teachers systematically document attendance, parents can track their child's attendance in class in real time, the child's grades or behaviour also in real time.

Research carried out by the author² proves [Żebrok, Smyrnova-Trybulska 2015: 105] that school employees are convinced that the quality of school work will be improved through the use of modern technologies. They believe that e-registers are useful for the teacher's work and contribute to the improvement of teachers' communication with parents. They are also convinced that the entire school community is destined to a digital school – the IT revolution will soon force all schools to use e-registers. In conclusion, there is no turning back on tools such as the electronic register at school due to social, technological, organisational and technical aspects, humanistic aspects and the need to improve the quality of school management and the educational process.

School websites. As part of the research³ [Smyrnova-Trybulska, Krupa 2011: 5] the websites of schools in the Cieszyn district were evaluated qualitatively and quantitatively. The sites were evaluated according to twelve criteria and the scores developed for the research: town/website address; administration (school or other institution); website/information update; downloadable materials (scenarios, lesson plans, presentations, articles, etc.), the possibility of uploading materials by teachers; the possibility of uploading materials by pupils (e.g. forums, chats, blogs, Wiki); e-learning service; photo-gallery; IT tool used to create the school website (HTML, CMS); contact details; graphic design. Taking into account the overall impression of all the sites analysed, it can be seen that the vast majority of them were of a high standard. The services were characterized by an extensive graphic design (e.g. gallery). Most of the pages offer the possibility to download files. A positive phenomenon is that schools treat their websites as their showcase.

² The aim of the research was to analyze selected aspects of functioning of the electronic register in educational institutions, and at the same time to verify the effectiveness of information transfer by means of new tools introduced into schools. The main research problem was included in the question: what is the effectiveness and level of communication with the use of such tools as an e-register? The research was conducted in the years 2015-2016.

³ The results of the research concerning the websites were derived from the report: "Information and educational space on the Internet in lower-secondary schools in the Cieszyn district, current status and future prospects: research report", Smyrnova-Trybulska E., Krupa K., Cieszyn 2011.

Among the negative features, it should be pointed out that most websites lack any interactivity. Only single websites provide forums or the possibility to use a contact form. A big disadvantage is also the lack of multimedia materials. Among all the criteria, the lowest results were achieved in terms of access to e-learning. As the results of the research have shown, most schools do not yet implement distance learning in any form. Only three websites contained additional materials for students to use outside the classroom.

Organisational sheets. An organisational sheet is a document that defines the detailed organisation of teaching, education and care in each educational establishment. It is the basis for determining the weekly schedule of educational activities, an important element of work planning and school financing. The sheet is prepared by the school director and approved by the representative of the managing body. The rules for the preparation of the organisational sheet are set out in Article 110 of the Act of 14 December 2016 – educational law (Journal of Laws of 2018, item 996, as further amended) and § 17 of the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 17 March 2017 on the detailed organisation of public schools and public kindergartens (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 649).

The traditional organisational sheet was prepared in paper form, but the development of new technologies also contributes to changes in the preparation of the document. There are new programming instruments on the market, which give the possibility to prepare organizational sheets in electronic form. A very important advantage of these tools is the use of web technologies, which create integrated systems supporting education. These applications make it possible to plan school work more effectively and manage it more efficiently. They also enable better control of the managing authority. This mainly concerns the number of employees, the number of educational activities financed by the local government, compliance with the framework curricula. Therefore, the authorities running educational institutions more and more often decide on this form of preparation of sheets. On the basis of the analysis carried out in the Cieszyn district, it can be concluded that the majority of the authorities in charge decided to switch to the electronic form of preparation of the organisational sheet.

Conclusions

Electronic mail, organisational sheets, e-registers and websites have become a frequently used medium for providing information in educational institutions. The widespread use of such tools has become an irreversible fact, but the level of com-

munication still seems to be unsatisfactory. Too little attention is paid to the professional use of these tools. First of all, the lack of professionalism in the names of e-mail accounts and the selection of hosting services is striking. It is also unacceptable for private e-mails to be used as official school addresses. This causes serious complications, e.g. in the event of a change in the position of director. A large part of school managers do not keep pace with the development of electronic services and the requirements of modern organizations. A serious shortcoming is the stoppage in receiving mail during the Christmas holidays, winter holidays and summer holidays. Despite breaks in education, each school has specific organizational tasks to fulfil. Furthermore, school websites lack interactivity and e-learning training.

Many companies offering electronic documentation tools have appeared on the market. There are therefore legitimate concerns about the degree of professionalization of these companies, the ways in which data is secured, etc. When introducing electronic registers in schools, technical support must be provided. It is important for the school to have an adequate number of computers and a secure and reliable Internet connection. It is important to provide professional help for teachers and the possibility of consultation. It also seems important to choose the right software, adapted to the needs and possibilities of the school, so that the tool can be used in its full potential (printing of certificates, sheets, school ID cards, etc.).

The use of information technology in education is a permanent and irreversible phenomenon. Technological progress has forced school organizations to use and provide access to the Internet with all its consequences. Educational institutions have naturally switched to digital data transmission and the use of new tools for information exchange has become a natural and everyday activity. These tools are used in intra-school communication, in inter-school relations, in contacts with pupils, parents and institutions. At the same time, the existing forms of communication, such as: paper student registers, faxes, traditional mail, etc., are abandoned.

Bibliography

- Augustynek A. (2011), *Komunikacja interpersonalna w relacjach społecznych*, in: Lesław H. Haber, *Komunikowanie i zarządzanie w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, Krakow.
- DeTienne K.B. (2009), *Komunikacja elektroniczna*, Wolters Kluwer, Warsaw.
- Griffin R. W. (1996), *Podstawy zarządzania organizacjami*, Warsaw.
- Grzenia J. (2007), *Komunikacja językowa w Internecie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw.
- Haber L. H. (2011), *Komunikowanie i zarządzanie w społeczeństwie informacyjnym. Wybrane zagadnienia*, Krakow.

- Rusek H., Górniok-Naglik J., Oleksy J. (2008), *Oświata w otoczeniu burzliwym. Migotliwe konteksty i perspektywy rozwoju współczesnej edukacji*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice.
- Smyrnova-Trybulska E., Krupa K. (2011), *Information and educational space on the Internet in lower-secondary schools in the Cieszyn district, current status and future prospects: research report*, Cieszyn.
- Szpunar M. (2006), *Rozważania na temat komunikacji internetowej*, in: Mazur J., Rzeszutko-Iwan M. (ed.), *Teksty kultury – oblicza komunikacji w XXI wieku*, Lublin
- Webber R. A. (1990), *Zasady zarządzania organizacjami*, Warsaw.
- Wróbel P. (2012), *Konsekwencje stosowania poczty elektronicznej z perspektywy organizacji i pracowników*, *E-mentor* No. 2 (44).
- Wróbel P. (2011), *Wybrane uboczne skutki wykorzystania poczty elektronicznej w organizacjach*, "Przegląd Organizacji", No. 7-8.
- Żebrok P., Smyrnova-Trybulska E. (2015), *IT Tools – Good Practice of Effective Use in Education*, Katowice-Cieszyn.
- Żebrok P. (2014), *The electronic mail as a means of communication at the educational institutions. Based on the example of Bielsko-Biała Branch of the Board of Education area*, *Edukacja Humanistyczna*, Szczecin.
- Żebrok P. (2014), *Przeciążenia informacyjne i komunikacyjne w organizacjach na przykładzie instytucji oświatowych*, in: *Kapitał ludzki wobec wyzwań współczesności*, Wziętek-Staśko A. (ed.), Dąbrowa Górnicza.
- Żebrok P. (2018), *Rodzina w systemie społeczno-kulturowym Śląska Cieszyńskiego. Studium teoretyczno-badawcze*, Krakow.

