

## E-COMMUNICATION FROM BOARDING SCHOOLS TO PARENTS

### E-KOMUNIKACIJA OD UČENIČKIH DOMOVA DO RODITELJA

*Olga Dečman Dobrnjič, Bojan Jeram\**

The National Education Institute of Slovenia, Ljubljana, Slovenia; Society SPIRSA, Ljubljana, Slovenia\*  
Državni institut za obrazovanje, Ljubljana, Slovenija; Društvo SPIRSA, Ljubljana, Slovenija

#### *Abstract*

We were interested in how e-competent the parents as key partners of schools are. The article discusses the role and the importance of information and communication technology (ICT) in school environment. We have found out that the process of informatization has become one of the most important activities of the modern world, a generator of social success and a means of integrating with the developed world. For organizations that do not follow the global development of computerization, there is no future. Currently in the Slovenian school system the project e-Education is in progress. Its primary goal is to accelerate the process of informatization of every educational institution, depending on its current status in management, educational and technical fields. The standards of an e-competent school, teacher (educator), headmaster and computer expert are being developed. We carried out a research in which we checked the e-competence of parents of secondary school students in boarding schools, and their e-expectations for the boarding school. The study involved 492 parents of students who live in large boarding schools in Slovenia and attend secondary school. The results indicate that parents use ICT and that they expect the boarding schools to have the possibility of collaboration with them via Internet. If boarding schools organize ICT related courses, the parents are prepared to participate.

#### *Sažetak*

Zanimala nas je e-kompetencija roditelja kao ključnog partnera škola. Rad se bavi ulogom i važnošću informacijske i komunikacijske tehnologije u školskom okruženju. Znamo da je process informatizacije postao jedna od najvažnijih aktivnosti modernoga svijeta, generator društvenog uspjeha i sredstvo integracije sa razvijenim svijetom. Za organizacije koje ne slijede globalne trendove informatizacije, nema budućnosti. Trenutno, u Sloveniji project e-edukacije napreduje. Njegov glavni cilj je ubrzati process informatizacije svake obrazovne institucije, ovisno o trenutnom stanju u njejoj upravi, obrazovanju i tehničkom području. Standardi e-kompetentne škole, učitelja, ravnatelja i računalnih stručnjaka u stalnom su razvoju. Proveli smo istraživanje u kojem smo provjerili e-kompetenciju roditelja studenata druge godine u domovima i njihova e-očekivanja od učeničkog doma. U istraživanju je sudjelovalo 492 roditelja učenika koji žive u velikim učeničkim domovima u Sloveniji i pohađaju srednju školu. Rezultati pokazuju da roditelji koriste ICT tehnologije i očekuju da učenički domovi imaju mogućnost suradnje putem interneta. Kada bi učenički domovi organizirali ICT tečajeve, roditelji bi ih bili spremni pohađati.

#### **1. Foreword**

We are living in an era of information which has become crucial in our daily life. If we need anything, we go to INTERNET and by means of INTERNET browsers we find it. In our business life too we can do almost nothing or can go anywhere without it. /1/. Influenced by global informational society Slovenia is getting actively involved in extended European educational environment which offers a continuously growing development and number of professional challenges. The ICT (information communication technology) jointly with the incorporatedness into the virtual environment is a

condition for integrating into a globalized society. The boarding schools in Slovenia are part of the education system and offer the pupils additional secondary education. Their services are available to pupils of elementary schools as well as to college – university students and to special groups of children or pupils or students. They are organized in different organizational groups but they all depend upon the environment in which they live and work /2/. There have been 40 boarding schools in Slovenia in the school year 2010/2011 catering for 5276 high school pupils and employing 203 tutors. How these boarding schools are involved in informatization will be presented in the following chapters.

## 2. ICT environment

The process of informatization has become one of the most important activities of the modern world. The scientists call it a social– technological revolution. The consequences of such revolution have not yet been researched in depth. It is quite clear however that with emerging informational society radical changes will be introduced in all spheres of human activities. The information science and particularly its main tool Internet is becoming a major industry of future and the principal infrastructure of each society, the embodiment of development, the generator of social success and the means of integrating into developed world. Internet which today has more than a billion users will soon be accessible to half of the world population /3/. Nobody questions the importance of ICT (information communication technology) and nobody doubts the significance of computers and Internet which provide the communication in the globalized education /4/.

In numerous countries, various ICT courses and other forms of education are available. Many schools and universities participate in this global e-universe through their Web sites. ICT competences are included as subjects and as objectives of all serious projects and objectives in the field of lifelong learning /5/.

Educational organizations are among the most important institutions of the global business operations. Their business processes therefore need be brought closer to their environment by means of modern instruments. With this objective in view the state approached to the project e – educational system. This project is being co-ordinated in the e-education centre and consists of three parts /6/:

- Development and implementation of counselling and support to e-competent schools (Project E–support),
- Development and introduction of e- material and
- Development and realization of training of e-competent teachers (Project e –competent teachers).

The basic objective of the project e-support is continuation and acceleration of the process of informatization of each educational institution depending on its current condition in terms of management, didactics and technical field. Teachers, tutors and headmasters are involved in the project. In terms of contents, the project establishes the foundations for work in three fields: counselling the school management (headmasters, development teams of the schools), didactic counselling and the system of technical assistance to educational institutions. Parallel to these processes the system

of evaluation has been developed. In 2009 around 4100 advisers' hours were carried out in various institutions of the system.

The project e-education system comprises the projects of setting the standards for the e-competent teacher, for headmaster, for school computer scientist and for the school. In this framework the training and other activities providing the counselling to schools on various levels are prepared and conducted. Teachers, headmasters and other professionals are involved in the project and closer cooperation with university and other institutions from the field of education from home and abroad is being introduced. In 2009 only, 879 seminars with 7887 participants were carried out. A document Standard for e-competent teacher, for headmaster and for school computer scientist was drawn up. The standard determines 6 basic skills respectively competences for teachers, headmasters, school computer scientist, the structure of obtaining the licence and the way of how to comply with the standard and of course the stipulations of conditions and possibilities of renewing the licence /7/.

## 3. What about ICT school environment?

Somehow the Internet classrooms, the e- marks register, Internet communities, and e-teachers' boardroom are the most recognized school environments. Only until recently, the staff opposed strongly to e- teachers' boardroom which is more and more becoming the teaching staff's virtual centre. It is a place of exchanging information and communications among the professional staff. Its particular advantages are transparency, accessibility and usefulness. The access is unlimited in terms of time provided however that there is possibility of connecting with the Internet. The usefulness of access through Internet is proved by the number of visitors. The e- boardroom has significantly increased the amount of information made available to the staff, the transparency of work and activities in all units. An efficient time management and speedy flow of information are as important in educational institutions as in business companies /8/. For successful work with pupils, the e-connection between school and parents is in our opinion as important as the e-connection between teachers and between teachers and management. We are living in time when due to their professional engagement parents' absence from homes is longer and longer. That is why we believe that it is sensible to strengthen the cooperation with parents by means of ICT. However ICT itself cannot be a substitute for a genuine human encounter, but it can improve the minimal accessibility of information on the progress

and work of their children /9/. The tutors in boarding schools use various modes of cooperation with parents, whereby the availability of information seems to be the essence of relationships. ICT is gaining in importance and value in boarding schools too. A research in this field proved that the conventional forms of cooperation between parents and teachers – tutors in boarding schools are more and more intertwined with modern forms and methods of work with parents /10/.

#### 4. Research on the expectation of parents

Internet has in an unimagined extent transformed and globalised the operations. New media have turned up: home pages, electronic mail, internet relay chat or on-line chat, electronic notice boards, Internet seminars and so on. A new world system is emerging /11/. The field of ICT is one of the most quickly developing businesses in the world and with the development of the technology the supply of the most diverse possibilities grows. Equally, the school environment is getting better equipped and ICT more accessible /12/. Adequate ICT equipment in boarding schools is a condition for informatization of boarding schools and consequently for e-cooperation between parents and tutors.

#### 4.1 The purpose and the objectives of research, research method and sample

The purpose of the research was to determine the e-competence of parents and their willingness to cooperate with the boarding school via Internet. To obtain the relevant data we conducted a survey and the instrument of the research was a questionnaire. The research sample comprised 492 pupils of boarding schools who attend secondary education (high schools). The survey was carried out by tutors' assistance in nine boarding schools in the cities Ljubljana, Maribor, Novo mesto and Ruše on 31st August i.e. on the eve of the beginning of the school year when the children are brought by their parents to the boarding school.

For the purpose of the research the following hypotheses were put forward and were tested by means of questionnaire responses:

- Hypothesis 1: Parents wish to cooperate with boarding schools via Internet
- Hypothesis 2: Parents wish to participate in internet community of parents of boarding school pupils
- Hypothesis 3: Parents would participate in training in the field of ICT should the boarding school organize it.

The questionnaires were prepared in conventional way on paper the results however were processed with computer software.

#### 4.2 Analysis of questionnaire responses:

*Note: F = frequency (number of responses) – in all tables herein*

Do you have a computer at home?	F	%
Yes	481	97.76
No	10	2.03
No reply	1	0.20

**Table 1: Personal computer**

Most parents (97.76%) reply that they have a computer at home.

Do you have Internet access at home?	F	%
Yes	463	94.11
No	28	5.69
No reply	1	0.20

**Table 2: Access to Internet**

Most parents reply that they have Internet access at home

If you have Internet access at home which Internet connection do you use?	F	%
Call connection via telephone modem	76	15.45
ADSL access via telephone connection	211	42.89
Cable connection	102	20.73
Optical connection	53	10.77
No reply	50	10.16

**Table 3: Type of connection with Internet**

The responses show that the majority of respondents (74.29) have a broadband connection with Internet (ADSL, cable, optical cable) and

only 15.43% still only have the connection through an ordinary telephone modem. 50 respondents gave no reply.

Do you use Internet?	F	%
Yes	453	92.07
No	37	7.52
No reply	2	0.41

**Table 4: Use of Internet**

The majority of the parents covered by the survey (92.07%) responded that they use internet.

If you use Internet then for what purposes?	F	%
To look for information in Internet and to study it	421	85.57
For communication by means of e-mailing	329	66.87
To participate in discussions (forums)	66	13.41
To participate in social networks (Facebook, Twitter, ...)	171	34.76
Others	29	5.89
Banking, bill payments	11	
For professional purposes	8	
Shopping	3	
Education	2	
Reading newspapers	1	
Taxes	1	
e-agriculture	1	
No reply	45	9.15

**Table 5: The purpose of using Internet**

From the replies we found out that the majority of parents use Internet to look for and to read information, to communicate by means of e-

mailing and to participate in social networking and in discussions in forums. Quite a few parents use Internet for other purposes.

If you do not use Internet what are the reasons for it?	F
We do not have access to Internet network	9
I do not need it	5
I do not know how to use a computer	3
I do not know how to use Internet	2
We do not have a computer	1

I am not interested in it	1
I do not want it	1
We get all the information from the radio and television	1
My daughter looks up everything I need	1

**Table 6: Reasons for not using Internet**

The reasons of those parents who do not use Internet are diverse but most often they simply do not have the network available or they do not know how to use a computer.

Have you seen the Web site of your child's boarding school?	F	%
Yes	372	75.61
No	119	24.19
No reply	1	0.20

**Table 7: WEB site of your child's boarding school**

We discovered that the majority of parents (75.61%) have seen their child's boarding school WEB site.

Do you know the contents of the Web site of your child's boarding school?	F	%
Yes	256	52,03
No	219	44,51
No reply	17	3,46

**Table 8: The contents of the boarding school WEB site**

More than half of the parents replied, that they know the contents of the WEB site of their child's boarding school.

Which part of the contents of the boarding school Web site are most interesting for you?	F
General information on boarding school, presentation, rules of the house, safety regulations	60
Photo gallery	40
How to use free time, leisure and sports activities	35
Social events in the boarding school, activities and events	31
Menus	29
News and notices	29
All	29
Inscription in the boarding school	6
Presentation of the education groups, group life	3
Pupils' pages	2
History	1

**Table 9: What is most interesting on WEB site of your child's boarding school?**

The fact that parents find information topics like photo galleries, data on leisure and sports activities, on social events and menus in the contents of WEB sites most interesting leads us to a conclusion that they follow up what is going on in the boarding schools.

Do you miss any contents on Web sites that would be of interest for you?	F
I do not miss anything	79
Updated information on events	4
Updated photo-gallery, actual photo news	3
Menu	2
Photos of rooms	1
e-mail communication with tutors	1
Information on time of parents' meetings	1
Parents' questions and answers on them	1
Arrangement of groups at the beginning of school year	1
Timetable of the city buses	1
More statements of the pupils on life in boarding schools (truthful and objective)	1

**Table 10: Which contents on boarding schools WEB sites are missing?**

The data in table 10, which tell us what the parents miss on the boarding schools WEB sites may represent a direction for the tutors and

for the headmaster as to what contents are still wanted and should be put on the WEB sites.

Are the Web sites updated enough?	F	%
Yes	220	44.72
No	14	2.85
No reply	258	52.44

**Table 11: How updated the Web sites of boarding schools are?**

Most respondents think that the information on the boarding schools Web sites are updated enough.

Would you beside personal contacts and telephone talks like to cooperate with boarding schools by means of modern information communication technology (Internet)?	F	%
Yes	323	65.65
No	147	29.88
No reply	22	4.47

**Table 12: Cooperating by means of Internet**

The replies revealed that many parents (65.65%) wish to cooperate with the boarding schools by means of Internet.

How specifically would you like to cooperate with boarding schools through Internet?	F	%
Receiving information on events in boarding school through boarding school Web site	262	53.25
Communicating with boarding school (tutor) via e-mail	272	55.28
Participating in Internet community of parents	79	16.05
Others	13	2.64
By phone	7	
Personally	4	
No reply	116	23.58

**Table13: Possibility of cooperating via Internet**

The responses lead us to a conclusion that the majority of parents wish to communicate with boarding school via e-mail (55.28%), 53.25% however wish to be informed on events in boarding schools via boarding school. 16.05% of the persons

covered by survey said that they would like to participate in Internet parents' community. It came as a surprise that only 4 parents replied that they want to cooperate with the boarding school personally only.

<b>Would you participate in training courses if the boarding school organized them for the purpose of promoting the parents' cooperation with the boarding school using Internet?</b>	F	%
Yes, I would attend such training	109	22.15
Yes, I would attend such training if it was free of charge	91	18.50
No, I am not interested in such training	206	41.87
No reply	86	17.48

**Table 14: Parents' attending the training**

The responses lead us to a conclusion, that roughly half of the parents (40.65%) who replied to the

question expressed their readiness to participate in training courses I boarding schools.

<b>Which of the said training subjects would be interesting for you?</b>	F	%
Use of Internet	85	17.27
Communicating with e-mail	89	18.09
Participating in Internet parents' community	95	19.31
No reply	289	58.74

**Table 15: Training that are interesting for parents**

Most of the parents involved in the survey are interested in education and in participating in the Internet community of parents, which is followed

by communicating by means of air mail and education by using Internet.

### Testing of hypotheses

The hypotheses were tested by considering the responses from the questionnaires. The first hypothesis that parents wish to cooperate with boarding schools via Internet can be accepted as this was a reply by most parents. They would cooperate with boarding schools via boarding school Web site, e-mail and Internet communities. We accept the second hypothesis that parents would participate in internet community of boarding schools as 16.05% of all surveyed parents replied so and besides parents expressed their wish to participate in training for participating in parents' Internet community (19.31%). We accept the third hypothesis as well which is that parents would participate in organized training in boarding schools in the field of ICT; 40.65% of parents covered in survey wish to participate in training and less than half only in case the training is free of charge for them.

### 5. Conclusion

Should schools and boarding schools wish to meet the needs of the pupils and their parents, they have to include informatization in their business operations. Presently the most recognized e-school environments are e-marks registers, internet communities and e-teachers' boardrooms. In our opinion, it is indispensable to develop e-communication between school and parents to assure their successful work. With the research conducted among 492 pupils of secondary education (high schools) staying at boarding schools we found out that the vast majority of parents use Internet to look up and read data, that they follow the communications with e-mails and social networks and discussions in forums. Most of the parents are familiar with the Web site of their child's boarding school which in turn proves how important an element for the

image of a boarding school is the Web site. From the responses we drew conclusions that a lot of parents wish to cooperate with boarding schools via Internet, they further wish to be informed about the events in boarding school through the boarding school Web sites and finally they wish to participate in parents' communities by means of e-mailing. We were rather surprised to find out that as many as half of the parents would participate in organized training in boarding schools if it were possible considering their other engagements. Most parents are interested in training on maintaining Internet

community of parents, communicating with e-mails and in training of how to use Internet. That is why we propose to the administration of e-education to include pupils' parents as the most important external partners in the education environment. We have found out that the information communication technology has become a part of communication in all environments. Slovenian education policy is well aware of this fact. For this purpose a national project e-education system covering educational institutions, headmasters, teachers, tutors, and computer science professionals is being carried out.

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