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Determinants of School Satisfaction in Times of Crisis According to Parents of Children with Special Educational Needs

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ABSTRACT

In the initial phase of the pandemic caused by the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), schools were closed, forcing most students to stay home on school days. In this chaotic and stressful situation, facing a potential life-threatening disease, parents needed to handle their family life, their own work, in addition to being teachers of their children. This situation may have been especially stressful for parents of children in need of special education. In this study, we examined possible determinants of parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown using a sample of parents ($N = 476$) with children in need of special education. By applying a multivariate regression model, we found that the strongest predictor of parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown was good communication between the parents and the school ($r = .38$), followed by how often the teachers were in contact with the children ($r = .18$) and how well the teachers guided the parents regarding home-schooling ($r = .17$). Notably, the degree of the children's difficulties, family climate or socioeconomic status was not related to parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown.

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On 11 March 2020, the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) outbreak was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). In Norway, schools were closed across the country from March 12 to 20 April 2020. Classes were held on digital platforms in diverse ways (Caspersen et al. 2021). Some teachers held online classes, giving the children lectures and assignments several times per day, while others had fewer digital interactions with their students, leaving many children and youth to structure their own school day. It is reasonable to assume a great deal of variety in how much the parents needed to aid their children in school-related matters. The degree of parental assistance may have depended on the children's needs. Children with special education needs (SEN), who are the subjects of this study, would be more closely followed up by teachers or specialised personnel under normal circumstances compared to other pupils. However, during the lockdown, it

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may not have been possible for teachers to provide individual follow-up in the desired manner. Therefore, the lockdown situation may have required stronger efforts by parents of children with SEN. The pandemic and its consequences (e.g. schools closing, digital learning and fewer interactions) came unexpectedly, and neither schools nor children and their parents were prepared to handle the situation. Children with SEN and their parents may be regarded as particularly vulnerable to such vast and rapid changes: 'As with most systemic challenges, those who are most impacted by crises are those who are already the most vulnerable' (Wilke, Howard, and Pop 2020, 2). Hence, all parties involved need to learn from experiences gained at this exceptional time. In this study, we investigate factors that may influence parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown using a sample of Norwegian parents of children with SEN.

Special needs education in Norwegian elementary schools

In Norway, special education (SE) services are provided, based on a discretionary decision by the school leader and recommendations from the educational and psychological counselling services. The children eligible for SE comprise a heterogeneous group, whose issues range from language difficulties to more severe cognitive challenges. Norway has a one-track system, where all children have the right to choose their local school, regardless of disability or the required degree of adaptation (Bossaert et al. 2015). The organisation of SE varies according to individual needs. Some children may receive several hours of SE per week, organised in small groups or as one-on-one sessions with an assistant. Others participate almost on equal footing with the other students and receive more invisible forms of adaptation in homework or other areas. The SE services are often operationalised in terms of the number of hours of support per week. Over half of the students eligible for SE services receive more than 190 hours of support per year (Directorate of Education and Training 2021). Many children with SEN are dependent on integrated routines related to schooling and stable relationships with teachers (Toseeb et al. 2020).

During the lockdown, the Norwegian government decided that a group of children would be characterised as 'vulnerable' (e.g. children with special needs, such as learning challenges; neurological disorders, such as Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); hearing and visual impairments, as well as children with adverse family situations). This group of children would have the opportunity to attend school, while the remaining students were home-schooled (Directorate of Education and Training 2020). The vulnerable group was estimated to comprise approximately 20% of the students. However, only 5.8% of the children attended school during the lockdown; of these, 1.3% were categorised as children in need of SE (Caspersen et al. 2021). Thus, a minority of the children who were classified as vulnerable were taught in schools; most were taught at home. More specifically, 55% of the children in need of SE received online teaching together with the rest of their class, while as much as 18% were not taught at all during the lockdown (Caspersen et al. 2021), leaving little doubt that the practical understanding of vulnerability was ambiguous (Hermstad, Smedsrud, and Hybertsen 2022). There is an evident need for further examination of how schooling during the lockdown affected students with special needs and their families.

Home-schooling during the lockdown; previous findings

Internationally, the findings on home-schooling during the pandemic are inconclusive and context sensitive. The parents of children with SEN in the United Kingdom were dissatisfied with the support they received from their school (Greenway and Eaton-thomas 2020). The results revealed that the parents' dissatisfaction was related to the decline in available resources and support from the school to accommodate the educational and psychological needs of their children (Greenway and Eaton-thomas 2020). This finding was supported by a study in the United States, where approximately 33% of parents reported a decline in SE services (Neece, McIntyre, and Fenning 2020). However, a study in Northern Ireland showed a more positive parental view; 83% of parents of children with SEN reported having regular communication with the school during its closure, and 79% said that they were able to contact their children's teachers if needed (O'connor et al. 2021). Nani and Sibanda (2020) found that in Zimbabwe, parents of students with SEN did not feel ready to become 'teachers' during the lockdown, partly because of their insufficient knowledge and pedagogical skills, as well as unclear instructions from teachers. Such dissatisfaction and feelings of inadequacy may mirror several negative effects of home-schooling on students with SEN. Goodrich, Hebert, and Namkung (2022) observed that U.S. students with SEN had an increased risk of having educational gaps due to their lack of face-to-face interaction. Becker et al. (2020) noted that U.S. students with ADHD displayed more challenges related to remote learning, the lack of everyday routines, more negative affect and problems with concentration compared to students without ADHD during the lockdown. Additionally, in a review the authors noted that students with SEN struggled more socially during the school shutdown compared to other students (Panagouli et al. 2021). Parents from Norway, England and across the UK reported that school closure for students with SEN had a negative impact on their children's mental health (Bøhler 2021; Castro-Kemp and Mahmud 2021; Greenway and Eaton-thomas 2020). In Norway, Mælan et al. (2021) reported that home-schooling led to lower efforts and poorer self-efficacy of low-achieving students (many students with SEN most likely belong to this group). This result was supported by a German study's (Nusser 2021) finding that low-achieving students invested less time in learning than middle- and high-achieving students during the pandemic. All these negative outcomes and the greater burden of care for students with SEN during the lockdown may have contributed to the distress and fatigue that were found in parents who had to home-school their children with SEN in England and Jordan, respectively (Castro-Kemp and Mahmud 2021; Sakarneh 2021).

Possible determinants of school satisfaction and self-determination theory

As described above, previous studies found that parental dissatisfaction with the school during the lockdown was due to the lack of support (Greenway and Eaton-thomas 2020) and unclear instructions from the school (Nani and Sibanda 2020). In our study, we build on previous findings but expand the scope by also examining individual factors characterising the children (e.g. the degree of difficulties) and the family context (e.g. socio-economic status [SES] and family climate) in a sample of parents of children in need of SE.

Relation between home and school

Not only were schools closed during the lockdown, but children and their parents lived under stress and in fear of an easily transmitted, possibly deadly infection, whose consequences were not understood by anyone at that time (Beaumont, Boseley, and Davidson 2020). These stressful times may have increased the needs to feel in control (*autonomy*) over one's life, to feel *competent* to influence one's surroundings, and to be cared for by others and be connected to them (*relatedness*). These key components fulfil some basic psychological needs, according to the self-determination theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan 1985; Ryan and Deci 2017). Against this backdrop, we argue that factors such as being able to contact the school, having good communication with the teachers and receiving guidance from them may contribute to the parents' experience of relatedness and their sense of gaining some control by being able to reach out to the school when needed during the shutdown. Moreover, guidance from the school may provide parents with the feeling of being competent enough to aid their children with school-related matters at home. We argue that good school – parent communication, good guidance and child follow-up by teachers may be key determinants of parental satisfaction with the school, perhaps because these determinants fulfil some basic psychological needs (SDT) in a chaotic and uncertain period. Thus, we test for these factors in our analyses.

Family context and socioeconomic status

In addition to the school – home relationship, vital determinants of parental satisfaction with the school may rely on family factors. Although parents of children with SEN often reported higher levels of stress, most reported levels of well-being like the general population (Iassidd and (Families Special Interest Research Group of The International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities) 2014). In their systematic review, Lima-Rodríguez et al. (2018, 89) noted that in families with children in need of SE, 'family health may be affected in all its dimensions', such as family functioning and climate. Notably, the pandemic may have increased parental stress (e.g. increased worry for their children, financial concerns, trouble with home-schooling), influencing the family climate. Poorer family climate might transfer to a general dissatisfaction with other aspects of life, including school (Szcześniak and Tułeczka 2020). With this as the background, we investigate whether family climate influenced parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown.

In Norway, the divorce rate in families who have children with disabilities (many of whom receive SE) is lower compared to that in the average population, and mothers of children with disabilities work fewer hours compared to their partners and to the average population (Tøssebro and Wendelborg 2015). Internationally, many studies found higher levels of marriage disruption (for an overview, see Tøssebro and Wendelborg 2017), but the difference was accounted for by SES (Hatton et al. 2010). Previous studies showed that SES was related to school involvement, and parents with lower SES were found to be less involved in their children's education (e.g. Hornby and Lafaele 2011). However, there seemed to be some cultural differences. Strømme and Helland (2020) found that despite the significant association between SES and parental involvement in school in all of the four European countries (Belgium, Spain, Iceland and Norway) they studied, the

association was significantly higher in Iceland than in Belgium and Spain. Moreover, teachers were found to display a stereotypical perception of involvement of parents with low SES (Bakker, Denessen, and Brus-laeven 2007), and teachers overlooked parents with lower SES more than they did parents with higher SES, resulting in poorer school – home relationships (Driessen, Smit, and Slegers 2005). One of the reasons why parents with lower SES seem less involved in their children’s schooling may be their lack of confidence in their own skills and knowledge in terms of helping their children in this regard (Green et al. 2007). Based on the above-mentioned findings, it is reasonable to assume that parental SES may influence parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown.

The current study

Taken together, there are varying degrees of difficulties experienced by children with SEN, who come from all SES levels. Parents report higher stress, and their family functioning and atmosphere may be affected by having children who require more attention and care than other children. In the present study, our main aim is to examine which factors were related to parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown using a sample of Norwegian parents of children with SEN. We take into account several factors in each of the individual/family-specific areas (parental education level and family income [SES], degree of difficulties of each child, and family climate) and relational (guidance from the school, communication between parents and the school) and contextual domains (hours of SE before and during the lockdown). The outcome of such a broad and explorative approach may be especially valuable in informing practice for the improvement of SE services in the future. The research question in the current study is as follows: in a sample of parents of children with SEN, which factors are associated with school satisfaction during lockdown due to the corona virus?

Methods

Procedure and sample

From August to November 2020, we conducted a survey directed to parents of children in need of different types of facilitation in schools. The facilitation may be in the form of SE, the use of aids or separate training offers, often referred to as ‘special schools’ in Norway. In the survey, parents were asked about their assessment of the teaching situation before, during and after the lockdown, with an emphasis on facilitation and aids, follow-up and contact with the teacher, and school – home cooperation. In the current study, we use the data from parental assessment during the lockdown.

The survey was openly posted online on various user groups’ Facebook pages and similar locations, and a request was made to different user-organisations (e.g. the ADHD parent organisation, the Association for Parents with Disabled Kids, The Norwegian Association for Autism) to encourage their members to respond. The research was financed by BLINDED FOR REVIEW. In total, 755 parents responded. However, the survey was extensive; thus, many participants omitted replying to several questions in the questionnaire. The final analytical sample consisted of $N = 476$ parents

(88.6% female). To assess validity, we compared the background information to national registers. In the survey, 66% were parents of boys and 34% of girls. 68% of the boys in our sample have a formal decision on special needs education, which matches the percentage in the overall population (Directorate of Education and Training 2021). In this study, 21% of the survey responses were from parents of students from 1st to 4th grade, 41% from 5th to 7th grade, and 25% from 8th to 10th grade. The remaining responses were from parents of children in upper secondary school. Additionally, 79% of the children of the respondents received teaching as part of 'ordinary teaching' in schools, while 16% received more adaptation, and 5% underwent training in separate schools. In the general population, less than 1% of the children attend separate schools/special schools.

Based on our comparison with national population data through official sources, the sample seems to match the population well on known background variables. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that there is selection in terms of who have responded to our survey, and we also see that the sample seems to match well when it comes to children with a formal decision on special needs education, but that the uncertainties are larger outside of this group. We therefore restrict our findings to parents of this particular group. The project was approved by BLINDED FOR PEER REVIEW.

Measures

Overall parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown was measured by a single item – 'Taken together, how pleased were you with the schools teaching during the lockdown?' – rated on a 6-point scale, from (1) *not pleased at all* to (6) *very pleased*.

Communication between parents and the school comprised five items, including questions about how easy it was for parents to get in touch with the school, how they were greeted when they contacted the school and how they experienced the communication between themselves and the school. The items were rated on a 5-point scale, from (1) *totally agree* to (5) *totally disagree*. The five items were combined to create a total communication score, and the scale had a high internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$).

Guidance from the school was measured with a single item – 'The school guided me on how to assist my child with schoolwork' – rated on a 5-point Likert scale: (1) *totally disagree*, (2) *somewhat disagree*, (3) *neither agree nor disagree*, (4) *somewhat agree* and (5) *totally agree*.

Child follow-up was measured with three single items. The parents answered (1) how often the child was in contact with their teacher during the lockdown, rated on a 4-point scale: (1) *less than once a week*, (2) *once a week*, (3) *2–3 times per week, daily* and (4) *several times per day*, and (2) how many hours per week the child received SE before and (3) during the lockdown.

The degree of difficulties of the child was rated by parents on a 5-point scale, from (1) *mild* to (5) *severe*.

Family climate was measured with the General Functioning scale, which is one dimension of the McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD; Epstein, Baldwin, and Bishop 1983). The General Functioning scale comprises 12 items that capture how the family members express emotions towards one another, how the family deals with decisions and how the family members accept one another. The items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale: (1)

strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) disagree and (4) strongly disagree. A higher score indicated poorer family functioning. The scale had high internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$).

SES was measured with two single items: parental education level and family income. Parental education was coded as follows: (1) *not completed high school*, (2) *high school*, (3) *college/university (undergraduate)* and (4) *college/university (graduate/master's degree/PhD)*. Family income was coded (NOK) as follows: (1) *below 350,000*, (2) *351,000–500,000*, (3) *501,000–700,000*, (4) *701,000–900,000*, (5) *901,000–1,100,000* and (6) *above 1,100,000*.

Statistical analysis

Correlations, means and standard deviations were calculated for all variables. A multivariate regression model within a structural equation model framework was applied to evaluate the independent variables' effect on parental satisfaction. School – home communication, family functioning, SES, child follow-up, the degree of difficulties of the child and parental guidance were regressed on parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown. We used a robust maximum likelihood estimator, which provides robust standard errors and is robust to deviations from normality. Prior to conducting the regression analysis, we performed Little's Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test to check for systematic differences on the fully observed variables between units with data and those with missing data. Little's MCAR test result was not significant, $X^2(277, N = 476) = 314.3, p = .061$, indicating that the pattern of missing values did not depend on data values. The missing data were therefore handled according to a full information maximum likelihood (FIML) procedure. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS (correlations, means, standard deviations, Little's MCAR test) and Mplus (multivariate regression model).

Results

Descriptives and intercorrelations among the study variables are displayed in [Table 1](#). The mean scores indicate that the parents were not that satisfied with the school during the lockdown and experienced poor guidance on how to assist their children with school-work. The parents gave more positive ratings concerning their communication with the school. They also rated their family climate as good. Their children received fewer hours of SE during the lockdown than they did before the lockdown.

Overall parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown was positively and significantly related to parental guidance, communication between parents and the school, how often the child was in contact with their teacher and the hours of SE received by the child during the lockdown. The correlations ranged from medium to strong. Overall parental satisfaction was negatively and significantly correlated with the degree of difficulties of the child, poor family climate and hours of SE received by the child before the lockdown. These correlations were all weak.

SES was not related to overall parental satisfaction. However, poorer family climate was positively related to the degree of difficulties of the child. The degree of difficulties of the child was positively related to hours of SE received before and during the lockdown, albeit the association was stronger before ($r = .34$) than during the lockdown ($r = .13$).

Table 1. Correlations among study variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
(1) Overall parental satisfaction with school during lockdown	1									
(2) Parental education level		1								
(3) Family income			1							
(4) Degree of difficulties (child)				1						
(5) Family climate					1					
(6) Guidance from the school						1				
(7) Communication between parents and school							1			
(8) How often was the child in contact with their teacher during lockdown								1		
(9) Hours of special education before lockdown									1	
(10) Hours of special education during lockdown										1
<i>N</i>	476	449	428	470	433	467	436	472	472	470
<i>M (SD)</i>	2.68 (1.69)	2.98 (0.78)	4.18 (1.47)	3.34 (1.07)	1.78 (0.47)	2.13 (1.37)	9.94 (3.87)	2.80 (1.38)	3.49 (2.00)	1.44 (1.04)
<i>Min-max</i>	1-6	1-4	1-6	1-5	1-3,33	1-5	3-15	1-5	1-7	1-7

* < .05, ** < .01, *** < .001.

Table 2. Results of regression analysis predicting overall parental satisfaction with school during lockdown.

	β	95% CI	<i>p</i> -value
Parental education level	-0.01	-0.09-0.07	.841
Family income	-0.04	-0.11-0.04	.366
Degree of difficulties (child)	0.05	-0.13-0.03	.192
Family climate	0.05	-0.13-0.03	.226
Guidance from the school	0.17	0.07-0.27	< .001
Communication between parents and school	0.38	0.28-0.48	<.000
How often was the child in contact with their teacher during lockdown	0.18	0.10-0.26	<.000
Hours of special education before lockdown	-0.11	-0.19-0.02	.016
Hours of special education during lockdown	0.14	0.05-0.22	.003

The results of the regression analyses are displayed in Table 2. All predictors were simultaneously included in the analyses. The results showed that parental guidance, communication between parents and the school, how often the child was in contact with their teacher, and more hours of SE during the lockdown positively predicted overall parental satisfaction. The strongest predictor was communication between parents and the school, followed by how often the child was in contact with their teacher during the lockdown.

Notably, more hours of SE before the lockdown predicted lower overall parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown. SES, the degree of difficulties of the child and family climate did not predict overall parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown.

Discussion

The overall findings presented here show that relational factors (close relation with the school) matter the most when the world is in turmoil and established routines change. Communication between parents and the school, parental guidance and contact between the child and the teacher had the strongest effects on parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown. These findings may not be surprising; however, it is vital to identify *success factors* for future situations.

Why communication matters

Humans all have the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness that require fulfilment, in turn promoting adaptive functioning (Deci and Ryan 1985). We argue that these basic needs may become especially pronounced during stressful life events and that these needs may partly explain our study's findings. When parents of children with SEN experience good communication with the school, can get in touch with the staff, receive guidance on how to home-school their children and see that teachers are in frequent contact with their children, several basic psychological needs may be met. Through close relations with the school, parents may experience the teachers' availability to them and their access to a support system that helps them feel relatedness in their lives regarding their children's education. By aiding parents with home-schooling, teachers may provide them with a sense of control, enabling them to deal with the various school assignments, thus satisfying their need for competence. When such basic needs are met, it

may alleviate stress (which probably reached a high level for many parents during the lockdown). This interpretation is also supported by interesting findings in other domains. Weinstein, Khabbaz, and Legate (2016) reported that individuals who frequently engaged in need-satisfying activities experienced less stress. Dancers who had higher psychological need satisfaction experienced less stress when performing (Quested et al. 2011). Likewise, it is possible for parents of children with SEN who report good communication with the school to experience less stress and more control and therefore be satisfied with the school despite their increased parental burden. Moreover, to fulfil their basic psychological needs, parents may have engaged in ‘tend-and-befriend’ behaviour as described in the ‘tend-and-befriend’ hypothesis (Taylor et al. 2000). Here, tending refers to nurturing activities aimed at protecting themselves and their children in order to decrease stress and promote safety. Befriending describes how individuals establish and maintain social networks that may aid in this process (Taylor et al. 2000). Especially under stressful conditions, individuals protect their children and affiliate with others for protection and comfort (Taylor and Master 2011). Befriending others as a coping mechanism during stressful times is more typical for women (Taylor et al. 2000) than for men. Since most of the respondents in our study were female, we believe that this hypothesis may be applied in this setting. Following the lockdown, many individuals felt lonely (Bu, Steptoe, and Fancourt 2020) and worried (Mustari and Rahman 2020). This may have contributed to the parents tend-and-befriend behaviour, meaning that parents of children with SEN actively sought teachers to reduce their stress and to fulfil their basic psychological needs, as described by the SDT. Those who experienced good communication (‘befriended’ the school) may therefore be especially pleased with the school during the lockdown. Notably, as our study is cross-sectional the results could have been interpreted differently; perhaps teachers were more inclined to respond to and keep in touch with parents who were satisfied with school.

Factors not associated with parental satisfaction with the school

Family characteristics such as income, educational level of parents and family climate were not related to parental satisfaction. This is a somewhat surprising finding. Previous research demonstrated that lower parental SES influenced parental involvement in school (Hornby and Lafaele 2011), teachers’ perception of these families and poorer teacher – parent relationships (Driessen, Smit, and Slegers 2005). Thus, we expected lower SES to be associated with lower school satisfaction. However, Norway is a country with relatively small differences in income and SES and is an egalitarian society, by most standards (OECD 2022). Norwegian schools and teachers also have a specific mandate in terms of reducing social inequality, which again can lead teachers to an increased awareness of SES. Moreover, research on the understanding of vulnerability during the pandemic lockdown in Norwegian schools found that well-known markers, such as SES, came into play to a higher degree than more invisible markers, such as SEN (Hermstad, Smedsrud, and Hybertsen 2022). This finding supports the interpretation that SES was paid more attention during the pandemic than during ordinary times, implying that findings related to SES were not as likely to be expected in our study.

Another important finding was the lack of relation between family climate and parents’ satisfaction with home-schooling. We expected poorer family climate to be

associated with lower satisfaction. Poor family climate is a stressor and combined with having a child with special needs at home during school hours, could have contributed to a negative attitude towards school and thus led to lower school satisfaction. However, in this sample, no such associations were detected. Interestingly, family climate had a low mean level, meaning that most parents in the sample were pleased with the family environment. Other results could have emerged in a sample where the family climate was rated poorer. Nevertheless, our findings showed that families with extra challenges may have good family climate despite the difficulties they faced.

Contrary to our expectations, this study's results showed that the degree of the child's difficulties was not associated with parental satisfaction. An association between the child's difficulties and parental satisfaction was expected because parents of children with more severe symptomology may require more time and effort from parents than those with less severe symptomology (Tøssebro and Lundebj 2002). Consequently, the higher parental 'burden' could have transferred to negative attitudes towards the school. One interpretation of the lack of association could be related to the subjective experience of challenges. The problems regarding children with divergent difficulties might be experienced very differently by their parents, based on many factors, such as expectations from others and the facilitation of SE services in the learning environment. The degree of difficulties was therefore not linearly related to troublesome schooling and thus might not affect parents' satisfaction with the school during the lockdown.

The only variable that was significantly and negatively related to parents' satisfaction with the school was the number of hours of SE received *before* the lockdown. This indicator is perhaps more objective than the parents' assessment of their children's difficulties, as the number of hours allocated is based on a formal procedure and evaluation of the need for support from external professionals (educational-psychological services). The negative relation between hours of SE before the lockdown and total satisfaction is most likely associated with the fact that many children did not receive the same number of hours during the lockdown as they did before it, as documented in national reports (Nøkleby, Borge, and Johansen 2021). This interpretation is supported by the fact that the number of hours received as special needs education during the lockdown was positively related to parents' satisfaction.

Limitations

Even though this study provides new insight into factors contributing to parental satisfaction with school during unusual times, it is not without limitations. This study is cross-sectional; thus we cannot ignore the possibility that the direction of effects could be reversed (i.e. those who were more satisfied with school experienced better communication and received better guidance from school). Another limitation is the reliance on self-report which may be unreliable as some individuals may respond in a socially desirable manner (Holtgraves 2004). There are also some weaknesses regarding some of the measures applied; 1) we have applied some instruments that are not standardised (i.e. communication scale), and 2) we have only used one item to describe guidance from school and child follow-up.

Conclusion

Extraordinary circumstances due to the COVID-19 outbreak provided a unique opportunity to examine the factors that influenced parental satisfaction with the school when ordinary schooling was prohibited. If such actions occur in the future, it is vital to identify the *success factors* that promote the best possible education for all children. The overall findings presented here show relational factors (i.e. communication between parents and the school, parental guidance and contact between the children and their teachers) as the most strongly associated with parental satisfaction with the school during the lockdown. The finding that relational factors strongly influence parental satisfaction with schools during the lockdown can inform school policy in Norway. Schools can prioritise relational factors by encouraging regular communication between parents and teachers, providing parental guidance and support, and facilitating contact between children and their teachers. By doing so, schools can enhance parental satisfaction and promote a positive and supportive learning environment for all students, under normal circumstances as well as under a pandemic. Receiving more hours of SE before the lockdown was related to less parental satisfaction, while SES and family climate did not influence parental satisfaction. Future work should address how high-quality communication between the home and the school could be promoted in times of crisis and how to ensure that the number of SE hours for which children are eligible is actually provided to this vulnerable group of students.

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