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Toward Effective Family-School Partnerships for Implementing Character Education at School in Latvia: A Multifactorial Model

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Annotation. This article presents a qualitative interpretative study aimed at identifying factors and preconditions of effective family-school partnerships for implementing character education at school in Latvia. The empirical data contain viewpoints of 1116 participants (parents, teachers, and school leaders) collected through two questionnaires. Based on the main research findings, a multifactorial model for school-family collaboration is proposed as a concrete direction for future practice and research.

Keywords: *character education; family-school partnership; influencing factors; preconditions; multifactorial model.*

Introduction

Family-school collaboration including effective parental involvement and engagement are crucial elements of successful education (Barge & Loges, 2003; Deslandes, 2019; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Dusi, 2012; Feuerstein, 2000; Jaiswal, 2017; Johnson et al., 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, 2010; Thomson et al., 2018, etc.). The concepts of parental involvement (promoted by the school) and parental engagement (initiated by parents themselves) in schooling are multidimensional (Campbell et al., 2016; Deslandes, 2019; Fenton et al., 2017; Jaiswal, 2017; Larocque et al., 2011). They include financial, emotional, motivational, and instrumental dimensions, as well as parent-child-teacher

interactions and communication at least in two contexts: at home and at school. Effective family-school partnerships are multi-level, complex social realities (Dusi, 2012), which implies establishing collaborative relationships and organizing activities which involve school staff, parents, and other family members (The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau, 2008).

This family-school collaboration requires enacting particular attitudes in a context of shared responsibility. As Deslandes (2019) put it, it includes "both an attitude and an activity in which student interest is at the centre of concern" and "refers to family responsibilities and the school's role in updating parents' participation in school monitoring" (p. 12). Effective family-school partnerships are based on an attitude of mutual trust, respect, and shared responsibility for the education of children and young people at the school (The Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau, 2008).

Over the years, research and literature reviews have identified a number of factors that influence the amount and quality of parental involvement and family-school collaboration (Deslandes, 2019; Dusi, 2012; Jafarov, 2015; Johnson et al., 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hornby, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Larocque et al., 2011; Michael et al., 2012; Peña, 2000; Raborife & Phasha, 2010). A central factor in school-family partnership is motivation. According to the integrative model elaborated by Deslandes (2019), which is based on Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005; 2010), there are three groups of teachers' and parents' motivators linked to parental involvement and school-family collaboration: personal and contextual motivators (see Table 1).

Table 1
Categories of Motivators Linked to Parental Involvement and School-Family Collaboration

Parents' motivators to be involved	Teachers' motivators for promoting parental involvement
Personal motivators	
• Role construction for involvement: understanding of their parental role • Parental self-efficacy for helping the student to succeed	• Role construction: understanding of their professional responsibilities in relationship with families • Teachers' self-efficacy in working collaboratively with families
School contextual motivators	
Parents' perceptions of contextual invitations to involvement (from the school, the teachers, and the students) and of the school responsiveness to parents' life context variables (knowledge, skills, available time and energy, and family culture).	Teachers' perceptions of parental involvement as a school priority and of the school administration responsiveness to teachers' life context variables (knowledge, skills, available time and energy, and school culture).

Note: Developed by the authors based on Deslandes (2019, pp. 13–14).

The study conducted by Peña (2000) revealed that parental involvement was influenced by several factors such as language, parents' cliques and education, attitudes of the school staff, cultural influences, and family issues. Another study (Johnson et al., 2004) revealed barriers to participation identified by parents and teachers. Parents referred to such obstacles as logistic problems (workload, time conflicts, transportation problems, and time for childcare), communication problems, misunderstandings in communication with the school that create feelings of inferiority in parents, and parents' perplexity about their child's unique problems. The barriers identified by professionals were parental apathy, lack of release and free time, lack of expertise of professionals, and teachers feeling overburdened and devalued. Raborife and Phasha (2010) grouped factors influencing school-family collaboration under three categories: community factors, family factors, and school factors. Factors hindering school-family collaboration from the family side were time constraints, family composition, poor contacts with parents, and parents' poor understanding of their roles. Hindering community factors encompassed living conditions, for example, poor infrastructure (lack of streetlights and overcrowding), which made it difficult for parents to attend evening school meetings. Hindering factors from the school side were associated with teacher's insensitivity towards learners and parents, cultural intolerance and unwelcoming school environment, inappropriate information channels, and poor communication (Raborife & Phasha, 2010). In another study, Hornby (2011) grouped the factors influencing effective parental involvement into four areas: (a) parent and family factors (parents' beliefs about parental involvement, parents' current life contexts, their perceptions of invitations for involvement, social class, ethnicity and gender); (b) child factors (age, learning difficulties and disabilities, gifts and talents, and behavioural problems); (c) parent–teacher factors (different goals, agendas, attitudes, and language used) and (d) societal factors (historical and demographic issues, political issues, and economic issues) (Hornby, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Character education is widely considered as an essential part of 21st century school education (e.g., Fadel et al., 2015; Retnowati et al., 2018; Rubin, 2017; Singh, 2019). In a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics perspective, which is the theoretical background of this paper, character is defined as "a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation, and guide conduct", and "character education includes all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal strengths called virtues" (The Jubilee Centre, 2017, p. 2). In this field, which is "not a slogan or a course but a mission that is embedded in the everyday school life" (Agboola & Tsai, 2012, p. 168), it is also necessary to create effective partnerships between school and family/community to encourage students to acquire good virtues and manifest good values in their lives (Agboola & Tsai, 2012; Berkowitz & Bier, 2006; Berkowitz et al., 2008; 2017; Epstein et al., 2002).

Whilst parents are the primary educators of their children's character, "empirical research tells us that parents want all adults who have contact with their children to

contribute to such education, especially their children's teachers" (The Jubilee Centre, 2017, p. 1). In the United States, the "11 Principles of Effective Character Education" elaborated by the association Character.org[1], which are intended to support schools in establishing a comprehensive character development initiative, explicitly include parental involvement in their principle No 10: "The school engages families and community as partners in the character initiative":

> Schools of character involve families. Parents are encouraged to reinforce the school's core values at home. School leaders regularly update families about character-inspired goals and activities (via newsletters, emails, family nights, parent workshops, the school website, and parent conferences). To build greater trust between home and school, school leaders reach out and encourage parents and family members to be involved in the work of the school's Character Committee.

A poll conducted in UK in 2017 (Parent-Teacher Association, 2017) showed that teachers believe parental engagement has many positive effects on children character, including improved behaviour (59%) and developing a shared school ethos (53%). For gaining deeper insights in this field, the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues has conducted the project 'Parent-teacher partnership'[2] from 2017 till 2020, addressing what parents and teachers perceived to be the barriers and enablers to working collaboratively on character education. Among the key findings of this study (Harrison et al., 2018), it was found that both parents and teachers prioritised character over attainment but perceived the opposite to be true of their counterparts; quality of communication was perceived by parents and teachers as the most important enabler of a positive relationship; and both parents and teachers reported that lack of time was the biggest barrier to a positive relationship between them. Other barriers frequently identified were 'not sharing the same values' and 'contact only taking place when there is misbehaviour'. Overall, in spite of this awareness about the importance of family-school collaboration for character education, "educators often lament the fact that the academic and character lessons from school are not reinforced at home" (Berkowitz & Bier, 2006, p. 8).

The sociocultural context of the country and the characteristics of the education system highly determine the weight of the different factors affecting parental involvement and engagement. In Latvia, where "the Soviet heritage can still be felt in the way character education is implemented at school" (Surikova & Fernández González, 2021, p. 546), there is a lack of empirical research on the factors influencing family-school collaboration for character education and the preconditions of effective family-school partnerships in this field. For these reasons, the aim of this study was to identify the main factors and preconditions of effective family-school partnerships for implementing character education at school in Latvia. To address the research goal, the following research questions were put forward:

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[1] https://www.character.org/11-principles-framework
[2] https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1753/projects/current-projects/parent-teacher-partnerships

- Research question 1 (RQ1): What are the main factors influencing family-school collaboration for character education, as perceived by parents, teachers, and school leaders?
- Research question 2 (RQ2): What are the preconditions for implementing an effective family-school collaboration for character education, as perceived by parents, teachers, and school leaders?

Research methodology

Research design

In order to address these questions, a qualitative interpretative study was designed, using secondary analysis of data obtained in two previous research projects conducted by the same research team: the Erasmus+ project "Arete Catalyst", implemented from 2018 to 2020, and the postdoctoral research Arete-school – from 2017 to 2020 (Fernández-González, 2019; 2020).

Sampling

Overall, 1116 participants were involved in the research: 461 parents, 496 in-service teachers, and 159 school leaders (see Table 2). They were between 23 and 78 years old ($M = 45.37$, $SD = 9.74$). The majority of survey participants (91.7%) were females. The overall work experience of school leaders and teachers oscillated between 1 and 54 years ($M = 22.07$, $SD = 12.25$). All five planning regions of Latvia were represented in the research as follows: 37.5% from Riga city and Riga region, 13.5% from Latgale, 11.0% from Kurzeme, 12.1% from Vidzeme and 25.9% from Zemgale. Participants were approached through regional educational authorities, family associations, and personal contacts. All of them participated voluntarily.

Table 2
Participant Groups

Participant group	Study 'Arete Catalyst'	Study 'Arete-school-1'	Study 'Arete-school-2'	Total
Parents	190	271	0	461
In-service teachers	110	363	23	496
School leaders	53	74	32	159
Total	353	708	55	1116

Data collection instruments

Two questionnaires were used for collecting data (see Table 3). The 'Questionnaire A' was administrated online and on paper twice: from March to May 2018 within the study 'Arete Catalyst' (353 participants); and from June till November 2018 within the study 'Arete-school-1' (708 participants). This questionnaire contained question for parents, in-service teachers, and school leading staff. The questions addressed participants' perceived level of school-family collaboration for character education, the main factors that facilitated or hindered this collaboration, and also allowed for sharing good experiences and expressing expectations and suggestions for a better school-family collaboration in this field. The 'Questionnaire B' was administrated in paper form in February-March 2020 to in-service teachers and school leading staff within the study 'Arete-school-2' (55 participants). The questions analysed in this study addressed participants' opinions about the factors influencing family-school collaboration in the field of character education (QB).

Table 3

Questionnaire Description and Data Processing and Analysis Methods

Questionnaire	Partici-pants	Question formulation	Data processing and analysis methods
Questionnaire A: Arete Catalyst Study 1 in Riga city and Arete-school Study 1 in five planning regions	Parents	*QA-1:* Does the school collaborate with you as parents in the field of shaping your children's character? Please choose one option: A or B! [*if A*: Rather yes, collaboration is good and fairly regular in this field]. Can you share your good experience? Please describe it! [*if B*: Rather no, collaboration does not take place or is very rare in this field]. What else do you expect from school in this field? Please share your suggestions for better collaboration!	Open and categorial coding, thematic analysis, code frequency analysis
	In-service teachers and school leaders	*QA-2:* What do you recommend to your school to improve its activities in the field of shaping pupils' characters?	
	In-service teachers	*QA-3:* What kind of support would you like to receive in the field of shaping pupils' character?	

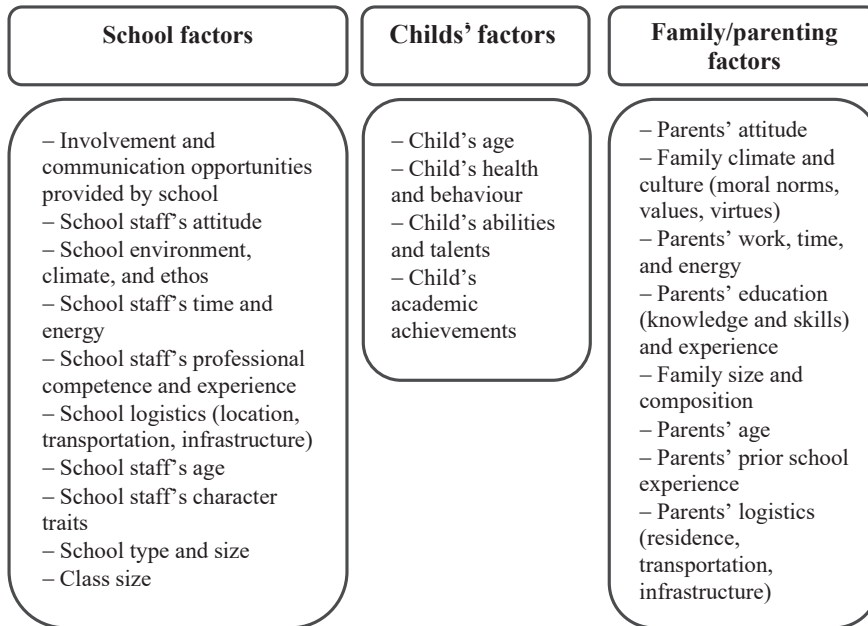| Questionnaire	Partici-pants	Question formulation	Data processing and analysis methods
Questionnaire B: Arete-school Study 2 in Riga region	In-service teachers and school leaders	*QB:* Please indicate the main factors that facilitate or hinder cooperation with pupils' parents at school in the field of character and values education!	Categorial coding, thematic analysis, code frequency analysis

Data analysis

The qualitative data referring to the 1st and 2nd research questions were processed and analysed using NVivo software, employing thematic analysis, open and categorial coding, and code frequency analysis. For preparing the analysis, the data obtained through the two questionnaires were first organized according to the research questions. Concretely, the data for exploring the 1st research question were obtained from teachers' and school leading staff's answers to the question QB (main factors that facilitate or hinder cooperation) and looking through this lens into the good experiences of, and expectations for family-school collaboration mentioned by parents in their answers to the question QA-1. The amount of data to be analysed was considerable: for example, parents' utterances spanned more than 4657 words describing examples of good cooperation (119 statements, 2461 words), and expressing their expectations (79 statements, 2196 words). For this reason, a review of relevant studies was done before starting the coding (Deslandes, 2019; Dusi, 2012; Jafarov, 2015; Johnson et al., 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hornby, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Larocque et al., 2011; Peña, 2000; Raborife & Phasha, 2010, etc.), in order to identify and operationalize the main factors influencing school-family collaboration. Based on this literature review, a preliminary category system was created, which was used for categorial coding and analysis of the data referring to this research question (see Figure 1).

For exploring the 2nd research question, participants' viewpoints were sought in the qualitative data, particularly in the questions QA-1 (parents' good experiences of and expectations for), QA-2 (teachers' and school leaders' recommendations) and QA-3 (expected support for teachers). The analysis of the rich data obtained through these questions was done in two steps: firstly, parents' practical good experiences, expectations, and suggestions were retrieved and categorized, using thematic analysis and open coding. Secondly, based on those preliminary findings, a further level of analysis was implemented, looking for more general preconditions for a fruitful family-school collaboration both in parents' and school staff's data. The findings of these two steps of the analysis are presented in the section "Results".

Figure 1

Family-School Collaboration Influencing Factors

School factors	**Childs' factors**	**Family/parenting factors**
– Involvement and communication opportunities provided by school – School staff's attitude – School environment, climate, and ethos – School staff's time and energy – School staff's professional competence and experience – School logistics (location, transportation, infrastructure) – School staff's age – School staff's character traits – School type and size – Class size	– Child's age – Child's health and behaviour – Child's abilities and talents – Child's academic achievements	– Parents' attitude – Family climate and culture (moral norms, values, virtues) – Parents' work, time, and energy – Parents' education (knowledge and skills) and experience – Family size and composition – Parents' age – Parents' prior school experience – Parents' logistics (residence, transportation, infrastructure)

Ethical approval

The study has received the approval from the Prorector of Humanities and Education Sciences professor Ina Druviete as being in conformity with the legislation of the Republic of Latvia and the regulations concerning the research application, which include research ethics concerns (Contract No 9-14.5/272 of 02.11.2017, point 8.2 and 8.3).

Results

RQ1: What are the main factors influencing family-school collaboration for character education, as perceived by parents, teachers, and school leaders?

The main enablers and hinderers of school-family collaboration were identified in school leaders' and teachers' answers to question QB about cooperation with pupils' parents at school in the field of character education. Overall, 34.7% of participants identified both enabling and hindering factors, 8.2% of participants – only enabling factors, and 57.1% of participants – only hindering factors. The identified enabling factors included more often school factors (17 times) than family/parenting and child factors (11 times), but the distribution of the identified hindering factors was the opposite: school factors were mentioned less often (20 times) than family/parenting and child factors (36 times). Some participants gave single-factor answers (for example, Participant 1: *Working with*

parents is hampered by their lack of time (factor - parents' work, time and energy); Participant 2: *Cooperation with parents is facilitated by constructive discussions in cooperation with support staff, interesting lectures and seminars of guest lecturers* (factor - involvement and communication opportunities provided by school)), but others provided multi-factor answers (for example, Participant 3 mentioned two factors: *Cooperation with parents is encouraged by the positive attitudes of educators* (factor - school staff's attitude) *and the interest of parents* (factor - parents' attitude); and Participant 4 mentioned five factors: *Working with parents is hindered by teachers' and support staff overload* (factor - school staff's time and energy); *the lack of specialists in schools* (factor - school staff's professional competence and experience); *parents' lack of interest in rising their children* (factor - parents' attitude); *parents' education level* (factor - parents' education (knowledge and skills) and experience) *and their understandings of moral and ethical issues* (factor - family climate and culture (moral norms, values, virtues)).

Among the factors enabling family-school collaboration mentioned by teachers and school leaders (see Table 4), the top-three most frequent were: (1) the appropriate involvement and communication opportunities provided by school – common school/class events, parents' meetings, interesting lectures and seminars, individual communication (e.g., consultations, emails, messages, phone calls), social support, etc. The involvement and communication opportunities mentioned in participants' answers were characterized as constructive, interesting, continuous, on regular basis, individual, mutual, common, informal, free, open; (2) a positive parents' attitude (e.g., responsiveness, interest, openness to collaboration/communication, trust); and (3) a positive school staff's attitude (e.g., responsiveness, attentiveness, trust).

Table 4

Family-School Collaboration Enabling Factors and Examples of Participants' Expressions

School factors	Family/parenting and child factors
Appropriate involvement and communication opportunities provided by school (10 times) Participant 1: […] *continuous communication (letters, discussions, meetings).* Participant 2: *Parent meetings; individual conversations, informal meetings with school leaders and parents.* Participant 3: *In our school, cooperation is very good - there is a person in charge of calling the parents and telling them everything necessary and answering all their questions.*	Positive parents' attitude (8 times) Participant 9: […] *Parents' interest* Participant 10: *Responsive parents* […]

Positive school staff's attitude (8 times)
Participant 4: *The positive attitudes of educators facilitate collaboration…*
Participant 5: *[…] observant teachers […]*

Supportive/favourable family climate and culture (moral norms, values, virtues) (2 times)
Participant 11: *The moral norms and virtues of parents based on experience.*

Open welcoming school environment, positive climate, inclusive culture and ethos (5 times)
Participant 6: *Trust facilitates collaboration.*
Participant 7: *An 'Open school' facilitates it.*
Participant 8: *Regular contact; the environment; and knowing each other, we are not big-city strangers to each other.*

Parents' work, time, and energy (1 time)
Participant 12: *Parents' time that they can dedicate to their child and whether they use that time appropriately.*

Child's age (1 time)
Participant 13: *The fact that we have students from grade 7 and they are sufficiently independent (facilitates collaboration).*

Among family-school collaboration hindering factors mentioned by teachers and school leaders (see Table 5), the three most frequently mentioned were: (1) a negative parents' attitude (e.g., arrogance, apathy, lack of interest and responsibility); (2) a lack of parents' time and energy, a heavy workload; and (3) an unsupportive/unfavourable family climate and culture (moral norms, values, virtues) as well as a lack of school staff's time and energy, a heavy workload.

Table 5
Family-School Collaboration Hindering Factors and Examples of Participants' Expressions

School factors	Family/parenting and child factors
Lack of teachers' time and energy, a heavy workload (8 times) Participant 14: *[…] teachers are constantly busy with other urgent issues.* Participant 15: *Overload of teachers and support personnel.*	Negative parents' attitude (17 times) Participant 22: *Parents who avoid working with school (hinder collaboration).* Participant 23: *The irresponsibility of parents.* Participant 24: *Parental reluctance to collaborate.* Participant 25: *The indifference of some parents.*
Lack of school staff's professional competence and experience in the field of moral education (5 times) Participant 16: *All pupils are integrated but we lack knowledge and professional people with knowledge in this field.* Participant 17: *Lack of knowledge on how to manage this process correctly.* Participant 18: *Lack of specialists in schools.*	

School factors	Family/parenting and child factors
School location (for example, school is too far from pupils' residence) (3 times)	Lack of parents' time and energy, a heavy workload (15 times)
Participant 19: *The main factor preventing cooperation with parents is the distance, because we have pupils from all over Latvia.*	Participant 26: *Parents' lack of time.*
	Participant 27: *Parents' high workload.*
	Participant 28: *Parents' busy working lives, always in haste.*
Lack of open welcoming school environment, positive climate, inclusive culture, and ethos (3 times)	Participant 29: *Parents too busy at work. They have little time to raise children.*
Participant 20: *The school focuses on the results of centralized (national) exams. Educating through punishment protocols for pupils.*	Unsupportive/unfavourable family climate and culture (moral norms, values, virtues) (8 times)
	Participant 30: *The lack of interest of parents in parenting.*
Lack of systematic involvement and communication opportunities provided by school (2 times)	Participant 31: *Parents' (of children with problems) reluctance to address issues related to moral and virtue education issues.*
Participant 21: *Teachers and parents have not developed structures, habits, specific ways to collaborate and interact systematically.*	Low level of parents' education (knowledge and skills) and poor experience in the field of moral education (6 times)
	Participant 32: *Lack of parental competence in pedagogy.*
	Participant 33: *Parents' belief that they know better what and how to do (lack of education).*
	Participant 34: *Parents' low level of education and low understanding of morality and ethics.*

According to the data, 64.1% of parents (n = 191) believe that collaboration with the school was good and fairly regular in this field, while the rest (35.9%, n = 107) believed that collaboration did not take place or was very rare. Parents' accounts on good experiences of, and expectations for, family-school collaboration (question QA-1) were interpreted through the lens of this 1st research question (factors that facilitate or hinder cooperation). The main influencing factors identified are reported in Table 6.

Table 6

Frequencies of Main Influencing Factors Identified While Analysing Parents' Good Experiences of and Expectations for Family-School Collaboration

Within parents' good experiences	Within parents' expectations and suggestions for improvement
Involvement and communication opportunities provided by school (52 times)	Involvement and communication opportunities provided by school (15 times)
School staff's professional competence and experience (30 times)	School staff's attitude (15 times)
School staff's attitude (23 times)	School environment, climate and ethos (11 times)
School environment, climate and ethos (15 times)	School staff's professional competence and experience (4 times)
Parents' attitude (8 times)	Family climate and culture (moral norms, values, virtues) (3 times)
School staff's character traits (5 times)	Parents' attitude (3 times)
School staff's time and energy (4 times)	School staff's time and energy (3 times)
Child's health and behaviour (4 times)	School staff's character traits (3 times)
School type and size (1 time)	Class size (3 times)
	Child's age (2 times)
	School staff's age (2 times)
	School type and size (1 time)
	Child's health and behaviour (1 time)

Taking both parent groups together, the most often mentioned influencing factors were involvement and communication opportunities provided by school (67 times), school staff's attitude (38 times), school staff's professional competence and experience (34 times), and school environment, climate, and ethos (26 times). See some examples of parents' expressions in Table 7.

Table 7

The Main Influencing Factors: Examples of Some Parents' Expressions

Influencing factor	Within parents' good experiences	Within parents' expectations and suggestions for improvement
Involvement and communication opportunities provided by school	*Our school has regular meetings with parents and teachers, discussing the achievements of children and also their behaviour or other topical issues. The school is focused on working with parents. Parents regularly engage and participate in the organization of various events […] (Parent 1).*	*I would like to see much more often real events / information / possibilities of seeing what is being done at school in the field of promoting children's character, rather than just providing academic knowledge […] (Parent 5).*

Influencing factor	Within parents' good experiences	Within parents' expectations and suggestions for improvement
School staff's attitude	*The teacher responsible for our class is perfectly able to say what she wants and to point out the undesirable behaviour, both directly and 'through flowers', and with humour* (Parent 2).	*[…] Moral values are taught, but this is done formally within the learning process. Teachers often forget that their virtues / moral beliefs should be demonstrated in their own deeds and words* (Parent 6).
School staff's professional competence and experience	*There are regular meetings with teachers who provide information about their observations on the child's behaviour, share their experience, and make recommendations that help to focus on the child's personal development* (Parent 3).	*[…] Are there any issues in the character of my child that I, as a parent, should pay attention before it is too late? What are the internal dynamics of the classroom, the collaboration between pupils? Are there any projects / events in which my child's cooperation with the teacher and with other pupils is fostered and manifested? I have no such information, or, at best, I only get it from my child (only from his point of view)* (Parent 7).
School environment, climate, and ethos	*[…] The school has defined its own values, according to which the day-to-day learning process is also taking place. Respect, respect for one another, respect for the teacher, mutual respect, trust, honesty, work: These values are visible everywhere in school, and there are kind reminders to say: 'good morning', 'good-bye', 'thanks', etc.* (Parent 4).	*The pupils learn from the examples they see. Adults may not say something and then do something else. In school, little children are compared to their own achievements […] there is a lack of praise and a positive incentive in the learning process. The education process is over-reliant on promoting child-to-child competition […]* (Parent 8).

Summarizing, involvement and communication opportunities provided by school and school staff's attitude were mentioned the most frequently among influencing factors both by Latvian school staff and parents. School staff also stressed the importance of factors such as parents' attitude, work, time and energy, family climate and culture, and school staff's time and energy. Parents stressed the importance of school staff's professional competence and experience as well as school environment, climate, and ethos. All the most important influencing factors mentioned by parents were school factors. However, factors mentioned by school staff included both school factors and family/parenting factors. Each factor, depending on its unique characteristics and on the quality of its influence, could be perceived as an enabler or a hinderer. Among the factors identified by school staff, most of the enabling ones referred to school context, while most of the hindering factors referred to family/parenting and child context.

RQ2: What are the preconditions for implementing an effective family-school collaboration for character education, as perceived by parents, teachers, and school leaders?

As explained in the methodology section, the results related to this research question are organized in two successive sections: first, a summary of parents' practical good experiences, expectations and suggestions is presented, followed by the interpretation of their account of the general preconditions for a fruitful family-school collaboration.

Practical suggestions for improving family-school collaboration for character education

Several recurrent themes appeared in the good experiences shared, the expectations expressed, and the suggestions formulated by parents. For synthesizing the results, the main themes were grouped in two categories: organizational forms and method for implementing family-school collaboration, and practical implementation strategies (used, expected, or suggested). Regarding organizational forms and methods used (or to be used), the most frequently mentioned positive example was teacher-parent individual conversations and consultations (31 times), school/class meetings for parents (16 times) and joint school/class activities/events (13 times). Regarding the strategies used (or to be used) for facilitating family-school collaboration, parents highly estimated that they are regularly informed about school life and children's problems and achievements (24 times), that problems/challenges are identified and addressed (20 times), that solutions are looked for jointly, with both school and family involvement (12 times), and that teachers often give advice to parents (10 times). A majority of parents would like school to help children better to improve their values/virtues/social skills (15 times). Parents also would like to receive more regular information on school life and children's problems and achievements (10 times), to receive a more personalized approach (6 times), to have teacher-parent individual conversations and consultations more frequently (6 times), and to receive more often advice/counsel (5 times). In addition to those parents' insights, teachers and school leaders, when speaking about promoting the moral education of pupils at school, highlighted the need to work with families (respectively, 9% of teacher statements, and 15% of school leaders' statements) and to engage in moral practice together with families (through extracurricular activities, school collective work, charity and voluntary activities), rather than just giving theoretical lessons, as illustrated by this director's comment: "More practical work, promoting cooperation between teachers, pupils and parents, organizing diverse events, activities, volunteering" (School leader A).

Preconditions for an effective family-school collaboration for character education

The richness of those participants' suggestions led to look deeper into the data, looking for implicit preconditions for effective family-school collaboration. For synthesizing the

results, the preconditions were grouped in three thematic groups that emerged from the data: defining a shared value system, based in the harmonization of the families' and school's climate, culture and ethos (moral norms, values, virtues); a shared responsible attitude that implies the mutual engagement of time and energy from parents and teachers; and the provision of training opportunities for enhancing parents' and teachers' competence and experience in this field. Some examples of expressions relating to each category are presented below.

Harmonisation of the families' and school's value system and climate. Harmonized cooperation between parents and teachers in this area is essential to avoid confusion in children. It is important that pupils' parents and teachers work together and understand the values of each other, so that the child is not confused by being raised at home in one way, but in a different school. Regarding the necessity of this harmonization, a parent commented that:

> The character cannot be formed from outside; it is formed as a result and under the influence of education. It is therefore necessary to promote a positive environment for the child, both at school and at home (Parent A).

One of the parents rejoiced that "Values are defined at school; the school has done value-defining work together with parents and is currently introducing them in different ways at school" (Parent B). And one of the teachers added: "Children are raised by the example of parents and adults. We need the support of all society and especially of parents" (Teacher A). Some school leaders also mentioned the relevance of society and school culture in this area, stressing the importance of

> […] creating the conditions in which a pupil is aware that s/he is an important part of the school, of the community, of society. We should explain them that a pupil can also do a lot to change society in a positive direction. The concept of 'It is my right' must be forgotten; instead, the question 'how can I help?' should be encouraged (School leader B).

Shared responsible attitude. As a parent commented, "It is important that the family is not the only place where mutual kind relations, respect, and listening to each other are important. The child needs to see that there are the same attitudes in school and society too, that these are not just the mother's requirements" (Parent C). Children education is shared by all those adults s/he meets during the day: "The pupils learn from the examples they see. Adults may not say something and then do something else" (Parent D). Parents are proud of schools that show concern and shared responsibility for children education. Parents and teachers should coordinate their efforts, as reflected in this parent's comment: "The child is asked to figure out the semester objectives – real, achievable ones, which can be worked out with the parents at home, so that they can be met and achieved more quickly also in the family" (Parent E). A teacher also stressed the importance of receiving support from school leaders: "The school team should start looking at character

development more seriously. Workshops and seminars focusing directly on character building are needed." (Teacher B). This comment links the theme of responsibility with the necessity of enhancing teachers' and parents' competence in this field.

Enhancing parents' and teachers' competence. Many teachers expressed their desire of enhancing their professional competence in this field, and of receiving methodological support for working in the classroom, such as short films illustrating a virtue, worksheets ready-to-use in the classroom, materials for promoting the discussion of a particular situation or a moral dilemma in the classroom, and lesson plans for the form time. Teachers also frequently mentioned the need for methodological guidelines, including pedagogical literature, definitions of virtues, and scientific studies in this area. Many of them would like to participate in courses and seminars on this subject with participation of specialists and the possibility of exchanging experience at or outside the school. Parents highly appreciated teachers' competence in this field and expressed gratitude for teacher's work:

> The classroom teacher does a tireless work, where situations are discussed briefly, analysed, and projections are made about how things can otherwise be done. Sometimes she highlights and emphasizes positive situations with praise, etc. Thanks to her for that! (Parent F).

Some parents also complained about teachers' and their own lack of preventive work:

> Real educational work happens very rarely at school; usually, any cooperation with parents (and also any parents' educational work with their own children) is done only in emergency situations, where the evil has already been done and it becomes necessary to palliate the consequences of it (Parent G).

And another parent commented:

> The teachers' tendency is to highlight the bad things […]. I think it is a big mistake that, if you are quiet and kind, it is like something normal, you will pass unnoticed; but if you are loud and rude, you will always be highlighted as a bad example (Parent H).

Some teachers stressed that competence development is needed not only for teachers, but also for parents: "Courses are needed not only for teachers but also for parents! Cooperation! There will be nothing to do without working together with parents" (Teacher C). As another teacher explained, "By offering courses, seminars to both parents and educators on such topics, it would be possible to build a common vision of the results to be achieved in virtue education and the development of character" (Teacher D). Another teacher stressed the specificity of the competence development courses for families: "Education begins in the family. In my opinion, one of the most useful measures would be to organize lectures for young parents and families, in which parents would be told about morality, values, etc." (Teacher E).

Discussion

The key findings of this study refer to home-school communication, shared values, shared responsibility, and families and teachers' training for character education. This discussion was organized following those themes.

Regarding the main factors influencing family-school collaboration for character education (research question 1), one of the key findings of this study is that both parents and school staff believed that appropriate involvement and communication opportunities provided by school was the most important enabling factor. A recent study (Harrison et al., 2018) found that "quality of communication was perceived by parents and teachers as the most important enabler of a positive relationship" (Harrison et al., 2018, p. 3). Home-school communication was also found to be the most valued element for inclusion in teacher training, specifically the regarding home-school meetings, dealing with difficult conversations, and communicating effectively (Jones, 2020). The study also revealed that school staff tended to give more weight to school factors (their characteristics and efforts) than to family/parenting and child factors (their characteristics and contributions) in the facilitation of family-school collaboration. This could be due to a lack of mutual communication, but this hypothesis should be explored further also from the perspective of parents.

Regarding the preconditions for effective family-school collaboration (research question 2), one of the key findings of this study is that, according to parents, teachers, and school directors, establishing a shared value system is a necessary precondition for effective family-school partnerships to implement character education. The importance of sharing values resonates with established (Hauser-Cram et al., 2003; Lasky, 2000) and more recent (Yaşaroğlu, 2016; Smith et al., 2020) international research. Cankar et al. (2012) made an interesting precision in this regard: a shared value system is certainly a key issue for the success of family-school collaboration, but "if common values are not 'internalized', which means that parents and teachers do not consider them as part of their value system, the foundation for initial harmony is missing" (Cankar et al., 2012, p. 38). Unfortunately, as explained in the Introduction, the harmonization of school and parents' values is not at all addressed in the Latvian legislation (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016; Saeima, 1997) and it is let entirely to the sole initiative of the parts.

Initial teacher education may be a privileged space for creating shared values: Recent scientific literature stressed the importance of addressing values in teacher education, including also conducting research on teacher educators' values (Hannon & O'Donnell, 2022). In addition, when teacher training programs focus on family engagement, teachers' family understanding of beliefs/values of families improve (Smith & Sheridan, 2019). This improvement of initial teacher training seems to be one of the most urgent aspects to be improved in Latvian educational context for implementing character education at school successfully. The results of this research also point to this direction, showing

that training of Latvian school staff, as well as families, in character education is one of the preconditions for establishing effective family-school collaboration in the field. Research in different historical and cultural settings has established that school staff and parents' training (Barge & Loges, 2003; Berkowitz & Bier, 2006; Berkowitz et al., 2008; Epstein et al., 2002; Navarro et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2018, etc.) is one more pivotal precondition for effective family-school partnerships to implement character education. Several efforts are being done for systematically improving academic staff competence for character education, such as the teacher training program 'Arete catalyst' (Arete Catalyst, 2019; Fernández González et al., 2020; Surikova et al., 2021), based on a preliminary research of best practices, expectations and needs in the field of character education (Surikova & Pigozne, 2018; Surikova et al., 2020; Verdeja Muñiz & García-Sampedro Fernández-Canteli, 2018), and the program for supporting principals' leadership for character education in Latvian schools (Fernández-González, 2020), elaborated in the frame of the postdoctoral project 'Arete-school' (Fernández-González, 2019). The provision of competence enhancement programs for parents in Latvia in the field of character education should be investigated in more detail, in particular inquiring whether and how existing programs for young parents contribute to establish a sustainable school-family collaboration in this field.
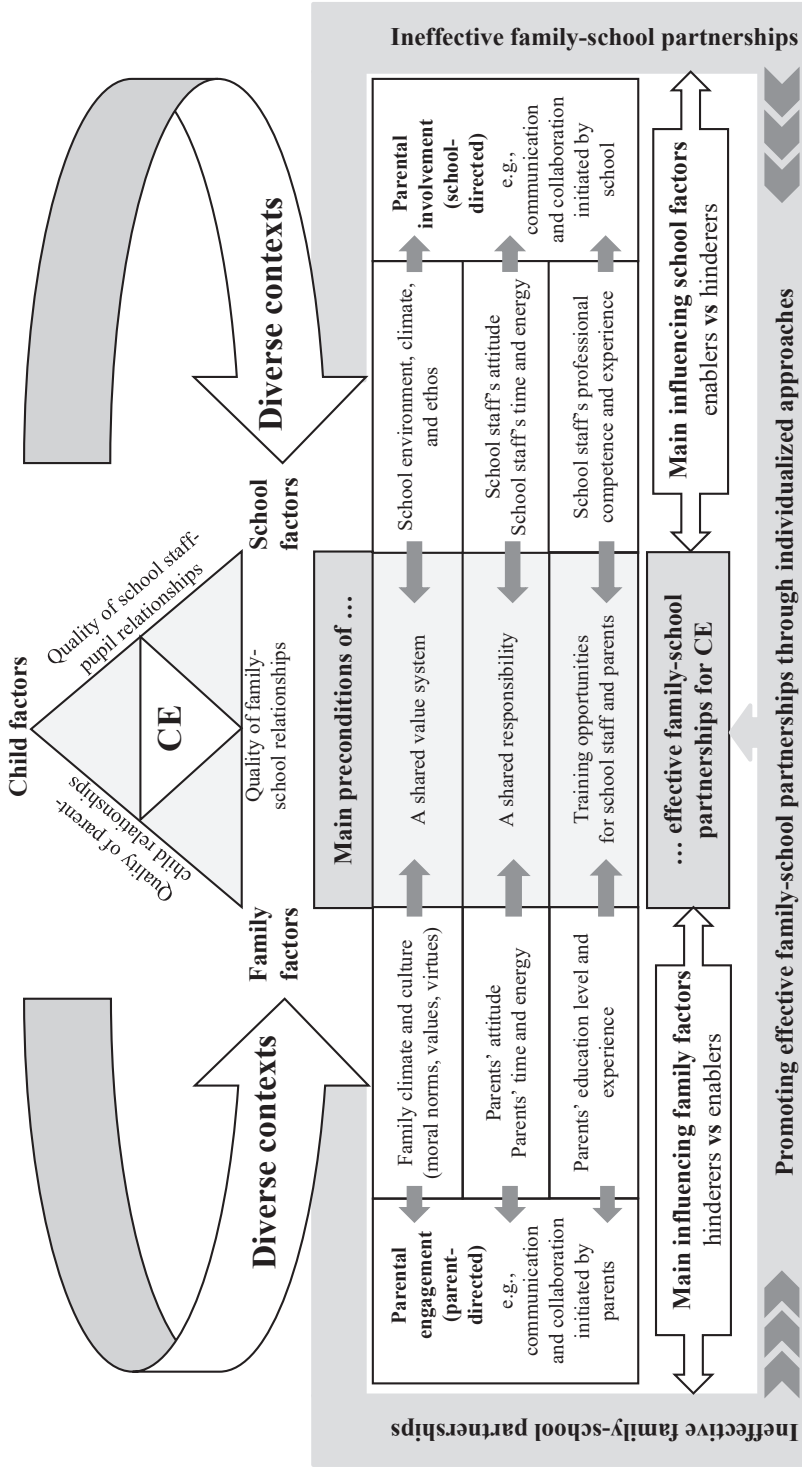
Conclusion

Answering to the research questions, and based on the analysis of the perceptions of parents, teachers, and school leaders, this study concluded that:

- The main factors influencing family-school collaboration for character education are family factors such as parents' attitude, work, time and energy, family climate and culture, and parents' education level and experience; and school factors such as school staff's time and energy, professional competence, and experience, as well as school environment, climate, and ethos.
- The preconditions for implementing an effective family-school collaboration for character education, are the harmonisation of the families' and school's value system and climate, a shared responsible attitude, and the enhancement of parents' and teachers' competence.
- Involvement and communication opportunities are a key point for promoting effective family-school partnerships through individualized approaches.

Although there is no model generally accepted for promoting effective family-school relationships in contemporary school system (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017), a number of conceptual and processual models between school and family were identified in the theoretical section of this study. However, none of these models address in an integrative way the factors and preconditions for effective school-family collaboration in the specific

Figure 2
Factors and Preconditions for Effective Family-School Collaboration for Character Education (CE): A Multifactorial Model

Ineffective family-school partnerships

Parental involvement (school-directed)
e.g., communication and collaboration initiated by school

School environment, climate, and ethos
School staff's attitude — School staff's time and energy
School staff's professional competence and experience

Main influencing school factors
enablers **vs** hinderers

Diverse contexts

School factors

Child factors

Quality of school staff-pupil relationships

CE

Quality of parent-child relationships

Quality of family-school relationships

Family factors

Diverse contexts

Main preconditions of …

A shared value system

A shared responsibility

Training opportunities for school staff and parents

… effective family-school partnerships for CE

Family climate and culture (moral norms, values, virtues)
Parents' attitude — Parents' time and energy
Parents' education level and experience

Parental engagement (parent-directed)
e.g., communication and collaboration initiated by parents

Main influencing family factors
hinderers **vs** enablers

Promoting effective family-school partnerships through individualized approaches

Ineffective family-school partnerships

field of character education. This is the reason why, based on the insights of this study, a multifactorial model was elaborated by the authors (see Figure 2). This model synthesizes the theoretical and empirical factors influencing family-school communication and collaboration for character education and illuminates the connection of those factors with the preconditions (shared values, shared responsibility, and families and teachers' training) that are necessary for establishing an effective collaboration.

In the Figure 2, the central outside triangle represents the unity and interconnectivity of family, child and school factors, and the inside triangle points to the quality of multiple two-sided relationships (parent-child, family-school, school staff-pupil), creating the basis of a multifactorial model impacted by diverse contexts in which the family-school collaboration for character education happens. The central model block included the three main preconditions for effective family-school partnerships for implementing character education at school, which is influenced by the main family factors (on the left of the central block) and the main school factors (on the right). Depending on their nature, the main factors could facilitate or hinder the involvement/engagement of parents and school staff in developing effective family-school partnerships (Deslandes, 2019) for character education. The bidirectionality of the arrows represents those two kinds of influence and possible results. In order to facilitate effective parental involvement and engagement in character education, it is necessary to acknowledge that schools and families are situated in diverse contexts and that individualised approaches are likely to be the most effective (Campbell et al., 2016).

Establishing a value system which is shared by the school and the family, sharing responsibilities in children education, and providing training opportunities for school staff and parents, are the preconditions of effective family-school partnerships for implementing character education in Latvian schools successfully. The model presented in this study suggests concrete directions for future practice at school: for example, it can be used as a self-assessment tool for school-family collaboration, in order to define the priority lines of action for the future (e.g., focusing on the improvement of one of the preconditions, for example, on the establishment of a joint value system or in the training of parents and teachers for character education, depending on the results of the self-assessment). The model can also be used for planning further research in the field, for example, seeking to get new insights in how a personalized approach can counteract the hindering factors at the level of the school or the family, or weighing the relative impact of each enabling factor in the overall improvement of the family-school collaboration for character education.

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Šeimos ir mokyklos veiksmingos partnerystės, skirtos asmenybei ugdyti Latvijos mokykloje, įgyvendinimo link: daugiafaktorinis modelis

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Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje pristatomas kokybinis interpretacinis tyrimas, kurio tikslas – nustatyti veiksmingus šeimos ir mokyklos partnerystės veiksnius ir prielaidas įgyvendinant asmenybės ugdymą Latvijos mokykloje. Tėvų dalyvavimas ir įsitraukimas į mokyklinį ugdymą yra daugialypė terpė, reikalaujanti ypatingų nuostatų (pasitikėjimo, pagarbos) bendros atsakomybės kontekste. Teorinėje tyrimo pagrindimo dalyje apžvelgti veiksniai, darantys įtaką tėvų įsitraukimui bei šeimos ir mokyklos bendradarbiavimui, taip pat būtinos prielaidos, skatinančios tėvų įsitraukimą ir dalyvavimą bei palengvinančios prasmingą ir veiksmingą šeimos ir mokyklos bendradarbiavimą. Empiriniai duomenys atskleidžia tėvų, mokytojų ir mokyklų vadovų požiūrį. Duomenims rinkti naudojami du atviro tipo klausimynai, kuriuos 2019–2020 m. užpildė 1116 dalyvių iš Latvijos. Rezultatai rodo, kad mokykla ir šeima siejamos su skirtingais kontekstais ir kad individualizuotų metodų taikymas greičiausiai bus veiksmingiausias. Tyrimas suteikia naujų įžvalgų apie pagrindinius įtaką darančius veiksnius ir prielaidas veiksmingai šeimos ir mokyklos partnerystei ugdant asmenybę, t. y. mokymo galimybių mokyklos personalui ir tėvams suteikimas, bendros vertybių sistemos kūrimas ir atsakomybės pasidalijimas. Remiantis pagrindinėmis tyrimo išvadomis, kaip konkreti ateities praktikos ir tyrimų kryptis siūlomas daugiafaktorinis mokyklos ir šeimos bendradarbiavimo modelis.

Esminiai žodžiai: *asmenybės ugdymas, šeimos ir mokyklos partnerystė, įtaką darantys veiksniai, prielaidos, daugiafaktorinis modelis.*