



## MODERNIZATION OF THE FORMS OF SCHOOL-FAMILY COOPERATION IN THE TERMS OF GENERAL INCLUSION

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### ABSTRACT

*In the conditions of general inclusion, it is essential to modernize the content and forms of school-family cooperation, because by implementing inclusive education, the school faces new issues, including students and parents in school life, getting a full understanding of children and providing them with appropriate support. Our goal is to present the existing forms of school-family cooperation and propose a new one based on the research done, contributing to increase the efficiency of that cooperation in the context of general inclusion. School-family cooperation helps parents understand children's difficulties, develop their positive qualities, promote self-determination, develop common requirements, educational and upbringing goals, and facilitate the organization of teacher-parent activities. Based on our research, we identify a new option of cooperation "secret room" or "safe room" that promotes school-family interaction, designed to organize teacher-family cooperation in a unique way. It will serve the feeling of security of each family member, to trust professionals, to speak up about problems, to find solutions. Contributing to family-centered cooperation, work will be carried out with both the parent/s and all family members who have direct participation in the education and upbringing of a child with special educational needs, and in the development of personality.*

*Interaction, Support, Parent, Teacher, Family environment, Joint work, Trust*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

As the Republic of Armenia has enshrined the idea of general inclusion by law, by which it declares the guarantee of every child's right to education, we decided to study the forms of school-family cooperation under the conditions of general inclusion.

Based on my own work experience at school and closely cooperating and talking to the teachers of a number of schools in Vanadzor city, seeing their dissatisfaction, especially the indifference of the students' parents who need special educational conditions, we tried to understand what the situation really is. Does the teacher use any means to fill that gap or is she just complaining?

The research methodology is based on a combination of the following methods: observation, conversation and filling questionnaires.

Working with parents is a continuous and difficult process, where each of the school's educators, particularly the class teacher, has his own function. This cooperation is effective when parents have the right ideas about their role in raising a child, forming a psychological and pedagogical culture, respect and trust in parent-child, parent-teacher relationships, establishing partnership relations, and the need for different ways of working with families and children in classroom work. Each family, upon entering the school, during the child's education willy-nilly goes through three stages: familiarization, joint activity planning and direct interaction (Katovich 2011). These stages help to properly organize school-family cooperation in favour of the child. In the conditions of general inclusion, the cooperation between the school and the family becomes very relevant, inasmuch as by implementing inclusive education, the school faces new questions related to the inclusion of students and parents in the school life, getting a full understanding of children, providing them with appropriate support, taking into account parents' opinion, which implies the modernization of both the content and the forms of cooperation.

## **2. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**

The purpose of the research is to present the forms of school-family cooperation, that exist in the scientific literature, and, based on the research to present the used forms, to propose a new option of school-family cooperation, that will contribute to increasing the effectiveness of that cooperation. There are different forms of school-family cooperation. According to Katovich (2011) as traditional forms of school-family cooperation, we can single out the meeting of the parent community with the school staff, parent meeting, consultation, individual work, lecture or seminar for parents, joint organization of recreation or joint entertainment of parents and students, home visit.

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW OF FORMS OF SCHOOL-FAMILY COOPERATION AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS**

The first institution of child socialization is the family, where the child acquires knowledge, abilities, learns what is good or bad, becomes a bearer of socially acceptable values. The roots of upbringing are anchored in the family, being the basis for the child's further activities. School is the institution where the child's socialization process continues, a place where the child's personality is formed and developed, the setting of upbringing changes, where the child learns rules of conduct, and values are formed. Spending most time of the day at school, the child not only acquires knowledge, but also comes into contact with different people: classmates, teachers, other school employees. For upbringing, education, and the full development of a child's personality it is necessary to have an appropriate microclimate, which is the key to establish quality relations between teacher-parent, teacher-student, student and classmates, mutual respect, tolerance, mutual trust and understanding. School-family interaction is a form of joint work, the purpose of which is to coordinate the cooperation of social institutions.

Thus, referring to forms of school-family cooperation, existing in the scientific literature, the first form is the *school-wide parent meeting* with the school staff, where the activities planned for the given academic year are presented: the benefit of child health care, aesthetic and work education, instilling moral and patriotic values, emphasizing the active role of the family. Parents are introduced to the school's requirements, educational goals and objectives, parents' proposals and opportunities for cooperation are also discussed. Although, during these general meetings, parents of students with special educational needs never express their concerns, preferring to speak privately.

The purpose of the *parents' meeting* is to increase the level of competence of parents in the upbringing and education of students. Inviting the parents of students with special educational needs to the parents' meeting makes them an active participant in the educational process, building self-confidence. However, teachers cannot constantly complain about the child, his behavior and learning, which is almost always done. It is also necessary to present the positive changes and qualities that exist and are manifested in the child.

*Counseling* as a form of work with parents can be conducted by the headmaster, teacher, psychologist, social pedagogue individually or for a small group of parents. When organizing a group consultation, the topic should be relevant to all participants. One of the important tasks of counseling is to make an individual development plan for the child with the joint efforts of parents and specialists. Parents of students with special educational needs, being concerned about their child's health, educational, psychological and social problems, can raise such questions to specialists in which they need support in order to build proper relationships with their children. The advantage of individual work is that, being alone with the teacher, parents are more honest when talking about their problems, which they would never raise in the presence of other parents. The content of a private conversation should be the property of the speakers only; it should not be disclosed.

*The joint organization of recreation or the joint entertainment of parents and students* contributes to the rapprochement of parents and children, the establishment of communication between the teacher and parents: to organize literary-musical evenings, creative, photo and sports competitions. During such events, the parents of students with special educational needs see the child in a new role for him, get aesthetic pleasure, the child is seen by other parents, the child himself gets a chance for social contact and shows himself in the best ways.

A *home visit* is a visit by the teacher or other school pedagogues to the child's house to see his individual corner, to get to know the child in a familiar environment, to observe family relationships. It helps discover the child's inclinations, interests, what he likes to do in his free time. By visiting houses of students with special educational needs, the specialist has the opportunity to get acquainted with the environmental facilities that arise from the needs of the child, to see the parents' attitude, care and concern towards the child (Volikova 1979).

A *lecture or a seminar* for parents on parenting are ways of developing the pedagogical skills of parents that help bring out constructive approaches to child rearing. Parents of students with special educational needs can be invited to such pedagogical seminars, teaching them how to properly work with the child, depending on his characteristics.

Despite the existing forms of cooperation, however, it is not so true in our reality. At the school-wide parent meetings, the school staff presents the general activities of the school, parents, particularly of students with special educational needs, do not raise any questions about the lack of conditions appropriate to their child's needs, the treatment of children, their inclusion in the educational process, or they do not even appear at these meetings very often in order not to receive excessive attention. Parental meetings are never held according to the above, but have a standard nature: to give information about the child's studies and behavior, often to complain about the child's indifference to studies, not seeing both sides the share of their own fault. Counseling and individual work is done with the parent, but the teacher is not always consistent with the full implementation of his advice. The joint organization of rest with students takes place during excursions, extracurricular activities, giving the class an opportunity to show unity. However, parents participate more enthusiastically than students in similar events, and students with special educational needs, depending on the nature of the problem, may not even participate in any event. The home visit is performed as needed; it is not regular. The teacher or the appropriate specialist visits the student when there are frequent absences or the parent refuses to visit the school. During a parenting lecture or seminar, which is rarely held at school, a school psychologist or social pedagogue can organize discussions for a small group of parents about the characteristics of adolescence or violence.

Our own work experience (8 years) in managing family-school cooperation at school shows that the school-family connection is relatively strong and complete at the junior school age, the attention and consistency of parents is greater in this period, they participate in lesson preparation with their children or send them to additional lesson preparation than in middle school. In middle school, considering the child to be older, with the increase in subjects, the consistency of the parents' decreases. Children's behavior becomes more active, parents avoid listening to unnecessary complaints, the connection with the school is partially interrupted. Among the forms of school-family interaction that exist, but, as experience shows, not used in

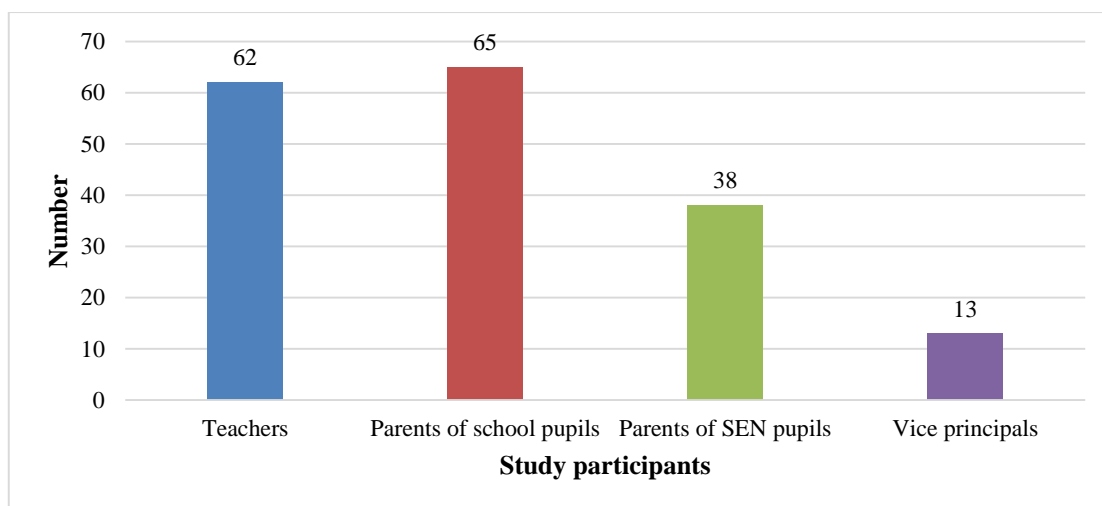
practice are the conference, parenting club, school, parents' general education or parenting university, master class, open doors or parents' day, round table, debate, discussion of problems, unpointing, family project or practical work, thematic conference for sharing experience of raising children, talk show for parents, presentation of family education experience with teachers in the media, periodical publication, virtual living room, school websites, information panels for parents, home video (Katovich 2011: 6).

At the beginning of the school year, the teacher should plan individual work with the family for the whole school year, home visits to students' families, special days of family counseling at school. Family members should clearly know their functions, prepare the child for school activities and not hide the child who needs special educational conditions. Although, especially in the junior school, parents meet the children in the school yard every day and can communicate with the teacher, ask about the child, but this contact is not enough to talk about the child's successes and difficulties in detail, and the teacher, naturally, cannot be limited only by this meeting. The ways of organizing work with each family are individual. When working with families who are difficult, at risk, socially disadvantaged, and in need of special educational conditions, the conversation should always be started by talking about the child's positive aspects, progress, and then move on to shortcomings and their elimination.

#### **4. METHODS**

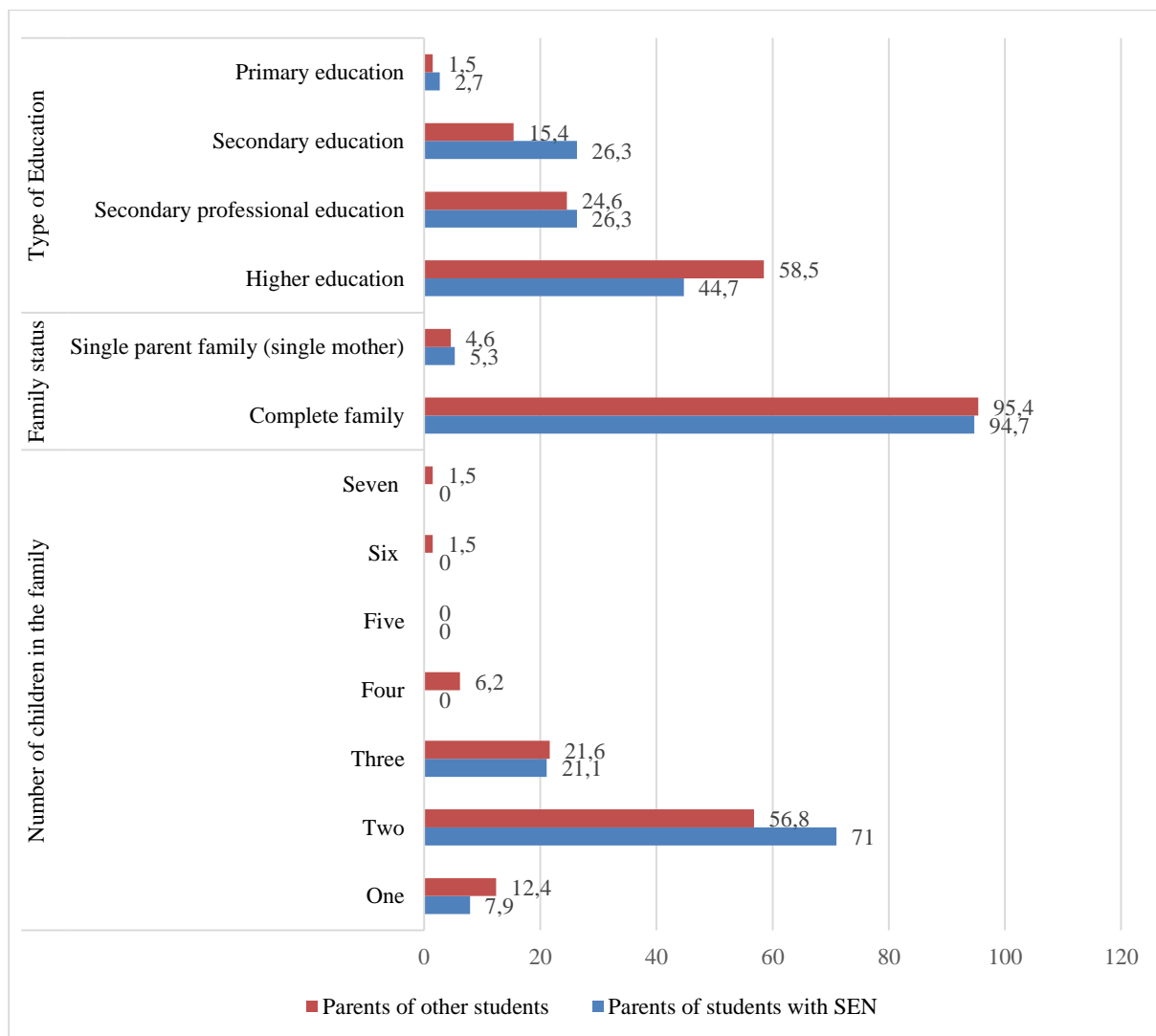
##### **4.1. Participants**

The participants in the study were 178 and belonged to the target groups involved in the family school cooperation (Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Participants in the study*

The profile of the parents involved in the current study is summarized in Figure 2.



*Figure 2. Profile of the parents taking part in the study*

#### **4.2. Instrument**

The data collection instrument used were the questionnaire, which were submitted through Google Forms. It comprised of 27 open and closed questions organized in different sections, from satisfaction and cooperation of parents and teachers, separate recommendations aimed at increasing the cooperation between the school and the family in the context of inclusive education. Also, we had a conversation with our participants to understand better their problems and needs.

#### **4.3. Data collection**

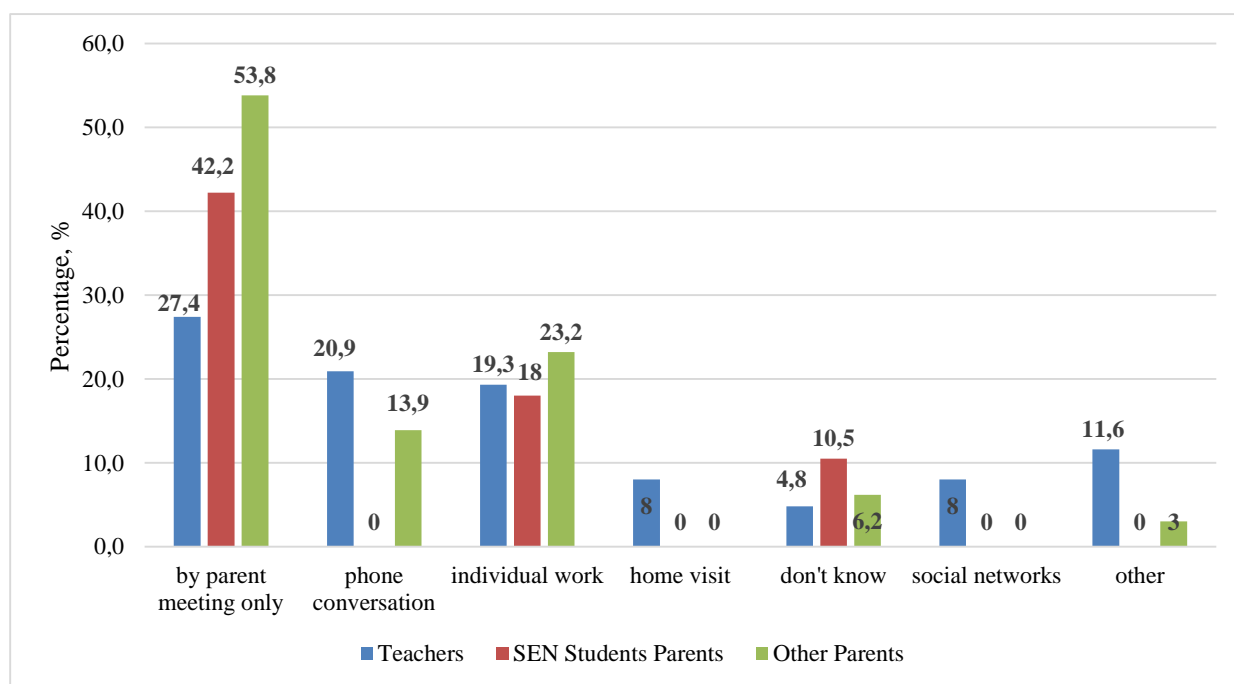
For filling out the questionnaires, we made a preliminary agreement with the principals of 7 schools in Vanadzor, on whose instructions the social pedagogue of the school distributed the questionnaires among parents and teachers. The period for the filling in of questionnaires by all study subjects was 2 weeks. Then the results were analyzed.

**4.4. Data analysis**

Since the questionnaire included open and closed questions, the analysis of the closed questions was done with the help of the Google Form platform which provides a statistical summary of data and allows for the visualization of these statistical data in the form of charts. The conclusions obtained as a result of our conversations and observations were combined with the analysis of the open questions.

**5. RESEARCH RESULTS OF FORMS OF SCHOOL-FAMILY COOPERATION AT SCHOOLS**

Here are our studies through surveys in a number of primary schools in Vanadzor city, Armenia about using forms of school-family cooperation, to find out whether parents of students without developmental disabilities, parents of students with special educational needs, school deputy principals and teachers what forms of school-family cooperation they use and the best way of cooperation for them.



*Figure 3. Responses to the question “Is school-family cooperation limited to parent meeting only, or can you name other forms as well?”*

As we see in Figure 3 school-family cooperation almost limited by parent’s meetings sometimes uses individual work. But it is more painful, that 4,8 % of the teachers and 10,5 % of the parents of students with special needs and 6,2 % of the parents of the other students don’t know and can’t name the form of cooperation.

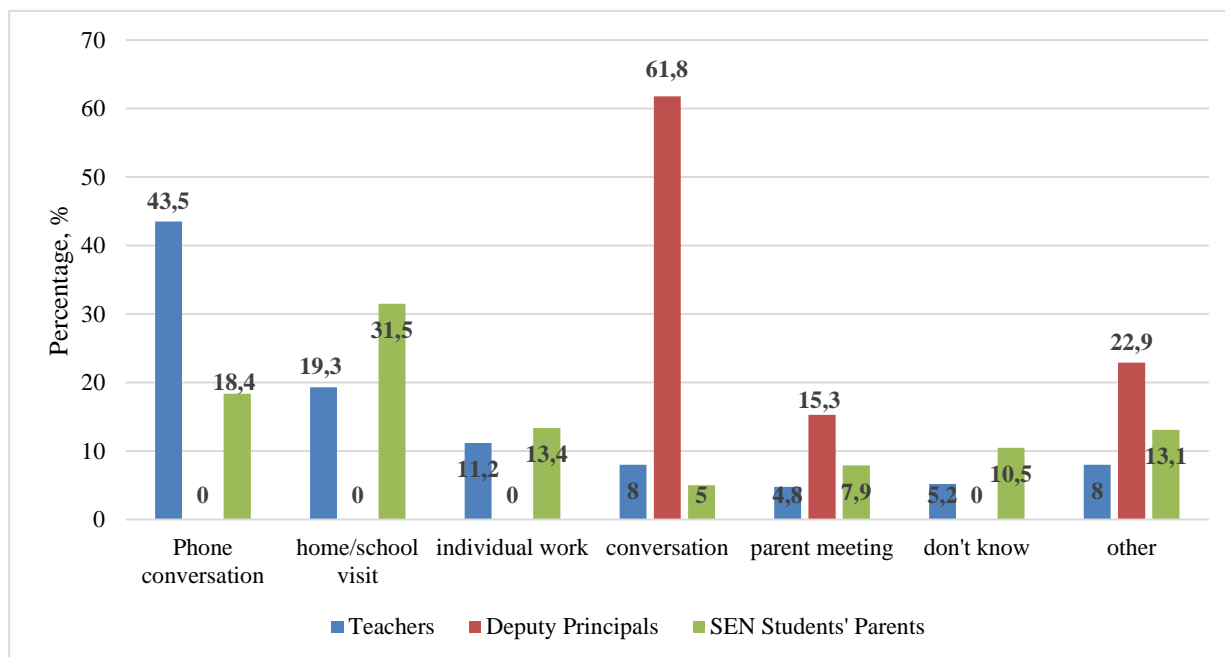


Figure 4. Responses to the question “What forms of school-family cooperation do you use?”

In Figure 4 we can see that for the teachers the most useable forms of family school cooperation are: phone conversation (43,5 %) and home visit (19,3 %), but for the parents of SEN students it is school visit (31,1 %) and phone conversation (18,4 %). 5,2% of the teachers and 10,5% of the SEN students’ parents again can’t explain the way of cooperation.

We asked all parents if they would like to have a special room at school where they may have a private conversation with teachers. 72% of the SEN students’ parents and 67,9% other parents expressed a positive opinion about such special room (see Figure 5).

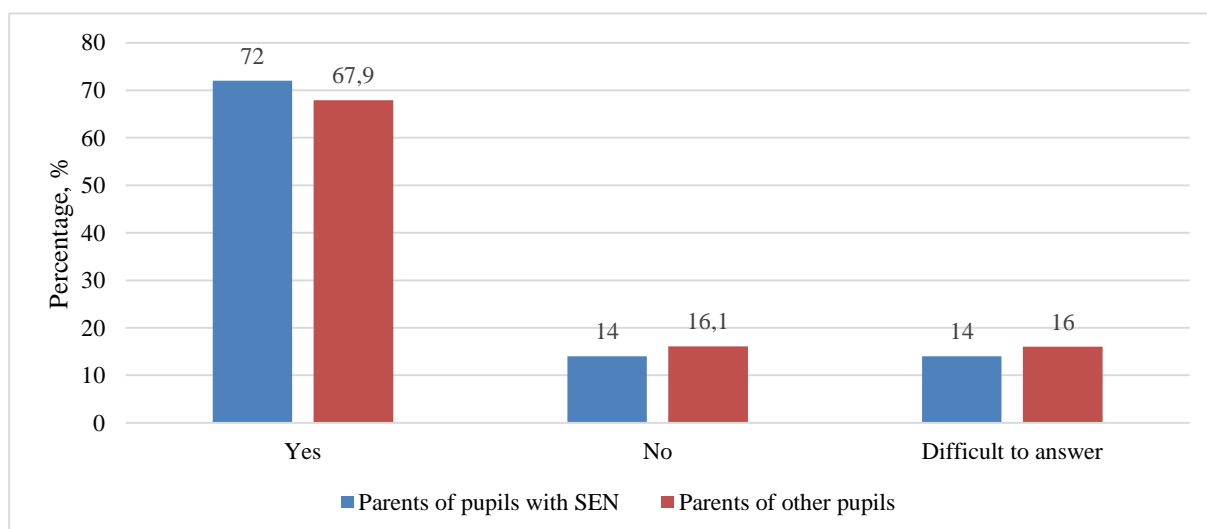


Figure 5. Responses to the question “Would you like to have a special room where you can have a private conversation with the teacher?”



Based on the research results (Figure 3) we would like to propose a new option of school-family cooperation, which we will call the "Secret room" or "Safe room".

The room will have its special place at school. This room is a private, safe space at school designed to facilitate collaboration between teachers and families in a unique way. It should serve the purpose of the family feeling safe, trusting the teachers, professionals, talking honestly about their problems and getting solutions. Here, there will be family-centered cooperation, that is, work will be done not only with the parent/s, but also with all family members who have their direct participation in the education and upbringing of the child, in general, in the development of his/her personality. All teachers and pedagogues may have an opportunity to use the room by creating transparent communication channels with parents. This form of cooperation between the school and the family will be implemented and tested in one of the Vanadzor schools, the evaluation of its effectiveness will be presented in our future articles.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Thus, the ways of working with the parents of students with special educational needs are designed to establish interaction between the school and family, to increase the effectiveness of the education and upbringing processes of students with special educational needs in the family and at school, which is facilitated by the parents' position, attitude towards the school, and relationships with teachers. Parents either see or very often do not even imagine their role in the organization of children's educational activities.

The content of all forms of joint work of the school and the family is completed in the organization of their active educational interaction aimed at the comprehensive development of the growing generation. The basis of this cooperation is the constant attention of the school to the development of the child, the pedagogically justified advice of the teachers, the study of the characteristics and possibilities of each family, and the provision of practical help to the family when encountering difficulties in upbringing.

The proposed forms, if applied, will certainly contribute to raising the pedagogical culture of parents, and of course, as a final result, increasing the effectiveness of school-family cooperation.

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