

Application of Social Software in the Context of Home-School Communication: Issues and Suggestions

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Abstract: Good home-school communication can promote students' active learning, guide teachers' professional growth, and improve family education levels. With the popularity of smartphones, home-school WeChat communication groups are one of the effective ways to promote cooperation. However, they have also brought about a series of problems, such as parents' lack of awareness of family education, which interferes with teachers' teaching, and students' reliance on WeChat groups, which reduces learning autonomy. This paper investigates the problems and solutions in using WeChat groups for home-school communication from the perspective of reverse psychology. The study found that parents and teachers have different attitudes and habits towards WeChat group home-school communication. Half of the parents are neutral, while the other half prefer communicating through WeChat groups. Parents pay attention to students' multifaceted performance and needs and have strong family education knowledge and methods. Parents spend more attention on their children's learning and entertainment in WeChat groups but also express negative attitudes toward teachers and classmates. Therefore, the use of home-school WeChat groups needs to be further explored to meet parents' needs better and promote home-school communication.

Keywords: Home-school communication, social software, problems and challenges

1. Introduction

Good home-school communication can promote active student learning, improve teachers' professional growth, and enhance family education levels[1]. In 2022, the "Family Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China" established guidelines for guiding parents' participation in their children's education. While schools are crucial for students' physical and mental education, family education also plays an essential role in shaping their character, moral values, and overall development[2]. The advent of smartphones has facilitated school-home communication and collaborative education, with a home-school WeChat communication group being one effective method to foster cooperation between home and school.

Nevertheless, the convenience and frequent use of social software for class information communication has given rise to a series of challenges. For instance, some teachers have reported that certain parents lack awareness of family education[3], while others tend to interfere excessively in teachers' teaching[4]. Additionally, some students become overly reliant on home-school communication via WeChat groups and other platforms, which can undermine their autonomy in learning and lead to other issues[5]. Effectively managing these problems poses a challenge for teachers seeking to maintain an excellent home-school communication group.

This study aims to explore the issues associated with using WeChat groups for home-school communication in primary and secondary schools, focusing on the development of rebellious psychology among users. It also seeks to investigate potential solutions and provide suggestions to promote more effective home-school communication.

2. Literature review

Chinese scholars have extensively studied home-school communication as an important topic, analyzing it from different perspectives[6]. Literature suggests that teachers often prioritize their voice in home-school communication and underestimate parents' opinions and suggestions[7]. The

communication between home and school is limited and lacks a long-term mechanism. The cooperation between home and school remains superficial, with communication being relatively single and infrequent. One-way transmission is dominant, and the content of communication is narrow with insufficient depth. There is limited understanding of home-school cooperation, resulting in a lack of true cooperation due to mutual misunderstanding between home and school[8]. Some scholars argue that communication between head teachers and parents suffers from shallow communication goals, insufficient communication motivation, a single form and content of communication, and insignificant communication effects[9].

In recent years, more and more literature has started studying the use of social software in home-school communication. Researchers have found that parents recognize the role of WeChat in facilitating home-school communication, as it helps them promptly understand school affairs and improve students' social abilities[10]. The advantages of WeChat in primary school communication include timely information dissemination, diverse communication symbols, rich communication modes, and networked communication[11]. Proper use of the WeChat platform for home-school communication can enhance the mutual support between school and family education, establish an educational synergy between home and school, and ultimately achieve the goal of promoting the all-round development of primary school students [12].

However, there are several issues in WeChat communication between home and school. Literature research indicates that there are often problems such as poor control of communication time, limited communication content, unequal status between teachers and parents, lack of communication awareness, and one-way transmission of information[13-15]. From a communication perspective, the home-school communication platform based on WeChat faces challenges such as limited interactivity, information flooding due to linear propagation in WeChat groups, and conflicts between the social nature of WeChat and the formal nature of home-school communication [11].

Some scholars have studied the differences among users of home-school communication based on WeChat. For example, Hu Y.'s[16] research found gender differences in class teachers' use of WeChat for class management. Some class teachers have insufficient understanding of WeChat management, inflexible use, and unclear communication. Some parents feel anxious about the content of WeChat groups, while others behave casually in the group, causing problems for the class teacher's management. Jiang D. et al.'s [17] study of parent group chat records for one year found that teachers played five types of roles. Zhang J.[18] analyzed the characteristics of short-term home-school WeChat groups and discovered the social attributes of parent WeChat groups and four types of parents. The study found that the head teacher's information received the most attention and, therefore, had a pivotal position in the group[18].

In summary, research on home-school WeChat groups typically centers around analyzing teachers' roles, followed by examining the relationship between teachers and parents. Studies on existing phenomena, problems, or characteristics in home-school communication often investigate and analyze specific issues, with limited exploration that integrates both aspects.

3. Research design

3.1 Research problem

Paying attention to the purposes and practices of participants with different roles speaking in home-school WeChat groups is essential for researching these groups. Based on this, summarizing the basic types and characteristics of common home-school WeChat groups will help understand the common problems that arise in different types. By analyzing successful home-school WeChat groups, researchers can identify additional benefits of this approach. Accordingly, this study formulated the following research questions:

- 1) What are the types and characteristics of WeChat groups for home-school communication?
- 2) What are the common problems in different types and how to avoid them?
- 3) what WeChat groups can bring additional benefits compared to traditional home-school communication methods?

3.2 Research object

This study conducted online surveys to interview parents, primarily middle-aged, in basic education. A total of 71 questionnaires were received, of which 59 were valid. Among the respondents, 42.37% were male and 57.63% were female. The highest educational level attained by the parents was "college or bachelor's degree," accounting for the largest proportion(57.63%). The majority of parents worked in the business or other service industry, comprising 71.19% of the sample.

Additionally, this study selected 6 representative parents(labeled A to F) as interview subjects. Four of them were women and two were men. These parents held occupations such as doctors and civil servants and expressed concerns about their children's learning.

Furthermore, the study included 2 teachers(labeled G and H) for research. One teacher was from a primary school and the other from a junior high school. They employed different WeChat group management methods but shared a common focus on analyzing the effects of notifications and listening to parents' opinions to enhance teaching effectiveness.

3.3 Research tool

The questionnaire used in this study consists of several sections: basic information, basic application status of home-school WeChat groups, management methods, frequency of use, satisfaction with use, communication content(between parents and teachers, between parents), communication effectiveness, recognition, and the problems faced. The questionnaire included a total of 20 questions.

The interview outline for parents and teachers includes: characteristics of different roles(teachers, parents, students) speaking in the group, content of concern, communication methods, existing problems, and suggestions for solving them.

The interview outline for parents and teachers includes: the satisfaction of different roles(teachers, parents) with WeChat groups as a communication channel between home and school, characteristics of speaking in the group, content of concern, communication methods, existing problems, and suggested solutions.

4. Data analysis

Based on the questionnaire and interview records, this article analyzes the relevant data from the following aspects.

4.1 Types and characteristics of WeChat groups for home-school communication

The survey results indicate that parents' overall recognition of the necessity of WeChat groups as a communication channel between home and school is relatively low. Among them, the majority of parents hold a neutral attitude, accounting for 45.76% of the respondents. Additionally, unbiased usage of WeChat groups for home-school communication is prevalent, accounting for 42.37% of the results.

Survey data shows that "teacher management mainly" and "autonomous management mainly" are two commonly used methods in current home-school communication. The majority of parents(40.68%) use WeChat groups for home-school communication each semester. However, there is also a small percentage of parents(6.78%) who claim to never communicate. In comparison, more parents prefer to correspond with teachers through the class WeChat group(mean value $M=3.64$) rather than through one-to-one private chat(mean value $M=3.54$).

In comparison, parents' satisfaction with using class WeChat groups to "communicate about students' situations"(mean value $M=3.66$) is slightly lower than using "announcement of school notifications"(mean value $M=3.76$). However, more parents recognize the role of the class WeChat group in announcing school announcements and are more satisfied.

In the survey on the frequency of topics related to WeChat home-school communication, the most frequently mentioned topics, in order of frequency, are "school notifications", "psychological status of children when they are students or in the school environment", and "students' learning status". Since parents prioritize and show concern for their children's psychological well-being, and many parents lack knowledge and methods related to psychological education, professional support from teachers and schools is necessary. The survey also found that parents tend to passively accept the school's teaching

arrangements. Parents actively seek information on their children's psychological well-being and performance.

The survey results indicate that the majority of parents who were tested have a positive attitude towards communication within the WeChat group. They are particularly interested in their children's after-school learning, entertainment, and the specific details of their homework for the day. This suggests that most parent-to-parent communication still revolves around their children's education, with minimal discussion about their physical health or social relationships.

The survey results indicate that parents prioritize understanding their children's situation through home-school communication on the WeChat platform(mean value $M=3.611$) and helping their children improve their academic performance(mean value $M=3.58$). They are also concerned about whether teachers show care for their children after communication, although the level of concern for improvement is relatively low(mean value $M=3.411$).

Based on the interviews, the home-school WeChat group primarily focuses on teachers issuing notices, with additional communication between parents and teachers, as well as among parents(Parents B, C, D, and E). Most parents acknowledge the role of home-school WeChat groups in helping them understand their children's learning status and facilitating home-school cooperation. However, some parents expressed negative attitudes towards teachers praising specific students' behavior in the WeChat group(Parent D). While there were slight differences in views and expectations regarding the class WeChat group among the interviewed parents, they all believed that the WeChat group played a significant role in home-school contact and student learning. They paid attention to the content of teachers' praise and notifications(Parents B and C) and provided suggestions for improvement, such as offering more classroom feedback and using clearer language expressions(Parent A). Additionally, they suggested that while WeChat group notifications are efficient, alternative means of communication should be used for personalized issues(Parent B).

4.2 Frequently Asked Questions and Solutions for Home-School Communication WeChat Groups

The survey results reveal that parents still struggle to find the correct way to communicate with teachers on the WeChat platform(mean value $M=3.68$). Many parents express dissatisfaction with the "one-way teacher-parent notification method in the WeChat group"(mean value $M=3.63$). Furthermore, some parents find the operation of the WeChat software itself challenging(mean value $M=3.61$), which hinders their home-school communication in WeChat groups.

Interviews with parents indicate that some parents have not yet mastered WeChat group functions such as "message do not disturb," leading to excessive disturbances for them(Parent E). However, when conflicts arise between parents and teachers or among parents in the WeChat group, parents actively coordinate and maintain a harmonious and civilized communication environment within the group(Parent F).

The interviews also revealed that when using WeChat groups, teachers not only focus on notifying all parents but also address other personalized problems. They are aware of the limitations of WeChat groups for such issues while understanding the functions of the group(Teachers G, H). Teachers have developed reasonable ways to handle inappropriate language from parents(Teacher G), and some teachers have encountered instances where parents disrupt rest time by messaging at any time(Teacher H).

4.3 The Unique Advantages of Home-School WeChat Groups

According to the survey results, parents recognize the convenience(mean value $M=3.73$) and efficiency(mean value $M=3.64$) of WeChat groups for home-school communication. However, the feature of rich forms is not considered the most important advantage by parents(mean value $M=3.64$, $M=3.63$).

Based on the interview results, parents place a greater emphasis on the tone and wording of teachers' notices in WeChat groups. They also have higher expectations for the accuracy of language used in the notices, particularly those related to student grades and academic performance(Parents B, E, F). Some parents mentioned that teachers mostly praise students in the WeChat group, but they also hope that teachers can promptly address students' learning status and encourage them to improve their efficiency(Parent F). Additionally, parents are mindful of their own choice of words when communicating with teachers in WeChat groups, and some parents are sensitive to terms like "underachievers"(Parent E). Furthermore, parents expressed a desire for more notifications regarding

student performance in the WeChat group and hold a negative attitude towards excessive praise in the group(Parents D, E). Parents actively participate in group discussions, pay attention to communication with parents and teachers in different roles, and utilize appropriate methods to help teachers rectify mistakes in group notifications(Parent F).

5. Conclusion and discussion

5.1 Main conclusion

Based on the data analysis, the researchers have identified three main categories of findings:

1) Parents and teachers have different attitudes and habits when it comes to using WeChat groups as a communication channel between home and school. Half of the parents hold a neutral perspective, believing that the WeChat group has a neutral effect. The other half prefer to communicate through the class WeChat group, while a few parents never share in the group.

2) Parents express concerns about school announcements, students' psychological and learning status, and they also demand family education knowledge and methods. The main focus of parents' concerns is on students' after-school study and homework.

3) Parents show a higher level of interest in their children's learning and entertainment in WeChat groups, but they do not pay special attention to whether it attracts more attention from teachers. Parents tend to have a negative attitude towards teachers praising individual classmates.

5.2 Discussion

While WeChat groups serve as an important channel for home-school communication, educators should be aware that not all parents have a positive attitude towards them. It is crucial to pay attention to this and seek better solutions. For example, Wu W.[19] discussed the "check-in" function of WeChat groups for home-school communication and observed the burden felt by parents when participating. Wu also delved into the level of home-school cooperation within WeChat groups. Therefore, future research should focus on enhancing parents' recognition of home-school partnership in WeChat groups and proposing practical methods to improve satisfaction and enthusiasm for both parents and schools in home-school cooperation.

Traditional research has identified various characteristics of home-school communication needs. However, the use of WeChat as a communication channel has introduced new features to parents' needs. For instance, Yu L. and Wei S.[1]discussed the alienation and reconstruction of communication functions in home-school WeChat groups. They pointed out that some groups have experienced alienation, with teachers transitioning from "organizers" to "silent ones" and parents shifting from "concerned" to "comparers." It is important to reconsider the role of WeChat groups in home-school communication to better meet the needs of parents and adapt to the changing times of home-school communication as a teaching activity.

Although WeChat is the most commonly used software for home-school communication, it may not satisfy users' higher needs when it comes to solving high-expectation tasks, such as student performance. Therefore, it is crucial to develop more professional home-school communication software. Fu Z. et al.[20] discussed the convenience of using mini-programs on the WeChat platform to enhance home-school communication and proposed a feasible software model. Pan Q. et al.[21] also analyzed the current status of existing home-school apps and provided specific suggestions. Promoting the integration of scientific and technological advancements in the smart era with home-school communication will facilitate more efficient home-school cooperation.

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