Creencias docentes del uso de tecnologías por familias para involucrarse en educación

Teacher's beliefs about the use of technologies by families to get involved in education

Militza Lourdes Urías Martínez*
Maricela Urías Murrieta**
Ángel Alberto Valdés Cuervo***

RESUMEN

El presente estudio de corte cualitativo se propuso entender creencias de docentes acerca de los beneficios del manejo de Tecnologías de la Información y Comunicación (TIC) por las familias de los estudiantes, y de las prácticas educativas para fomentar la utilización de TIC por los padres. Se realizaron entrevistas a 12 maestros de escuelas primarias, ocho mujeres y cuatro hombres, con edades entre 23 y 55 años. La información se analizó con el método inductivo. Se encontró que los docentes consideran que el uso de TIC por las familias mejora el apoyo al aprendizaje en casa, el capital cultural de los estudiantes, y la comunicación con los padres. Los profesores creen que fomentan que las familias utilicen las TIC cuando las manejan para informarles respecto a tareas y actividades escolares. Se concluyó que los docentes consideran que el manejo de las TIC por las familias favorece el proceso de enseñanza. Sin embargo, sus creencias acerca de las prácticas que promueven su utilización por las familias son limitadas. Estos hallazgos sugieren que si bien docentes son conscientes de los beneficios de las TIC es necesario capacitarlos para que favorezcan un uso más amplio de las tecnologías por las familias.

ABSTRACT

The present qualitative study aimed to understand teacher's beliefs about the benefits of the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) by the families of the students, and of the educational practices to encourage the use of ICT by parents. Interviews were conducted with 12 teachers from urban public elementary schools, eight women and four men, aged between 23 and 55 years. The information was analyzed with the inductive method. It was found that teachers consider that ICT use by families improves support for home learning, cultural capital of students, and communication with parents. Teachers believe that they encourage families to use ICT when they handle it to inform them about homework and school activities. It was concluded that the teachers consider that the management of ICT by the families favors the teaching process. However, their beliefs about practices that promote their use by families are limited. These findings suggest that while teachers are aware of the benefits of ICT, it is necessary to train them to favor a wider use of technologies by families.

* Master's degree in Educational Research. Professor in the Department of Education of the Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora [Sonora Technological Institute]. Mexico.
** Ph.D. in Education. Professor-researcher in the Department of Education of the Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora [Sonora Technological Institute]. Mexico.
*** Ph.D. in Sciences. Professor-researcher in the Department of Education of the Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora [Sonora Technological Institute]. Mexico.

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Mexico published in its Official Journal of the Federation (2013), that educational quality implies the active participation of the stakeholders involved in the educational process; more specifically, the role of parents in supporting their children's education is considered essential to a student's school success (Epstein, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones & Reed, 2002; Valdés, Wendlandt, Carlos & Urías, 2014). The educational participation of families entails parental involvement in activities that favor students to acquire the skills demanded by the school curriculum (Fantuzzo, McWaynne, Perry & Childs, 2004; Suizzo & Stapleton, 2007; Valdés, Uriahs, Wendlandt & Torres, 2014).

In this paper, we agree with Epstein (2011), in assuming that the participation of parents is reflected in aspects such as upbringing: the formation of habits and values necessary to respond effectively to school and social demands; support of home learning: the supervision of homework and the development of extracurricular activities that promote the acquisition of competencies demanded in the curriculum; communication with the school: the exchange of information with the teacher about the child and the operation of the school; decision making: the contribution to school decisions about school activities and policies; volunteering: the actions aimed at improving school management; and collaboration with the community: the use of community resources to promote student learning.

Parental involvement is positively related to the students' academic achievement, as it increases their intrinsic motivation towards study, achievement orientation and the perception of academic self-efficacy (Bazán & Castellanos, 2015; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Newland, Chen & Coyl-Sheperd, 2013; Sánchez and Valdés, 2014). It also promotes the trust and synergy between teachers and parents in actions aimed at promoting quality learning in students (Lerkkanen, Kikas, Pakarinen, Poikonen & Nurmi, 2013; Sánchez and Valdés, 2014; Valenzuela and Sales, 2016). Moreover, it mitigates the negative effects of deficiencies in the economic and cultural capital of families (Carlisle, Stanley & Kemple, 2005; Knopf & Swick, 2008; Silas, 2008). Although the involvement of families to achieve a quality education is essential, studies conducted in Mexico report that parental participation is low and the interactions between parents and teachers are burden with conflicts (Martínez, Bracho & Martínez, as cited in Flores-Crespo, 2009); Márquez, 2014; Perales and Escobedo, 2016; Valdés, Martín and Sánchez, 2009).

ICTs are viewed as tools that favor the participation of parents in the education of their children (Hohlfeld, Ritzhaupt & Barron, 2010; Jury, 2009; Leiva, 2014; Thompson, 2008). This is due to the high inclusion of ICTs in current societies (National Institute of Statistics and Geography, 2016; International Union of Communications, 2015), and the findings

suggesting positive attitudes of families towards the use of ICTs to support their children's learning (Aguilar and Leiva, 2012; Nila, Nevárez, Pulido & Puente, 2011; Olmstead, 2013; Uriah, 2011).

Teachers influence parents' use of ICTs to support their children's education (Newland *et al.*, 2013; Sánchez & Valdés, 2014; Walker, Wilking, Dallaire, Sandler & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005); particularly, teachers' beliefs about the role of families in the education of their children have an impact on the parents' use of ICTs (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Padak & Rasinski, 2010; Patterson, Webb & Krudwig, 2009; Valdés and Sánchez, 2016). Teachers' beliefs about the parental role include judgments about the values, goals and behaviors of families regarding education (Epstein, 2011; Herpworth & Riojas-Cortez, 2012) and are linked to the ways in which they interact with parents (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Barnett, Gareis & Brennan, 2010).

While there is evidence about the relation between the teachers' beliefs and the educational involvement of parents, studies at the international level that address these beliefs are scarce (Aguilar and Leiva, 2012; Barnett, 2016; Lewin & Luckin, 2010; Machado-Casas, Sánchez & Ek, 2011; Olmstead, 2013; Pittman, 2008; Walsh, Cromer & Weigel, 2014). In Mexico, the situation aforementioned is even more evident, since it is a subject of incipient research in the country (Nila *et al.*, 2011; Uriah, 2016).

Our study explores, from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective, the beliefs of teachers of urban public primary schools on parents' ICTs use to get involved in their children's education. The purpose of this study is to understand how these beliefs favor or limit the use of these tools by families in supporting their children's school achievement. This is especially valuable for programs that aim at promoting the use of ICTs in families to enable parents to participate in their children's education. To achieve our goal, we analyzed the teachers' beliefs in three thematic axes: ways in which parents can use ICTs to participate in their children's education; benefits they perceive from ICTs as resources to relate to families; and ways in which they can use ICTs to communicate with families.

METHOD

Participants | The study was conducted in three urban public elementary high schools that attend students from families of different social classes. Based on the criterion of maximum heterogeneity, we selected twelve teachers from these schools, two for each school grade (Quinn, 2015). Eight (66.7%) of the twelve teachers were female and four (33.3%) male teachers, aged from twenty-three to fifty-five (*M = 34.21, DE= 8.16*). The number of participants was established according to the saturation of the analytical categories (Creswell, 2009).

Data Collection Techniques | Semi-structured Interview. Participants were interviewed with open-end questions that address their beliefs regarding ICTs as resources for families to participate in the education of their children. The following questions were used as inducers: how can parents use ICTs to get involved in their children's education? What role can ICTs play in favoring the involvement of families in education? And what actions can teachers carry out to foster parents' ITCs use as tools to participate in their children's education?

Validity and Credibility | To strengthen the rigor of our findings, we resorted to several techniques, which is an important aspect in qualitative studies (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). We use a method for comparison of categories derived from the analysis of different fragments of the interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and we triangulated the analysis of the data. To do so, we contrasted the coding carried out by the three participating researchers (Creswell, 2009; Quinn, 2015). Credibility was verified by reviewing the analyses with the teachers who participated in the study (Flick, 2007), with whom we shared the findings, and asked them for their feedback which was retrieved to develop the categories. Finally, we used a theoretical triangulation to analyze the theory-based results (Flick, 2007; Quinn, 2015).

Procedure |The objective of the project was presented to the school authorities and we requested their authorization to have access to the teachers of their institutions. For the interviews, we sought the voluntary and informed participation of the teachers, and we guaranteed the confidentiality of the information collected. The interviews were conducted by two researchers participating in the project in a space assigned by the school authorities; said interviews lasted forty minutes approximately. These sessions were recorded with the teachers' consent. We obtained the ethical permission of the Research Commission of the Technological Institute of Sonora and, lastly, we gave the teachers a manual with recommendations on how to promote the effective use of ICTs by families as to guarantee the benefit they would obtain by participating in the study.

Information Analysis |The content analysis was conducted by means of an inductive method, through which an open coding was first developed, and secondly, a selective coding (Thomas, 2003). First, the answers of the participants were transcribed and then processed by using the Atlas.ti 7 software. Second, the researchers identified fragments of the text and codified them in an intuitive way without using theoretical assumptions (open codes), besides prioritizing the expressions directly provided by the participants. Third, we started the process of axial coding and obtained its validity by comparing the codes generated by the researchers; we kept those that contained agreements from three researchers. Then, jointly, the researchers reduced the categories to the 23 centers for the analysis and the writing of the results. Finally, we created a model of the main

categories, subcategories and relationships between them and organized the codes in two levels in each thematic axis.

RESULTS

Teachers' beliefs about the role ICTs play in the participation of family in education | Teachers consider that families can use ICTs to promote their children's school achievement since their use allow them to learn about effective parenting practices, to communicate with the teacher and to stimulate the child's motivation to study and to learn the school curriculum (See Figure 1).
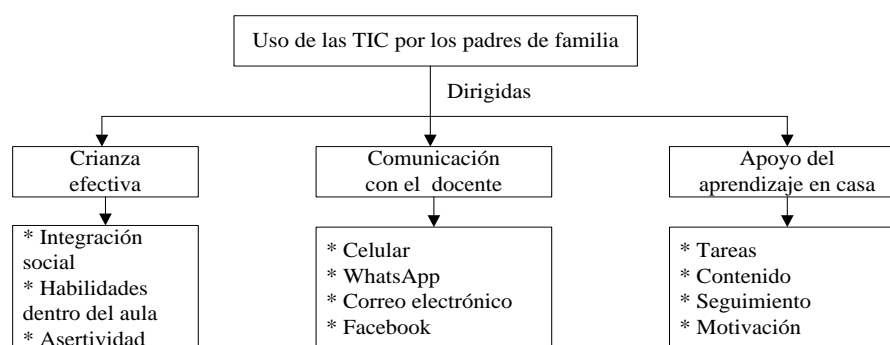
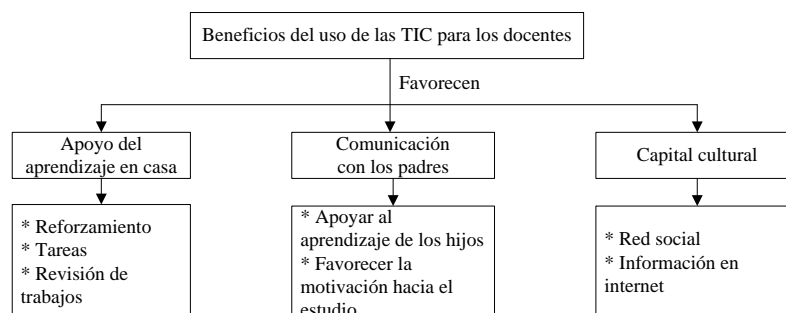**Figure 1.** Teachers' beliefs about parent's ICTs use.

In regard to parenting, teachers consider that ICTs can be used by families to acquire knowledge about their children's socio-emotional development and learn about effective parenting practices. Regarding the role of ICTs as a support for learning, teachers view these tools as instruments that allow parents to help their children with their homework and to promote aspects that have to do with academic performance, such as curiosity and motivation to learn. Teachers also claim that ICTs are resources that must be managed by families to maintain close communication with their children's teachers:

> Teacher 2. First of all, parents that cannot get an interview with their children's teacher in person can always resort to cell phones to get close to him/her and establish communication. Besides, the technological device aforementioned, when used by the head of the family, helps him/her keep track, from home, of his/her children's daily school assignments, as well as the content of the school program being seen with the children at that moment.

> Teacher 4. As motivation. Seeing that their parents are interested in their education is very important for children and this motivates them in keeping up progressing. Nowadays, it is very important that the head of the family make use of these tools in order to give more support to their children.

Teachers benefit from using ICTs

Teachers consider that families that use ICTs benefit their teaching practices by strengthening not only the learning of competencies demanded by the curriculum but also the family-school communication regarding academic achievements and difficulties; it also contributes to increasing the students' cultural capital (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Teachers' beliefs about parents' ICTs use.

According to teachers, ICTs reinforce learning at home which is reflected in better quality school assignments, greater motivation for learning and higher academic performance of the students. Moreover, teachers claim that ICTs helped them communicate with families to address their children's learning and behavior; this has lead to a greater synergy between parents and teachers. On the other hand, teachers believe that families expand the cultural capital of students through ICTs and, hence, develop their learning:

> Teacher 10. When assigned a task, parents can use the Internet to seek the information that is needed. Moreover, they can encourage their children to watch educational videos or access information that increases their motivation to learn.

> Teacher 7. We currently have a Facebook group and we use it mainly to give details on the assignments, clear out doubts, make suggestions about their children' education, and I even add complementary activities. In a certain way, I always try to follow up on every student and detect his/her areas of opportunities and report this to the parents so they can also address their child's educational progress or failure quickly.

Strategies used by teachers to foster the use of ICTs in families

Teachers' strategies focus primarily on encouraging parents to use ICTs to communicate with them about their children and their school activities (See Figure 3).
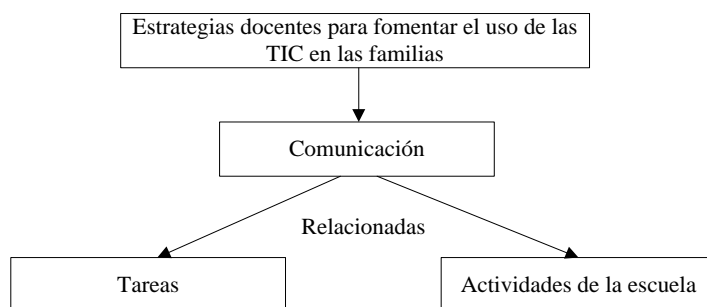
Figure 3. Getting the head of the family involved in ICTs.

Teachers mention that they promote the use of ICTs among parents by communicating with them through social networks, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, to address issues related to homework assignments, suggestions to improve learning and information about school activities:

> Teacher 1. We have a WhatsApp group. On the first meeting I give them my phone number since it is very important for them to have it if ever they have any doubts, or if they want to get in touch in case any situation that arises needs to be attended immediately, since it is very useful to make announcements and to have immediate communication with all the parents through Facebook. Sometimes parents get in touch with me to talk about matters related to homework, doubts and suggestions.
>
> Teacher 5. I believe that communication is benefited by the contact between parents and teachers, since currently, my students' parents are very young; they could be my children and their children, my grand-children. Therefore, I had to learn how to use WhatsApp. We have a group WhatsApp through which we communicate. I post the homework, even if my students have copied it in class, I send it back to them through this means; if there is any pending matter, I notify them; I feel that the flow of communication is much better now than then.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study we have analyzed the teachers' beliefs about the use of ICTs that foster or limit the utilization of these tools by families to participate in the education of their children. In a manner consistent with what is reported in the literature on this subject, we have identified some teachers' beliefs that contribute to the use of ICTs by families (Machado-Casas *et al.*, 2011; Olmstead, 2013; Pittman, 2008; Walsh *et al.*, 2014). More specifically, we have found that teachers view ICTs as resources that parents can use to promote their children's school achievement, to improve aspects related to parenting, to communicate with the school and to support the learning of the school curriculum.

Likewise, teachers believe that these resources make their teaching practices more efficient (Olmstead, 2011; Thompson, 2012; Walsh *et al.,* 2014), since they consider that technologies, when managed effectively by families, expand the cultural capital of the students, increase the support

for learning at home and make communication between teachers and parents more fluid.

However, there are also some teachers' beliefs that hinder the effective use of ICTs by parents to participate in the education of their children; for example, we notice that teachers do not think that families can use ICTs to support school management in aspects such as decision making, volunteering programs and community resource management (Valdés and Sánchez, 2016; Valdés *et al.,* 2014). Along these lines, we can infer from the teachers' answers that the strategies they use to promote the parents' utilization of ICTs are limited. In general, their actions focused solely on enhancing the communication with parents regarding school assignments and activities.

The findings from this study suggest relevant lines of intervention to promote the families' participation. In this sense, we notice that it is feasible to take advantage of the teachers' favorable beliefs towards the use of ICTs by families to generate actions aimed at effectively integrating these tools in elementary schools (Machado-Casas *et al.,* 2011; Olmstead, 2013; Pittman, 2008; Walsh *et al.*, 2014). However, our findings also show that it would be convenient to raise awareness among the teachers about the possibilities of parents using these technologies to participate more actively in school management. Furthermore, it is important to train teachers in strategies that allow them to promote the use of ICT in families in order for parents to support their children's learning; this is essential since there is evidence of the impact of family participation on teaching practices (Barnett *et al.*, 2010; Knopf & Swick, 2008; LaRocque, Kleiman & Darling, 2011; Park & Holloway, 2013).

Finally, our study provides useful data for programs that intend to integrate ICTs in elementary education, particularly those that seek to transform them into resources, so families become efficiently involved in education. However, the results presented here should be interpreted with some caution since our research dealt solely with the teachers' insight on the topic at hand. It is necessary to address this topic from the perspective of the other stakeholders involved in the use of ICTs in education, such as principals, students and parents.

It should also be noted that this study focuses on urban public-school teachers who attend middle class students. This implies that the findings should be taken with reservation as a comprehensive framework of the beliefs of teachers working in rural schools or with vulnerable populations about the use of ICTs by families. Therefore, it is necessary to undertake studies on teachers who work in rural communities or communities of high social marginalization to obtain information relevant to this sector.

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