

The Family in the Support System for the Child's Smooth Transition to Primary School and the Successful Adaptation

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Abstract – The current concept of children's readiness to enter school also assumes the school's and family's readiness to create optimal conditions for children's adaptation into the new school environment. The presented study analyzes the readiness of parents of future and beginning pupils in relation to the successful adaptation of pupils to the beginning of systematic education. Regarding the issue, pedagogical research experimentally verified the impact of the proposed activities on increasing the pedagogical readiness of parents and the school readiness of children in the home environment. By carrying out the research and subsequent statistical analysis of the data, it was confirmed that the implementation of the activities had an impact on the level of adaptation of beginning pupils from the perspective of parents.

Keywords – Future/beginning pupil, child's transition from kindergarten to primary school, role of parents of future/beginning pupils.

1. Introduction

During the child's transition and entry into the primary school, parents represent the so-called managers of the family educational environment.

The ability of parents to successfully face the changes and challenges associated with the given period affects the child's success even when starting systematic education in primary school [26]. The author [23] consider the successful start of primary education to be important because the problem-free schooling of the child subsequently influences his future academic results and achievements even at higher levels of education.

A child's ability to successfully adapt to a new environment, to the beginning of systematic education, is conditioned by determinants, among which we can include, among other things, the achievement of an adequate level of school readiness (the ability to handle the demands of the school). There are many opinions on its criteria in the literature. An inspiring view is presented by [11] who emphasizes that for beginning pupils is important pay attention mainly to their personal development, personal competence. The author perceives personality competence as an integral characteristic of the personality of a future pupil, consisting of the individual-psychological component (personality specifics, its individuality, e.g. a child's self-evaluation, the level of intellectual abilities), the motivational-value component (school motivation – relationship to knowledge, curiosity), the communicative component (the ability to establish contact with peers and adults) and the learning component – a certain level of universal learning activities (prerequisites for learning, e.g. the ability to understand and accept the teacher's instructions, to plan the course of activities (3 – 5 procedures), to be able to perform self-control in accordance with the assigned procedures, prerequisites for self-evaluation according to specified criteria.).

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A sufficiently prepared child with good support from parents and teachers can handle the demands of elementary school more easily and efficiently [1], [6], [18].

Teachers and parents of future and beginning pupils have a significant role in the development of the mentioned areas of competence [12], [22], [24]. It is essential that both parties – the family and the school perceive responsibility for their roles and their importance in the education and development of the child [17], [5]. The active participation of parents with the teacher and the creation of their partnership has a positive effect on achieving academic success of students at school, improving their behavior, self-regulation and supporting mental health [17].

In order for parents to be partners of the school and be able to cooperate effectively and provide their children with adequate support during the transition to school and in the process of adaptation, they need to be prepared for this.

2. Parents' Preparedness for the Period of Child's Transition

The importance of the partnership between parents and teachers in the child's support system during the transition from kindergarten to primary school is repeatedly confirmed by research [13]. Parental preparedness can be divided into the following areas: material preparedness, personal preparedness (self-education, cultivation of parental attitudes), socio-legal preparedness, psychological (controlling emotional manifestations and ways of behaving, but also the ability to respond correctly and appropriately to various life situations) and pedagogical readiness (a set of knowledge about the child's development, upbringing, education and development process) [19]. For the achievement of a successful adaptation process, socio-emotional support from parents, their sensitive reactions, avoidance of stressful control and criticism, and support for development are of great benefit cognitive stimulations [25], [27]. [8], [21], consider the family involvement like the strongest predictor of a child's positive results at school.

In connection with the need to increase the psychological and pedagogical readiness of pupil's parents and encourage their participation in the educational process, several studies point to the need to implement innovative strategies for their mutual cooperation with the teacher. It can be, for example, the use of various programs aimed at shaping parental competences, in our case the ability of parents to navigate the difficult period of transition of children to school, to know how to create an optimal home environment for their children and to provide support.

3. Strategies for Supporting Children and Parents in the Process of the Smooth Transition

As part of supporting the school readiness of children in individual areas according to [11] in a family environment and at the same time increasing the pedagogical and preparedness of parents of future pupil, we prepared a set of ten intentional activities. The assembled activities created space for strengthening the child's self-evaluation, awareness of their own positive characteristics, reasons for praise and ideas about school education during the summer holidays. Children performed activities either independently or in a joint activity with a parent through a social game. In this way, they consolidated the acquired knowledge and ideas about the future role of a pupil at school. Part of the support strategies in the transitional period was to increase the pedagogical readiness of parents through information posters. Their content consisted of a set of eight written materials on the issue of a child entering school. The introductory posters included information about the changes that await the child and his parents during the transition to primary school, what role is played by the period of adaptation at the beginning of schooling, what a beginning schoolchild may experience during this period, what adaptation difficulties may arise, their manifestations and potential causes. The written materials also included selected prevention strategies with an emphasis on the possibilities of parental participation, the meaning and content of cooperation with the teacher, the implementation of home preparation and a set of general recommendations for parents of school-age children. Informational posters were sent to parents during the summer holidays, before the children started the first grade of primary school.

4. Methodology

With the theoretical points and empirical findings so far, the goal of the research activity is to find out the impact of a set of activities on the level of child's adaptation at the beginning of schooling from the perspective of parents.

We formulated hypotheses for the research:

H1: We assume that in the first measurement (September, after entry into the 1st grade) there will be a statistically significantly higher level of adaptation of the pupils of the experimental group from the perspective of the parents.

H2: We assume that in the repeated measurement (December) the level of adaptation of the pupils of the experimental group will be statistically significantly higher from the parents' point of view.

The selection of the research sample was available, it consisted of 85 future pupils at the end of kindergarten, consequently 85 beginning pupils at primary school. Due to the research design, the sample was divided into an experimental group with the implementation of the set of activities and a control group without the implementation of activities. The methodological framework of the research activity was an experiment, the starting point of which was the application of selected activities and posters for parents aimed at stimulating the readiness of parents and children in the family environment.

For research activity was used a translated and modified questionnaire for parents: Diagnostic screening of a child's adaptation to school according to [4] the questionnaire is structured into six items, which determine the level of effort and the child's success in completing school tasks; his independence; the mood with which he goes to school; relationships with classmates and assessment of the child's level of adaptation. Respondents chose one of the options for each item according to the characteristics of the child. Individual statements were assigned points, the sum of which expressed the student's level of adaptation. Complete adaptation (highest level) is defined for the range of points from 30 to 19, incomplete adaptation (medium level) includes points from 18 to 13, incorrect adaptation (low level) is defined by less than 12 points (inclusive). The questionnaire was administered to the parents of pupils repeatedly, which made it possible to monitor the dynamics of the pupils' adaptation from the parents' point of view. We statistically processed the obtained research data using the Wilcoxon two-sample test [15].

A - research on the level of the pupils' adaptation from the perspective of parents in the first measurement

After entering the values, we calculated the value of the test statistic $Z = 7.000$ and the probability value $p = 0.000$. Since the calculated probability value $p = 0.01$ is a small number, we reject the hypothesis at the level of significance and accept the alternative hypothesis, i.e. j. the observed differences between the overall results of the questionnaire in the experimental group and the control group in the first measurement are statistically significant. The situation is also illustrated in Figure 1:

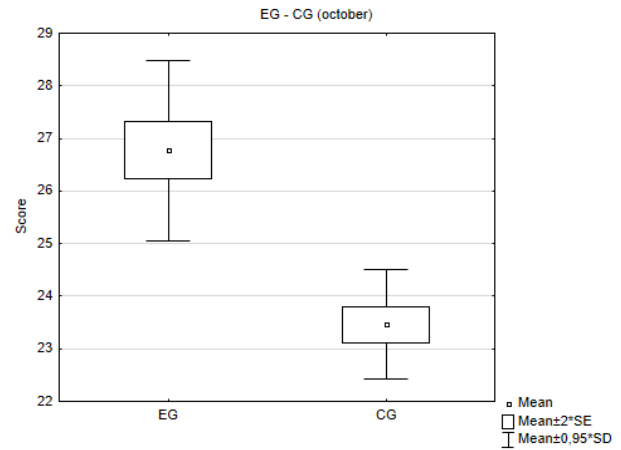


Figure 1. Average values of the total results of the questionnaire for parents in the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG) in the first measurement

In the first measurement, we found a higher average number of points for the respondents of the experimental group (26.77 points) than for the respondents of the control group (23.46 points). Within the average number of points, there is a 3.31 point difference between the groups. According to parents' opinions, the level of adaptation was better for the respondents of the experimental group, who reached the highest level expressed as full adaptation. The maximum number of points of the respondents of the control group did not reach the level of the minimum number of points of the respondents of the experimental group in the first measurement. Considering the confirmed differences between the experimental and control groups and the number of points in each group, we can consider the level of adaptation of the respondents of the experimental group to be statistically significantly higher compared to the respondents of the control group.

B - research on the level of the pupils' adaptation from the perspective of parents in a repeated measure

Analogously, we determined the statistical significance of the differences between the overall results of the questionnaire for parents in the experimental and control groups in a repeated measurement that was carried out in December. After entering the values, we calculated the value of the test statistic $Z = 7.607$ and the probability value $p = 0.000$, t. j. the observed differences between the overall results of the questionnaire in the experimental and control groups in the repeated measurement are statistically significant. The situation is shown graphically in Figure 2:

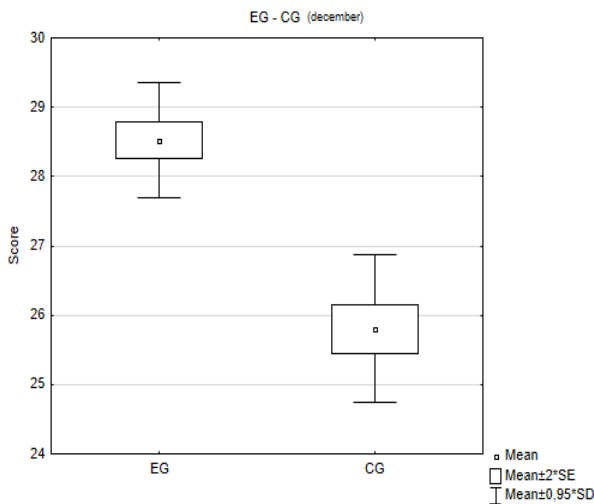


Figure 2. Average values of the total results of the questionnaire for parents in the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG) in repeated measurement

The average number of points in the experimental group was 28.52 points and in the control group 25.80 points, which means a point difference of 2.72 points. The detected, statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups points to a higher level of adaptation of the respondents of the experimental group. The respondents of the control group achieved in the repeated measurement (in December) the number of points corresponding to the result of the respondents of the experimental group in the first measurement (in October). As part of the focus on the adaptation of pupils, we can state that the level of adaptation of the respondents of the experimental group in October was reached by the respondents of the control group only in December.

5. Results and Discussion

Based on the research findings, we can conclude that hypothesis H1 has been confirmed. The differences between the overall results of the questionnaire for the parents of the respondents in the experimental group and the control group in the first measurement were statistically significant, so the level of adaptation of the respondents of the experimental group was statistically significantly higher from the parents' point of view. According to the findings from the repeated measurement, hypothesis H2 was also confirmed, in which we assumed that in the repeated measurement there would be a statistically significantly higher level of adaptation of the students of the experimental group from the parents' point of view.

This means that we can confirm the impact of a set of intentional activities for future pupils and their parents on the level of adaptation of the respondents from the parents' view.

The results of the repeated measurement show a proven long-term effect of a set of activities on the level of school adaptation. The opinions of the parents confirmed that the respondents of the experimental group were able to adapt better to the conditions of a pupil's life, to a new type of activity and to the demands associated with systematic education at school. The average number of points in the individual measurements indicated progress even among the respondents of the control group. However, they required a longer time to achieve a higher level of adaptation. From the parents' view, the respondents of the control group did not have the main indicators of successful adaptation regarding the formation of the desired behavior of the pupil, mastering the learning activity and contact with classmates. The course and success of adaptation for these pupils can potentially be threatened by the increased difficulty of situations that can trigger the emergence of adaptation difficulties requiring solutions and support from parents and teachers.

Similarly, [3] investigated the success of adaptation of beginning pupils. Based on the results, they emphasize that parents should perceive the changing needs of their child, the fulfillment of which would have a potentially positive impact on the level of their initial education. [10] advises the dissemination of written materials to the families of future pupils as tools for supporting the child's academic results.

The set of deliberate activities represented a tool for supporting the successful adaptation of beginning pupils. Similarly, [16] point to the early development of skills necessary for school education. During the transition of the child to school, it is necessary to pay attention to the support of the child in the family environment. The role of parents is specifically in the social, emotional and academic support of a beginning pupil. [2] According to [14], carrying out transition activities for children and parents has a positive effect on the adaptation of beginning pupils in the school environment. The active involvement of parents strengthens a positive approach to school and increases children's motivation to learn [7].

The lack of activities stimulating the cognitive skills and preparedness of the future pupils in the family environment leads to difficulties when entering the 1st grade and more demanding mastering of the curriculum, and worse school results [20]. According to similar results, the quality of mutual relations between parents and children affects the pupils' adaptation in school. The beginning pupils can transfer experiences from the family environment to the school environment [9]. The cognitive stimulation, a sense of well-being, adequate reactions and expressions of interest in the child are prerequisites for the successful adaptation of the beginning pupils and their better results at school.

6. Conclusion

However, from the point of view of the application of effective educational procedures by parents, it is necessary to pay individual attention to the development of their pedagogical and psychological readiness. The main reason for the need to develop these areas is that parents who do not have an adequate level of readiness before their child enters primary school, are not sufficiently familiar with the life of a beginning pupil and the changes in this period of its life, are consequently unable to apply the correct educational methods in pedagogical practice – educational methods. In order for pupils' parents to be perceived as partners in the educational process, it is necessary for them to be sufficiently prepared to fulfill their role and accompanying tasks in relation to the child's education. It is the teacher and the primary school that should participate in accepting their new role, through the application of various forms of cooperation, by implementing various activities, workshops or seminars supporting the development of individual areas of parents' readiness for their child's entry into the primary school.

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