

KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS, PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND PARENTS VIEWS ON KINDERGARTEN-SCHOOL TRANSITION

Summary

Transition from kindergarten to primary school is widely recognised as the most critical transition in the early childhood phase, as it poses several difficulties for children, families and schools (Britto, 2012) – and it clearly needs to be supported. In Hungary, kindergarten education is compulsory for all children past the age of three, for four hours a day and at six years of age it is compulsory to start school. The structure of the education system varies from country to country. Therefore school starting ages, the quality of preschool education, to the conditions of starting primary school, and the curricula vary considerably around the world (Fleisz-Gyurcsik, 2021b). The present dissertation examines how Hungarian stakeholder groups help the transition to school, because this receives little research attention in the country. Internationally, research focuses on qualitative methods. The large sample and the quantitative methodology of the present main study makes it possible to arrive at system-level insights which may be relevant outside the Hungarian context as well.

The theoretical background of the thesis covers the basic concepts, the regulation of pre-primary education and schooling in Hungary, and the differences between kindergarten and primary education in Hungary. Given the several differences between the two levels of education, a national and an international systematic literature review discuss practices to support the transition.

The research consists of two major phases: (1) interviews with participants from different groups of actors (kindergarten and primary teachers, and parents) conducted in preparation for collecting data on a large-scale; (2) the development of a detailed questionnaire based on the findings of the interviews and administered online (July to September 2021). A total of 359 kindergarten teachers and 380 primary school teachers responded, as well as 226 mothers with a child who had just completed the first grade of primary school at the time of the data collection. Analyses were run to compare the subsamples and also to identify factors that may influence participants' thinking within the sub-samples.

Overall, the results show that the actors hold different views on the main issues of transition, different interpretations of the transition from kindergarten to school, different perceptions of the factors that make the transition difficult, and different expectations of each other and of themselves during the transition period. Educators' efforts to support the transition also differ by the level of education they work at.

One of the main findings is that a major problem of the transition from kindergarten to school originates in the different views the actors involved have on this transition, with each actor group interpreting the transition issues only from their own perspective. Another issue is that the actions of the different actors are not harmonised, and the actors involved seem to have little awareness of each other's expectations or of their own and each other's tasks. This may result in not identifying the appropriate or necessary methods of support and assistance to help children and families in the transition. The main message of the findings is that during the period of kindergarten-to-school transition, there is a need to harmonise the activities of the different actors, to support the cooperation of the stakeholders, and to ensure professional communication between the actors involved.

Learning about the views of stakeholders on the transition from nursery to school is of great importance. First, the findings shed light on the direction in which it would be worthwhile to offer help to promote the work and effectiveness of educators. Second, they provide information for the design of developmental programmes at both levels, thereby helping their coordination. Third, they provide an exploration of the views of parents, which can be used as a basis to formulate arguments when communicating with them regarding the transition.