

Transition Practice from Kindergarten to Elementary School from the Perspective of Preschool Teachers and Elementary School Teachers

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The transitional practices of children from kindergarten to elementary school require careful planning and support from all parties involved. Early experiences (positive or negative) can have long-term effects on children's development, learning and academic achievements. The focus of the work, which is part of a wider research project, is on the perception of preschool teachers and elementary school teachers regarding transitional practice in the Republic of Croatia. The study aims to appraise the quality elements of the current transitional practice of children from kindergarten to elementary school and the importance of cooperation between preschool teachers and elementary school teachers to achieve this quality from the perspective of both preschool teachers and elementary school teachers. The empirical research included 228 preschool teachers and 113 elementary school teachers from the Republic of Croatia. The presented results are part of the processed quantitative data collected through an independently created questionnaire of appropriate reliability. It is observed that preschool teachers and elementary school teachers do not differ in their appraisals of transitional practice and the importance of cooperation; they appraise the current practice as mediocre, while they highly value the importance of cooperation in the context of transitional processes.

Keywords: transitional practice, preschool, elementary school, preschool teachers, elementary school teachers

Introduction

Continuity in upbringing and education, especially between preschool institutions and elementary schools, is crucial for the successful transition of children from one environment to another (Esping-Andersen 2009). Preserving continuity in approaches, methods and support for the child contributes to easier adaptation and reduces stress associated with changing the en-

vironment (Einarsdottir 2020), because in addition to changing the social context, according to the authors Visković and Višnjić Jevtić (2019), transitions between communities most often imply a change in daily activities, especially games and learning. As an important developmental moment, it requires support and continuity from preschool teachers and elementary school teachers. Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to development, which emphasizes the interaction between the various systems in which the child operates, and Vygotsky's social theory of learning, which emphasizes the importance of the context in which the child learns, provide important insights into the transition process (Vygotsky and Cole 1978; Bronfenbrenner 1979). An integrated approach to learning and child development, and coordinated programmes between kindergarten and school, are important factors for preserving continuity and facilitating the transition (OECD 2017). The transition of children from kindergarten to elementary school represents a significant moment in a child's life, which can have long-term consequences for their development and academic success (Early et al. 2001; Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, and Cox 2005; Magnuson et al. 2007). Continuity in approaches and practices and cooperation between preschool teachers and elementary school teachers are the most important factors for facilitating the transition process and supporting the child's development (Pianta et al. 1999) and ensuring the quality of transition practices (Dockett and Perry 2007; Visković 2018). Appreciation of children's abilities, possibilities and needs contributes to the quality of transitional practices.

It has been established that teachers' practices have a positive effect on children's transition by creating connections between preschool and elementary school (Schulting, Malone, and Dodge 2005). Activities aimed at developing socio-emotional skills, self-confidence, and independence help the child to cope with new challenges more easily (Dockett and Perry 2007). Understanding and support from professionals are indispensable for creating a stimulating environment and ensuring a successful transition for the child (Esping-Andersen 2009). The appraisals of preschool teachers and elementary school teachers regarding the importance of quality transition practices reflects their willingness and engagement in facilitating the transition process of a child from kindergarten to elementary school (Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta 2000). Einarsdottir, Perry, and Dockett (2008) observe that teachers' perception of their own role in transition processes is reflected in their practices. Although in more developed countries transitional practices are often perceived as adequate, in some less developed countries, such as Mexico, preschool teachers and elementary school teachers point to a weak con-

nection and rare mutual cooperation, and to the fact that practices in the kindergarten-school relationship are not implemented (Urbina-Garcia 2019).

The National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education (Odluka o donošenju nacionalnog kurikulumuma za rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje 2015) and its expanded version from 2017 provide guidelines for supporting quality transitional practice in Croatia (Odluka o donošenju nacionalnog kurikulumuma za rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje 2015). Curriculums that integrate approaches and contain clear goals and activities for creating an environment that fosters children's transition to school are crucial for ensuring continuity and quality in transitional practice (Prelogović 2005). Despite the importance of this process, and the implementation of transitional practices through different approaches, research on transitional practices in Croatia is rare, which emphasizes the need for further research and pointing out the importance of cooperation between kindergartens and elementary schools.

Research Methodology

The study was carried out as part of an extensive research project of a combined research approach (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2011; Creswell 2014) on the cooperation of preschool teachers and elementary school teachers in the processes of transition from kindergarten to elementary school, which is currently being carried out in Croatia. The presented results are part of processed quantitative data collected through a survey questionnaire, which was filled out by 228 preschool teachers of early and preschool age and 113 elementary school teachers from the Republic of Croatia.

The fundamental goal of the presented quantitative research study is to appraise the quality elements of the current transitional practice of children from kindergartens to elementary schools and the importance of cooperation between preschool teachers and elementary school teachers in achieving its quality, from the perspective of both preschool teachers and elementary school teachers. The fundamental goal is elaborated through the following research tasks:

1. To examine the perspectives of preschool teachers of children of preschool age and of elementary school teachers about the quality elements of the current transition practice of children from kindergarten to elementary school.
2. Examine the agreement with the statement *Cooperation between pre-*

school teachers and elementary school teachers is necessary during the transition process of a child from kindergarten to elementary school.

Based on the defined goals and the research tasks, the following research hypotheses were set:

- H1 Preschool teachers and elementary school teachers do not differ in their appraisals of the quality elements of transitional practice from kindergarten to elementary school.
- H2 Preschool teachers and elementary school teachers estimate that the quality elements of transition practice from kindergarten to elementary school is mediocre.
- H3 Preschool teachers and elementary school teachers do not differ in their appraisals of the importance of cooperation between preschool teachers and elementary school teachers during the transition process of a child from kindergarten to elementary school.
- H4 Preschool teachers and elementary school teachers note the importance of mutual cooperation when children transition from kindergarten to elementary school.

Sample

The sample was convenient and included 228 preschool teachers and 113 elementary school teachers from the Republic of Croatia. Respondents from most Croatian counties were included in the survey: Bjelovar-Bilogora, Brod-Posavina, Dubrovnik-Neretva, Zagreb, Karlovac, Koprivnica-Križevac, Krapina-Zagorje, Lika-Senj, Međimurje, Osijek-Baranja, Primorje-Gorski Kotar, Sisak-Moslavina, Split-Dalmatia, Šibenik-Knin, Varaždin, Virovitica-Podravina, Vukovar-Srijem, Zadar, Zagreb counties. The sample is not uniform concerning gender and includes 227 (99.6%) female preschool teachers and one (0.4%) male preschool teacher, and 111 (98.2%) female elementary school teachers and 2 (1.8%) male elementary school teachers, which was expected if the specificity of the type of occupation is taken into account. The age and work experience of preschool teachers and elementary school teachers involved in the research ranged widely, and the data are presented in table 1.

The majority of preschool teachers involved in the research had a higher professional qualification (completed a two- or three-year study) – 160 of them (70.2%), while the majority of elementary school teachers had a higher professional qualification (a four- or five-year study) – 90 of them (79.6%) (table 2).

Table 1 Sample Characteristics: Age and Length of Service of Respondents

Respondents	Preschool teachers				Elementary school teachers			
	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	22	62	41.30	9.52	28	64	46.16	9.14
Length of service	1	42	14.78	9.85	1	41	20.92	10.15

Table 2 Sample Characteristics: Vocational Education of the Respondents

Vocational education	Preschool teachers		Elementary school teachers	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Secondary vocational education	3	1.3	0	0
Higher vocational education	160	70.2	21	18.6
University degree	61	26.8	90	79.6
Professional spec.	2	0.9	1	0.9
M.Sc.	2	0.9	0	0
Ph.D.Sc.	0	0	1	0.9

Instrument

For the purposes of the entire research project, a questionnaire called *Transition of Children from Kindergarten to Elementary School* was created, given that none of the existing ones could fully answer the set goal and provide a thorough insight into the researched phenomenon. The questionnaire is the same for preschool teachers and elementary school teachers and consists of 7 parts. In the introductory part of the questionnaire, the purpose of the research and the research procedure were explained to the research participants. The first part of the questionnaire refers to demographic data: gender, age, highest professional qualification, length of service in the institution (kindergarten/elementary school), profession, county, etc. The next four parts of the questionnaire were designed to collect data on different forms of cooperation between kindergartens and schools in the context of transition processes.

The research presented in this paper utilized and analysed data collected through the sixth section of the questionnaire, about the general appraisals of the respondents about the current transitional practice of children from kindergarten to elementary school.

The internal consistency of the sixth part of the questionnaire is extremely high, as indicated by the calculated Cronbach alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.953$). It consists of 6 items with a five-point Likert-type scale that allowed respondents to determine the degree of agreement with the statements related

to the appraisal of the quality of transitional practice from kindergarten to school.

Data Collection Procedure

In 2023, the Committee for Ethical Assessment of Research of the University of Jurije Dobrila in Pula gave a positive opinion on the realization of this research. Data collection was carried out on an appropriately selected sample of preschool teachers preschool age and elementary school teachers in the Republic of Croatia (except Istria County) during a two-day hybrid national expert meeting organized by the Education Agency: The Relationship between Contemporary Theory and Contemporary Educational Practice in the Field of Early and Preschool Education, held on 27 and 28 September 2023, at the Tribune of the City of Zagreb and online through the ZOOM platform, and through preschool teacher and elementary school teacher groups through the social network Facebook during January 2024. The survey was anonymous and voluntary.

Data Analysis

The collected data were processed with the help of statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 26. An analysis of the main components was performed, and descriptive statistics and non-parametric tests were used to check the relationship (difference) of the examined variables.

Results

The teachers' opinions of the current transition practice by preschool teachers and elementary school teachers in Croatia was examined through 4 statements for which the respondents appraised the degree of agreement on a Likert-type scale (1 – do not agree at all, 5 – completely agree).

An analysis of the main components was carried out on the stated claims. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test ($KMO = 0.835$) and the result of Bartlett's sphericity test ($\chi^2 = 1537.774$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$) indicated the suitability of the correlation matrix for analysis.

According to the Kaiser-Guttman criterion and Cattell's scree-plot, one component was singled out, explaining 87.799% of the common variance. Table 3 shows the results of the conducted analysis (saturation, communalities, eigenvalues and percentage of explained variance for each component).

The calculated Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.953$) indicates the high reliability of the scale.

Table 3 Appraisal of the Quality Elements of Current Transitional Practice: Results of Principal Component Analysis

Item	(1)	(2)
The current transitional practice of a child from kindergarten to elementary school is adapted to the child's capabilities.	0.96	0.93
The current transition practice of a child from kindergarten to elementary school is adapted to the child's needs.	0.94	0.88
The current transitional practice of a child from kindergarten to elementary school is adapted to the child's abilities.	0.94	0.88
The current transition practice of a child from kindergarten to elementary school is satisfactory.	0.91	0.82
Characteristic root	3.51	
Percentage of explained variances	87.80	

Notes Column headings are as follows: (1) component, (2) communalities.

Table 4 Appraisal of the Quality Elements of Current Transitional Practice: Arithmetic Mean of All Respondents' Answers

<i>N</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
341	1.00	5.00	2.83	1.01

As can be seen (table 4), the respondents' answers concerning the statements are in the range from 1 to 5, where 1 refers to the appraisal of the examined quality elements of the transitional practice as unsatisfactory, and 5, while the arithmetic mean of the answers is 2.83.

In the next step, it was examined whether preschool teachers and elementary school teachers differ in their appraisals of the quality elements of the current transitional practice. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the variable *Quality elements of the current transitional practice* is not normally distributed ($K-S = 0.133$, $df = 341$, $p < 0.001$), so the Mann Whitney U test was used. The test results are shown in table 5. They indicate that there was no statistically significant difference between preschool teachers and elementary school teachers in the appraisal of the quality elements of current transitional practice (Mann-Whitney $U = 11917.500$; $p = 0.256$). Thus, the hypothesis (H_1) can be accepted.

Descriptive statistical procedures, calculating the median and interquartile range, aimed to determine the appraisal of the quality elements of transitional practice by preschool teachers and elementary school teachers. The obtained results are presented in table 6.

On a five-point Likert-type scale (1 – I do not agree at all, 5 – I completely agree) the agreement with the statement 'Cooperation between preschool

Table 5 Difference between Preschool Teachers and Elementary School Teachers in Appraisals of the Quality of Current Transitional Practice (Mann Whitney U-Test)

Category	<i>N</i>	$\bar{R}$	ΣR	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Preschool teachers	228	175.23	39952.50	11917.500	0.256
Elementary school teachers	113	162.46	18358.50		
Total	341				

Table 6 Appraisal of the Quality Elements of the Current Transitional Practice of Preschool Teachers' and Elementary School Teachers' Answers: Median (*C*) and Interquartile Range (Q_{3-1})

Category	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	<i>C</i>	Q_{3-1}
Preschool teachers	228	1.00	5.00	3.00	1.50
Elementary school teachers	113	1.00	5.00	3.00	1.25

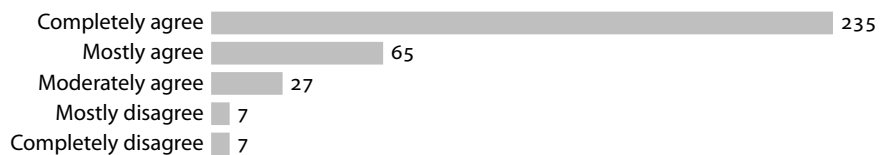


Figure 1 Necessity of Cooperation between Preschool Teachers and Elementary School Teachers during the Transition of a Child from Kindergarten to Elementary School

teachers and elementary school teachers is necessary during the transition of a child from kindergarten to elementary school' was appraised.

From the descriptive indicators (table 6) it is evident that preschool teachers ($C = 3.00$; $Q_{3-1} = 1.50$) and elementary school teachers ($C = 3.00$; $Q_{3-1} = 1.25$) appraise the level of quality elements of the current transitional practice as mediocre, which proves the hypothesis (H_2).

The results shown graphically (figure 1) indicate that the majority of respondents, 235 of them (68.9%), completely agree that the cooperation of preschool teachers and elementary school teachers is necessary during the transition process of a child from kindergarten to school, while 65 (19.1%) mostly agree with the statement. Only 14 (4.2%) respondents generally or mostly disagree with the fact that the cooperation of preschool teachers and elementary school teachers is necessary during the transition of children from kindergarten to school.

The Mann-Whitney U test examined whether preschool teachers and elementary school teachers differed in their appraisal of this claim. The obtained results presented tabularly (table 7) indicate that no statistically significant

Table 7 Differences in the Attitudes of Preschool Teachers and Elementary School Teachers about the Necessity of Cooperation for the Transition Process: Mann Whitney U-Test

Category	<i>N</i>	$\bar{R}$	ΣR	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Preschool teachers	228	168.95	38520.00	12414.000	0.503
Elementary school teachers	113	175.14	19791.00		
Total	341				

Table 8 The Importance of the Cooperation of Preschool Teachers and Elementary School Teachers for the Transition from Kindergarten to School

Category	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	<i>C</i>	Q_{3-1}
Preschool teachers	228	1.00	5.00	5.00	1.00
Elementary school teachers	113	1.00	5.00	5.00	1.00

result was obtained (Mann-Whitney $U = 12414.000$; $p = 0.503$) and that the views of preschool teachers and elementary school teachers on the importance of their cooperation for the transitional processes from kindergarten to school do not differ. Thus, the hypothesis (H_3) can be accepted.

Based on the graphic indicators (figure 1) and the calculated descriptive indicators presented in table 8, it is evident that preschool teachers ($C = 5.00$; $Q_{3-1} = 1.00$) and elementary school teachers ($C = 5.00$; $Q_{3-1} = 1.00$) to a very large extent agree that the cooperation of preschool teachers and elementary school teachers is necessary during the process of a child's transition from kindergarten to elementary school. Thus, the hypothesis (H_4) is proven.

Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that preschool teachers and elementary school teachers do not differ in their appraisals of the quality elements of transitional practice and the importance of their cooperation during these processes. The appraisals of preschool teachers and elementary school teachers about the importance of quality transition practice is very important for the transition between kindergarten and school because it reflects the willingness of practitioners to facilitate this process (Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta 2000), and shapes their approach to the realization of the practice itself (Einarsdottir, Perry, and Dockett 2008). For the implementation of transitional practice, it is important that preschool teachers and elementary school teachers are aware of their role (Einarsdottir, Perry, and Dockett 2008), and understand the importance of relationships and cooperation, which enables a better understanding of the relationship between two educational institutions.

Research shows that the perception of preschool teachers and elementary school teachers about the quality of transitional practice differs in different countries (Urbina-Garcia 2019). Moir and Johnson (2021) point to the importance of transitions and changes in a child's daily life, emphasizing the need for thoughtful planning of the transition from kindergarten to school, in which different experts who are part of interdisciplinary teams participate. According to Puccioni, Froiland, and Moeyaert (2020), preschool teachers contribute to this by encouraging parents to cooperate, which supports the child's transition to elementary school, which is related to the child's positive academic achievement and prosocial behaviour, and negatively related to behavioural difficulties.

The surveyed preschool teachers and elementary school teachers from Croatia rate their current transitional practice as average. Although The National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education (Odluka o donošenju nacionalnog kurikulumu za rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje 2015) provides guidelines for quality transitional practice and school programmes provide the child with an additional opportunity to acquire the necessary skills and resilience (Došen-Dobud 2001), the obtained results indicate that the current practice is far from ideal.

The findings of the research indicate the fact that both preschool teachers and elementary school teachers agree to a very large extent that their mutual cooperation is necessary during the child's transition from kindergarten to elementary school. This indicates that the main participants in these processes are aware of the significance of their role, given that their cooperation is key to facilitating the transition process and supporting the child's development (Pianta et al. 1999; Prelogović 2005) and ensures the quality of transitional practices (Dockett and Perry 2007; Visković 2018). In other words, the obtained findings suggest that preschool teachers and elementary school teachers should improve the transitional practice that they characterized as average in quality through richer and more successful cooperation, through the creation of a stimulating environment for the realization of quality transitional practices (Esping-Andersen 2009), which would contribute to empowering children and making it easier for them to cope with new challenges (Dockett and Perry 2007).

The research results of Puccioni, Froiland, and Moeyaert (2020) highlight the importance of ensuring a quality transition from family to kindergarten through the use of transition practices that support collaboration with parents and create uninterrupted continuity between home and kindergarten, and later with school.

Conclusion

The transition of children from kindergarten to elementary school is an important process that requires careful planning and support from all involved participants (Soenens et al. 2005; OECD 2017; Visković 2018). The research showed that preschool teachers and elementary school teachers are aware of the importance of quality transitional practice and mutual cooperation in facilitating the transition process of children from kindergarten to elementary school. Their appraisals of the quality of transition practice can significantly impact the transition's success, suggesting the need for further improvement through stronger cooperation and the creation of a stimulating environment for children. This research provides a basis for further consideration and implementation of strategies that will improve transition practice in the Croatian context. In this connection new research questions are opened, related to a more thorough investigation of the current cooperation between preschool teachers and elementary school teachers in the context of ensuring accessibility between kindergarten and school in Croatia and adapting the child to the school environment. In this regard, it would be important to determine the predictors that contribute to the implementation of good transitional practices in the Croatian context, taking into account cooperation with parents. A qualitative approach would enable a deeper insight into the perspective of preschool teachers and elementary school teachers in the context of the transition processes from kindergarten to school.

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Praksa na preходу iz vrtca v osnovno šolo z vidika vzgojiteljev/-ic in učiteljev/-ic

Prakse na preходу otrok iz vrtca v osnovno šolo zahtevajo skrbno načrtovanje in podporo vseh vpletenih. Zgodnje izkušnje (pozitivne ali negativne) imajo lahko dolgoročne učinke na otrokov razvoj, učenje in kasnejše akademske dosežke. Poudarek prispevka, ki je del širšega raziskovalnega projekta, je na percepciji vzgojiteljev/-ic in učiteljev/-ic o preходу otrok iz vrtca v osnovno šolo v Republiki Hrvaški. Namen raziskave je presoja elementov kakovosti trenutne prakse preхода otrok iz vrtca v osnovno šolo in pomena sodelovanja med vzgojitelji/-cami ter učitelji/-cami za doseganje njegove kakovosti z vidika z vidika vzgojiteljev/-ic in učiteljev/-ic. V empirično raziskavo je bilo vključenih 228 vzgojiteljic in 113 učiteljic iz Republike Hrvaške. Predstavljeni rezultati so del pridobljenih kvantitativnih podatkov, zbranih z vprašalnikom, oblikovanim v ta namen. Pridobljeni podatki kažejo, da se vzgojitelji/-ce in učitelji/-ce v oceni tranzicijske prakse in pomena sodelovanja ne razlikujejo, sedanjó prakso ocenjujejo kot povprečno, visoko pa cenijo pomen sodelovanja v kontekstu tranzicijskih procesov.

Ključne besede: prehod iz vrtca v osnovno šolo, vrtec, osnovna šola, vzgojitelji/-ce, učitelji/-ce