

Adaptation of the child in the first grade: Perception of parents and teachers

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ABSTRACT

In the process of adapting children to school nowadays, except school, the family of the child who starts primary school, also has an important role. How children adapt to school and how much school-family cooperation helps is one of the most discussed issues by educational institutions and by the parents of the children. This happens taking into consideration that children are different and each one of them may have dissimilar difficulties in adapting to school and for this issue, the opinions of the parents are important, but also of the teachers on the other hand.

This research aimed to extract the most accurate and concrete data on how children adapt to first grade, looking at the perceptions of parents and teachers as well as how school-family cooperation helps in the adaptation of the child in primary school. Since this time is more stressful for teachers, as well as for parents because the child, in addition to start adaptation, also starts education at school.

In this research the mixed method, quantitative and qualitative research approach was used. Questionnaires based on the Likert scale, as well as open-ended questions and interviews were used as data collection tools. Interviews were conducted with first grade teachers and questionnaires were completed by parents whose children are in the first grade. The study was conducted in four schools in the municipality of Vushtrri with a total of 220 parents of children attending the first grade and 10 teachers who teach in the first grade.

Quantitative data analysis was done using SPSS statistical package, version 26, while qualitative data analysis was done through thematic analysis.

Keywords: school adaptation, teacher perception, parent perception, school-family cooperation, first grade, first grade child.

Introduction

We are living in an era of major adjustments that are taking place in education reforms in many countries of the world, including Kosovo. The changes that are being made are mainly in the Kosovo Curriculum, one of them is the involvement of parents in the school life of the child, where parents began to become more interested in their children's school life. Parents, seeing their importance and impact on the quality and achievement of their children, began with their involvement in their child's school life, but they were not helpful to their children in adaptation to the school environment and this is common mostly to the first-graders. Seeing that children find it difficult to adapt to the school environment, especially in the first grade, I decided to do this research regarding the perceptions of parents and teachers about the adaptation of children in the first grade. According to (Gera, 2015), education, an important link in the education of generations, seeks more and more to improve, develops and enriches in topics, needs and necessities for the benefit of the children's education. The educational needs of our schools have emerged as a result of major social, economic and political changes which has led to their conception and direction. In Kosovo, the changes that have been made in the school curriculum require parents to be included in the school and this is necessary for the first-graders. All these are provided in the Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF), which is a document drafted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, more specifically according to (MASHT, 2004) parents should be an integral part of education and communicate with the school on an ongoing basis in order to be informed of all important actions at school. In order to be successful, schools must be supported by the community. The school should be open to society and should strive to increase parental involvement in school decision-making. This will include the establishment of a parent council at the school, municipal and central level to

represent the interests of parents in the education system. The current law on primary and secondary education defines parental rights as follows:

- It establishes good cooperation between students, parents, schools, institutions and workplaces to ensure that their children will be educated in accordance with this law.
- One way to present complaints to the teacher, the school principal, the municipality and the MEST regarding the quality of education.
- It creates a guide for school services and staff and participation in school council election. This cooperation of the school with the parents of the children is no longer a problem because it can be achieved through different forms of cooperation. According to (ZUNA Deva & bashkautorët, 2009), the forms can be direct and indirect. In Kosovo, some studies have been done related to the adaptation of children in the first grade, but we do not have enough studies regarding the perceptions of parents and teachers about the adaptation of the child in the first grade and the school-family cooperation for the adaptation of the first-graders. Regarding school-family cooperation, various studies have been done, among which it is said that the parents of the child in school should definitely cooperate with the child's school because parents have an impact on children in the way that these children will adapt to school (Nitamo & Alitolppa, 2015). Also, according to (MASHT, 2017), there is a parents' council which is a representative body at the school level. Furthermore, the Core Curriculum Document for preparatory class and primary education supports: parents - in tracking the level of achievement of their children's competencies in certain time periods which is based on the knowledge, behaviors, feelings and attitudes that are manifested in different life situations, in harmony with the learning outcomes for curricular areas and competencies (MASHT, 2017). The cooperation of the school with the parents of the first-graders is very important for the child. Based on the fact that children find it difficult to adapt to school, I think that this research through the perceptions of parents and teachers will show the importance of the cooperation of the child's family with the school where the child starts school and vice versa. This cooperation, in addition to easier social adaptation of children in school, will also contribute to the quality of teaching, which will help teachers during the learning process to cope with crisis situations in the classroom or school and organize various activities with educational character and many others.

Literature Review

In order to have a better view of family-school cooperation, it is necessary to consider the three theoretical frameworks which together create the complete theoretical basis on family-school cooperation. These three frameworks are:

- 1) The theory of Epstein (Epstein J., 1987) (Epstein J. L., 1995), (Epsten, 2001),
- 2) Theory of Hoover & Sandler (Hoover & Sandler, 1995, 1997, 2005)
- 3) Theory of world creation and family empowerment (Bouchard, 1998), (Dunst, 1992).

The importance of school-family partnership

Numerous studies show that because of the school-family cooperation students benefit the most, the school is strengthened, it helps the teacher and the families are also reinforced (Epsten, 2001). The school and the family share their core mission of educating the younger generation. School-family cooperation can have both positive and negative impact. Impact is positive when cooperation is open, honest and responsible, while it is negative when there is a lack of communication, understanding and mutual assistance. When the child starts the first grade, the parents are interested in their child's teacher, school organization, teaching schedule, their children's achievements, etc. On the other hand, the school or more specifically, the teachers want to know about the child's personality, advantages and difficulties in learning, etc., we can assume that mutual information about the child (student) is important. Through school-family cooperation is created interaction partnership, exchange of information and experiences, and last but not least joint decision-making. Furthermore, taking in consideration the degree and quality of cooperation of school-family factors, more complete and deeper information is obtained about the personality of the child (student).

Proper cooperation of school-family factors improves and advances relations at school, in the family and in the community. Also, this deepens the cooperation between school-family factors, raises awareness for training and continuous psycho-pedagogical research and also reflects on the harmonization of the realization of the educational goal (ZUNA Deva & co-authors, 2009). Nowadays, researchers, educators and parents emphasize the history of working together between school and family. Moreover, they call for major parental involvement in education. Parental involvement in various studies has been defined as representative of behaviors and practices at school or at home that incorporate parents' aspirations, expectations, attitudes, and beliefs regarding children's education (Georgiou & Tourva, 2007).

Studies on the perceptions of parents and teachers, their cooperation for the adaptation of students in the school environment

According to (Kraja, 2008), the school has three strong partners: the student without whom there is no school, the teacher and the parents. These crucial partners, together with the curriculum, determine the fate of the education of generations when they are associated with a well-thought-out educational policy and management, with a dignified budget and with an awareness of public opinion. School-family cooperation starts when parents begin to be interested in choosing a good teacher for their child, but officially this cooperation starts from the very first day of school, when the child starts first grade (Koliqi, 2012). According to (GIZ, 2013), the school can not function well without the help of parents because the school must communicate with parents for at least four reasons, among which are; information (parents must be informed about student attendance, academic progress and personal development), cognition (for the school to understand any development that may affect student learning), counseling (for parents on ways to help students in specific curricular subjects), consultation (with parents for specific difficulties of the child in school). Children begin school with a range of skills that are influenced by their individual moods, experiences and backgrounds. They also experience transition in different ways. Thus, the transition and adaptation of children in school is influenced by a variety of personal and family characteristics, social and family tendencies, contextual and life experiences. In addition, an Australian research explores the impact of parental cooperation with the children's school and school factors that may support children when they start school, or predispose them to risk being out of school (Baker, Piotrowski, & Brooks-Gunn, 1998). Parents of the child in school should definitely cooperate with the child's school, because parents have a major impact on children's adaptation to school (Nitamo & Alitolppa, 2015). The study conducted by (Tan & Goldberg, 2009) focuses on the involvement of parents in the education of children both at school and at home. 91 fathers and 91 mothers participated in a study that assesses levels of parental involvement (directly at school, homework, extracurricular educational activities, and interpersonal involvement) and their relationship to children's grades and parental reports of children's anxiety about school and their satisfaction. The analyzes demonstrated the unique contributions made by fathers and mothers in changing children's grades and adapting to school. Furthermore, (Brizuela & Garcia-Sellers, 1999) argue for the role of a home-school mediator as a facilitator of children's adaptation to school. According to them, students which have a facilitator show better results at school. In a survey conducted by (Cowan, Cowan, & Mehta, 2009) it is stated that if parents cooperate between each other and together they cooperate with school, this cooperation represents a fundamental change in the adaptation of children to primary school. This conclusion came from the tests' results of children's academic achievement and observations of teachers' checklists for internal and external behaviors. Over the past 25 years, numerous studies have focused on the implications of parents of safe or unsafe working role models for their children's development (Sroufe, Egeland, Collins, & Carlson, 2005). The work models of mothers and fathers connecting adults and couples are related to how effectively they behave with each other and their child, and in the way how their child adaptively meets social, emotional, and academic challenges to make the transition to elementary school. A large amount of research demonstrates that many factors are directly related to the quality of each parent's relationship with the child and the level of mental and social adaptation of the child (Cummings, Davies, & Simpson, 1994). Also, the child starting the first grade goes through a transition from pre-primary to first grade, so in a study done by (Chan, 2012), he took into account the perceptions of parents, educators and first-grade

teachers. From this study, he observed children and derived the following results: Children's voices and their performance observed during the transition period indicate that they have different expectations for the transition. Both primary school teachers and parents of child classify pre-academic skills as the most important area of development, while kindergarten teachers rank them as less important. On the other hand in an article by (Willemse, de Bruine, Griswold, Vloeberghs, & Van Eynde, 2017) among others it is stated that parent-teacher cooperation is specifically designed for primary education, which means that teachers and parents work together for students/children during primary education because this is the most sensitive phase for children including the adaptation of children to school. In another survey (Deforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p. 31) stated: For young students, parents provide the child with a context in which he or she can acquire school, and develop psychological qualities of motivation and self-worth. But sometimes teachers, especially the beginner ones, are reluctant to involve parents in school so (Bingham & Abernathy, 2007) found that new teachers were unsure of how to involve parents in a meaningful way due to various reasons, among others, lack of their skills. Candidates for teachers need to be prepared to establish productive relationships with families (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007), but beginner teachers feel unprepared (Hornby & Witte, 2010). Whereas family involvement means that it should not remain at a formal level but it should be very cooperative. Based on the involvement of family, school and family cooperation, family involvement refers to a wide range of activities through which parents, grandparents, brothers and older sisters and other family members contribute to the support of student learning (Cori & Railsback, 2003).

Methodology

Mixed methodology - This selection of methodology is the most appropriate for this research, which the main purpose is to find out what the perceptions of parents and teachers are about the adaptation of children in the first grade. During the data collection procedure, parents and teachers were willing to contribute to the research by completing the questionnaires and participating in the interview. The research includes the numerically determined population, which is composed of parents of first-grade children and teachers who work with first-graders. Since the first-grades students of this municipality include a large number of children, then a sample was defined with a random selection of teachers and parents. Thus, the selection of the sample was done by a technique that ensures that every element in the population has an equal chance of being selected in the sample. The sample included 10 teachers and 220 parents and it was conducted in four schools in the municipality of Vushtrri: Ali Kelmendi, Naim Frashëri, Migjeni and Enver Hadri. The research model is very representative and the perceptions of parents and teachers about the adaptation of the child in the first grade are described. The combination of quantitative and qualitative method was used for this research. Quantitative research method is concerned with the collection and processing of data that are structured and can be presented in numerical form, while the qualitative method has data collected words and expressions of the research participants themselves (Matthews & Ross, 2010) . The questionnaire used in this research contained demographic data and relevant questions for the purpose of the research and interviews. In order to prove that the questionnaire is reliable the Cronbach Alpha test was done in the SPSS statistical package. The questionnaire includes 20 questions, 14 of which are with 5-point Likert scale, the questionnaires are structured and contained closed and open questions. Some of the questions are scaled on a nominal, ordinal and interval scale and it was conducted with parents of first-graders. The interview contains four sets of questions with a total of eight questions and the nature of the interview was semi-structured because these kinds of interviews allow a range of personal ideas and opinions to be expressed within the given parameters. Interviews were conducted with teachers who work with the first-graders. The instruments contain questions related to what are the perceptions of parents and teachers in the adaptation of the child in the first grade, simultaneously this is the purpose of the instrument.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data results and their interpretation was done based on the questionnaire (quantitative data). The results are presented through graphs, which are done in the statistical program for social sciences SPSS(the 26th version) expressed in percentage (%). Qualitative data were done through thematic analysis, where firstly the main topics were defined, then interpretations.

Results

Teachers explain that parents should be part of the school and while we analyze their perceptions, we notice that teachers agree that parents should be involved in their child's school life. In this way, teachers will cooperate with the parents of the children, because parent-teacher cooperation is one of the best ways to help the children in their adaptation and progress. It is also necessary to develop the teacher-parent partnership because it will improve the work for the development of the full potential of each student, and this potential undoubtedly includes the adaptation of the child in the school environment. Also, teachers say that parents have the legal right to access all the educational achievement of their children, moreover, they have the right to follow behavior and to be involved in decisions that are made about their children. Parents become part of the school by joining the class council, by being invited to be part of various activities carried out by their children, by using different methods of communication, and by participating in meetings where they are introduced to their child's achievements which are mostly held on social networks etc. The communication of the parents with the teacher is largely done through the parent-teacher meeting to communicate the results in the lesson and the behavior of the child in the school. The best forms of learning are physical contacts, but in the absence of physical contact, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, electronic ones are used, such as; Viber, email, Skype etc. Teachers claim that children who are used to spending more time with their parents when the first grade starts, they feel lonely until they adapt to the teacher and the school environment. Teachers consider that children are not yet adapted to the first grade when the student does not feel well in class, does not socialize with other students and does not participate in activities. Moreover, if the student does not speak and is not active, then we can sum up that the child has difficulties in adapting. Parents think that the discussions with their child's teacher will help their child to adapt to the first grade and therefore do not have difficulty communicating and cooperating with their child's teacher, so they often receive teacher's suggestions. Parents sometimes have requests from the child's teacher to get involved in school activities to help the children. Teachers claim that in order to make it easier for students to adapt in the first grade, they try to create a warm environment in the classroom by always speaking to them with the kindest words, but also through different attractive activities. Moreover, teachers say that when dealing with children who find it difficult to adapt in the first grade, teachers should always keep in mind the fact that children are individual, unique and each of them can have their own ways of adaptation. Based on the teacher's experiences, they convey that children who have previously been in pre-primary education are more easily adapted. Teachers declare that they try to talk to the parents, explain their child's condition and ask for their help and cooperation. Also, it should take a lot of work from parents because only one party is impossible to achieve success. The school and the family should build a partnership based on mutual communication with shared obligations and responsibilities.

Discussions

The discussion of the results was done in the form of answering the research questions. The discussion of the results of the perceptions of parents and teachers about the adaptation of the child in the first grade: The main research questions are:

1. What are the parents' perceptions of the child's adaptation in the first grade?
2. What are the teachers' perceptions of the child's adaptation in the first grade?

As mentioned above, the mixed method was used as the data collection method. Initially, through the collection of quantitative data, we obtained the perceptions of parents about the adaptation of the child in the first grade, where according to them, family-teacher cooperation is mostly needed in child's adaptation to school in the easiest way possible. School-family cooperation is achieved by the desire of both parties for cooperation and by seeking and receiving suggestions from the parties for better adaptation of the child. Whereas, through the collection of qualitative data we have received the perceptions of teachers and we have come to the conclusion that according to teachers, the adaptation of children in the first grade depends not only on the child but also on the classroom environment. On the other hand, it also depends on the child's family because children who are used to staying longer with their parents, when the first grade starts, they feel lonely until they adapt to the teacher and the school environment, thus generally children who are only related to family members have problems socializing with other districts.

Discussion of the results for the best way of adapting children in the first grade:

Supporting research questions are:

1. What are the best ways for children to adapt to first grade, according to their parents?
2. What are the best ways for children to adapt to first grade, according to teachers?

Some parents claim that their child has adapted easily in the first grade and has managed to socialize with other children, all this has been achieved due to the cooperation of the teacher and the parents themselves. Furthermore, some other parents say that their child has adapted more easily to the classroom due to two factors that they consider equally important: the teacher and going to pre-primary education. While other parents say that children found it difficult to adapt in the first 15 days, but then the communication with the parents-teachers managed to find a solution for the child and to adapt easily. Others say that they talked to their child about school from a very young age, so they increased their desire and willingness to go to school, and this helped them to adapt more easily. On the other hand, teachers say that in order to make it easier for the child to adapt to the first grade, they create an attractive environment for the pupils.

Discussion of the results of the difficulties encountered by parents and teachers in working together to facilitate the child's adaptation to first grade: The results showed that parents do not encounter difficulties in cooperating to facilitate the child's adaptation to first grade. Descriptive research results show that 73% of parents do not encounter difficulties in communicating with their children's teachers and 68% of parents do not encounter difficulties in cooperating with their children's teachers to facilitate the child's adaptation to first grade.

Discussion of the results for finding the best ways by parents and teachers for the adaptation of the child in the first grade and the level of cooperation between them: The results of the research show that parents and teachers have found the best ways to adapt the child in the first grade and these are; teachers creating the right conditions for the adaptation of my child in the first grade (57% of the parents), parents talking to their children about school before starting the first grade, etc.

Conclusion

From the discussions made above, we can conclude that according to parents and teachers, children who are related only with the family or especially to a family member, have problems with socializing and setting up in the classroom. In addition, children who do not feel good in the classroom, do not socialize and talk with other students, and also do not want to participate in activities, we can sum up that they are not adapted in the first grade. Parents and teachers have found ways to help their children to adapt in the first grade. This has been achieved by talking to children about school when they were still young. Thus, parents increased their desire to go to school, and also pre-primary education has helped children to be more easily adaptable in the F first grade. On the other hand, teachers do their best to create a loving atmosphere in the classrooms for their students. Parents and teachers see communication

as the most effective way to succeed, from this, we conclude that cooperation between parents and teachers is good and there are no difficulties to communicate and cooperate.

Limitations and Future Studies

In order to work even more in this area and to contribute to the easier and faster adaptation of the child in the classroom, some further studies are recommended:

- To study the factors that hinder the adaptation of the child in the first grade;
- To study the factors that help the child adapting to the first grade;
- To conduct a study by observing children who find it difficult to adapt in the first grade;
- To study the factors that contribute to school-family cooperation;

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