# FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO PRIMARY SCHOOL

**Marina Besi[1i],**
**Maria Sakellariou[2]**
[1]Phd Candidate,
University of Ioannina,
Greece
[2]Professor,
University of Ioannina,
Greece

**Abstract:**

The transition of children from preschool to primary school is considered one of the most critical periods of childhood. For this reason, in recent years, great emphasis has been given on children's successful entrance in primary education. The purpose of this paper is to record the opinions of Greek teachers on which children are more likely to experience difficulties in their transition to the next educational level. The survey was carried out on a sample of 1,602 teachers from the entire Greek educational territory. The tool that was used was a questionnaire of closed-ended questions. It was also analyzed how their responses varied according to their job position (preschool teachers, primary school teachers and school directors). Teachers believe that the most important factors that are related to the successful transition of children to primary school include the socio-emotional development and the interpersonal relationships of children in preschool, their good relations with teachers, their ability to follow the rules of school, but also parents' trust towards teachers.

**Keywords:** factors of transition, preschool, primary school

## 1. Introduction

The transition of children from Preschool to Primary School is considered one of the most critical periods of childhood and is a dynamic and evolving process that contributes not only to the later school course but also to the socio-emotional development of children. For this reason, in recent years, great emphasis has been given on children's successful entrance in primary education.

---

[1] Correspondence: email marinabesi@gmail.com

Bibliography highlights the fact that school readiness and transition from preschool to primary school are important issues concerning the education of children. The quality preschool experiences support and increase children's schooling and prepares them to succeed in primary school (Barnett, 2011. Camilli et al., 2010). Preschool teachers play a great role in preparing children for school life and in the acquisition of skills. They help them socialize, interact with adults and peers in positive ways, develop effective collaboration strategies in order to feel strong and able to manage new conditions with confidence and successfully go to Primary School. Social skills play the most important role in helping to start school in a positive way (Docket & Perry, 2005).

The transition is a continuation of programs between pre-primary and primary education and a continuous effort to create links between teachers, parents and communities (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). It is clear that communication and relationship must be built between children, teachers and parents (Sakellariou & Sivropoulou, 2010). The quality of parents' relationships with the teacher and school staff and the child's ideas for education can be an equally valid indicator of the effects of the transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Building family-school partnerships is considered as the main way to support the positive effects of the transition. In many studies, the collaboration of family-school enhances the educational experience of children (Sheridan et al., 2012) and promotes the development of their social skills (Pirchio et al., 2013).

School success is closely linked to the profession, financial status and educational level of parents (Yoshikawa et al., 2012). Understanding this diversity is part of the responsibility of teachers in order to get to know the children and help them by supporting the more effective transition to school.

Modern research, according to Pashiardis and Brauckmann (2009), proves that the role of school Director is crucial, since it determines to a great extent its success but also access to equal and qualitative education for all students (OECD, 2018). The school Director has to direct and coordinate all actions and influence the educational and strategic behavior of teachers (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011).

Successful school transitions are very important in children's lives. It is therefore necessary to understand the importance of transition from preschool to primary school as it is linked to students' future success and their overall development (Pianta & Cox, 2002).

## 2. Methodology

This paper is part of a Pan-Hellenic research and was done using a questionnaire. The quantitative research was chosen as it allows the collection of large volumes of data from a large sample of respondents and the connection of two or more characteristics (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The technique that was applied is the Proportional Stratified Sample Surveys. According to this technique, the sample was divided according to the characteristics of

the population in the layers (educational regions of Greece) and then random samples were selected from each layer. The stratified sample survey was designed to ensure the representation of all sections of the population, to reduce the estimation error and to have a sufficient number of subpopulation subjects. This technique generally leads to estimations with a high level of precision.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the opinions of Greek teachers on which factors are related to the successful transition of children from preschool to primary schools.

## 3. Research Tool

In this research paper, the questionnaire was chosen as the most appropriate tool for collecting research data, as it can lead to quick, accurate and cost-effective collection of research data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In particular, a questionnaire of closed-ended questions was developed based on the research objective. 15 possible factors which may influence the successful transition of children to the next educational level were given and the teachers were requested to answer whether they agree or disagree with each one of them.

### 3.1 The sample
The target population is Teachers of Primary Education (preschool teachers, Teachers of 1st and 2nd class of primary school and Directors of primary schools) of the 13 educational districts of Greece.

The sample of the survey was selected by the laws of sampling and represents 4% of all preschool teachers, 4% of Teachers of 1st and 2nd class of the total of each educational district and 4% of the Directors of primary schools of the total of each educational district. The figures for the total number of teachers in each district were provided by the Ministry of Education. The final sample size was 1,602 teachers and more specifically 784 preschool teachers, 634 teachers and 184 directors of primary schools.

### 3.2 Research Data
The data analysis provided by the primary data survey was done using the statistical analysis program SPSS 23.0.

Table 1 shows the absolute (f) and relative (%) frequencies as well as the mean (M) and standard deviations (SD) of teachers' responses concerning their opinions on groups of children who may have a higher risk of experiencing a difficult transition from preschool to primary school. The questions are presented in order of priority, from the highest to the lowest average.

**Table 1:** Absolute (f) and relative (%) frequencies of teachers' opinions on factors which affect successful transition of pupils from preschool to primary school

| Factors that are related to the successful transition of children from preschool to Primary School | «YES» | |
|---|---|---|
| | F | % |
| 1. Children's socio-emotional development and interpersonal relationships | 1254 | 78,4 |
| 2. Attending preschool | 1250 | 78,0 |
| 3. Positive relationships between children and teachers | 1018 | 63,5 |
| 4. Children's ability to learn and follow the rules of the school | 983 | 61,4 |
| 5. The level of trust of parents towards teachers | 920 | 57,5 |
| 6. Parents' opinion of school and learning | 794 | 49,6 |
| 7. Parents' educational level | 677 | 42,3 |
| 8. State policy on preschool and school education | 677 | 42,3 |
| 9. Academic Qualifications of Children (School Readiness) | 654 | 40,9 |
| 10. The socio-economic level of the family | 519 | 32,4 |
| 11. The building and logistics infrastructure of Primary School | 515 | 32,1 |
| 12. Culture and language (ethnic minorities) | 502 | 31,3 |
| 13. The Director's attitude on school management | 337 | 21,0 |
| 14. The daily schedule | 234 | 14,6 |
| 15. The hours of Primary School | 186 | 11,6 |

According to the findings of Table 1, the main factors that are related to the successful transition of children from preschool to primary school include the socio-emotional development and the interpersonal relationships of children in the preschool. More specifically, it was found that almost four out of five teachers report that the socio-emotional development and the interpersonal relations of children (78.4%) and their attendance in preschool (78%) influence their successful transition from Preschool to Primary School.

What follows are the factors that refer to the positive relationships of children with teachers (63.5%), the ability of children to learn and follow the rules of school (61.4%), the level of trust of parents towards teachers (57, 5%) and parents' opinion of school and learning (49.6%), which are factors that more than half of the teachers agree on their importance.

We then see that more than two out of five teachers agree that the educational level of parents (42.3%), state policy on preschool and school education (42.3%) and that the academic qualifications of children (School readiness) (40.9%) affect the successful transition of children to primary school.

Moreover, it is noted that almost one in three teachers agree that the socio-economic level of the family (32.4%), the building and logistics infrastructure of Primary School (32.1%) and culture and language (ethnic minorities) (31.3%) affect the successful transition from preschool to the primary school, while about one in five teachers (21%) is in favor of the importance of the Director's attitude on school management.

Finally, the percentage of teachers who claim that the daily schedule (14.6%) and Primary School hours (11.6%) affect the successful transition from preschool to primary school.

Then, a two-way analysis of variance was performed, with service as the "independent" variable and as "dependent" variables each of the above factors that may be related to the successful transition.

**Table 2:** Absolute (f) and relative (%) frequencies of teachers' opinions on factors which affect successful transition of pupils from preschool to primary school, according to their position and the results of χ²-test

| | | No | Yes | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | *f* (%) | *f* (%) | $\chi^2$ |
| The socio-emotional development | Preschool Teacher | 132 (16,9) | 651 (83,1) | 24,54*** |
| | Teacher | 155 (24,5) | 478 (75,5) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 58 (31,7) | 125 (68,3) | |
| Attending kindergarten | Preschool Teacher | 116 (14,8) | 668 (85,2) | 46,16*** |
| | Teacher | 182 (28,7) | 452 (71,3) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 54 (29,3) | 130 (70,7) | |
| Positive relationships between children and teachers | Preschool Teacher | 243 (31,0) | 541 (69,0) | 22,37*** |
| | Teacher | 255 (40,2) | 379 (59,8) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 86 (46,7) | 98 (53,3) | |
| Children's ability to follow the rules | Preschool Teacher | 295 (37,7) | 488 (62,3) | 4,70 |
| | Teacher | 238 (37,5) | 396 (62,5) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 84 (45,9) | 99 (54,1) | |
| The level of trust of parents towards teachers | Preschool Teacher | 314 (40,1) | 470 (59,9) | 3,90 |
| | Teacher | 284 (44,8) | 350 (55,2) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 83 (45,4) | 100 (54,6) | |
| Parents' opinion of school and learning | Preschool Teacher | 366 (46,7) | 417 (53,3) | 8,16* |
| | Teacher | 343 (54,1) | 291 (45,9) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 97 (53,0) | 86 (47,0) | |
| Parents' educational level | Preschool Teacher | 480 (61,2) | 304 (38,8) | 7,77* |
| | Teacher | 347 (54,7) | 287 (45,3) | |
| | Director of Primary | 98 | 86 | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | School | (53,3) | (46,7) | |
| State policy on preschool and school education | Preschool Teacher | 455 (58,0) | 329 (42,0) | 0,10 |
| | Teacher | 363 (57,3) | 271 (42,7) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 107 (58,2) | 77 (41,8) | |
| Academic Qualifications of Children | Preschool Teacher | 420 (53,7) | 362 (46,3) | 20,87*** |
| | Teacher | 416 (65,7) | 217 (34,3) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 108 (59,0) | 75 (41,0) | |
| The socio-economic level of the family | Preschool Teacher | 560 (71,4) | 224 (28,6) | 10,62** |
| | Teacher | 402 (63,4) | 232 (36,6) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 121 (65,8) | 63 (34,2) | |
| The building and logistics infrastructure of Primary School | Preschool Teacher | 564 (71,9) | 220 (28,1) | 11,76** |
| | Teacher | 405 (63,9) | 229 (36,1) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 118 (64,1) | 66 (35,9) | |
| Culture and language | Preschool Teacher | 554 (70,7) | 230 (29,3) | 2,87 |
| | Teacher | 424 (66,9) | 210 (33,1) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 122 (66,3) | 62 (33,7) | |
| The Director's attitude on school management | Preschool Teacher | 656 (83,7) | 128 (16,3) | 157,42*** |
| | Teacher | 528 (83,4) | 105 (16,6) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 80 (43,5) | 104 (56,5) | |
| The daily schedule | Preschool Teacher | 667 (85,1) | 117 (14,9) | 0,13 |
| | Teacher | 543 (85,6) | 91 (14,4) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 158 (85,9) | 26 (14,1) | |
| The hours of Primary School | Preschool Teacher | 715 (91,2) | 69 (8,8) | 16,54*** |
| | Teacher | 535 (84,4) | 99 (15,6) | |
| | Director of Primary School | 166 (90,2) | 18 (9,8) | |

**Note:** * $p < 0,05$.  ** $p < 0,01$. *** $p < 0,001$.

According to teacher responses, there is a statistically significant relationship between teacher responses and their job position. In particular, the percentage of preschool teachers that consider socio-emotional development and interpersonal relationships of children (83.1%), preschool education (85.2%), positive relations of children with teachers (69%), parents' opinion of school and learning (53.32%) and academic qualifications of children (46.3%) as significant factors that influence the successful transition of children from Preschool to Primary School, is higher compared to the teachers and Directors of Primary Schools.

On the contrary, the percentage of preschool teachers that considers that the educational level of the parents (38.8%), the socio-economic level of the family (28.6%), as well as the building and logistic infrastructure of the Primary School (28.1% %) affect the successful transition from Preschool to the Primary School,  is lower compared to primary school teachers and school Directors. It is worth mentioning that 56.4% of School Directors consider that the Director's attitude on school management affects the successful transition from Preschool to Primary School, while the corresponding percentages of preschool teachers (16, 3%) and teachers (16.6%) that agree with this view are extremely low. It was also found that 15.6% of teachers consider that primary school's schedule influences the successful transition from Preschool to Primary School, while the corresponding percentages of preschool teachers (8.8%) and Primary School Directors (9.8%) are extremely low.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The main factors that influence the successful transition of children to primary school include the socio-emotional development and the interpersonal relationships of children (O'Gorman, 2008; O'Kane & Hayes, 2006; Dockett & Perry, 2005). In particular, almost four out of five teachers point out that socio-emotional development and interpersonal relationships of children (78.4%) and their attendance in Preschool (78%) influence their successful transition from preschool to primary school. They recognize the importance of developing basic skills that are grown in children during their studies in preschool, according to the international research data.

What follows are the factors which more than half of the teachers agree on their importance and which refer to the positive relationships of children with teachers (63,5%) (O'Kane & Hayes, 2006) and the ability of children to learn and the rules of the school (61.4%) follow (Dockett & Perry, 2005. Lin et al., 2003. Wesley & Buysse, 2003). The well-being of children and their positive commitment to learning depend on positive relationships with their teachers (Wong, 2003), while their ability to understand school rules facilitates their adaptation and create a sense of security and safety. The rules are useful as they provide children with clear guidance on the management of school environment and the context within which they can function independently, helping them to integrate smoothly into the new school (O'Kane & Hayes, 2006; Dockett & Perry, 2005). Moreover, about half of the sample teachers focus on the level of parents' trust to teachers (57.5%) and parents' opinion of school and learning (49.6%).

Researchers have identified in transition practices the parent-teacher relationship and the parental participation in student's school experience as critical outcome variables in the context of a successful transition to primary school (Sanagavarapu & Perry, 2005; Schulting et al., 2005; Pianta, 2004). Ties and relationships are an important part of the ecosystem of transition. The transition to primary school is a period when each parent starts a new relationship with the child's school or teacher. It is not enough just to adapt the child to the new school environment. Keeping parents informed and actively involved in the process can help reduce the anxiety of transition. The quality of their relationships with teachers, the trust in their faces and their opinion on the child's education are equally valid indicators of transition.

We then see that more than two out of five teachers agree that the educational level of parents (42.3%), the state policy on preschool and school education (42.3%) and the academic qualifications of children (School readiness) (40.9%) affect the successful transition of children to primary school. Many aspects of a child's social environment, such as the parents' level of education, appear to have a major impact on educational outcomes and are key determinants of child's future development and well-being (Lloyd et al., 2007). These children may have more educational support at home. From teachers' responses, we see that they give great importance to the academic qualifications of children with regard to their school readiness. Also, let's not forget that in the past the focus was primarily on whether the child was ready to start school (Dockett & Perry, 2005). The state policy on education is recognized by a significant part of the sample teachers as an important factor for a successful transition. Many states have made efforts and have seriously invested in developing programs to facilitate this transition (Rous et al., 2010; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). In Greece, no significant steps have been taken by the Ministry of Education. In the past, in 2007-2008, there has been a remarkable effort by the Special Service for the Implementation of CSF Programs of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs with the project "Facilitating the smooth transition from Preschool to Primary school", which was developed by preschools in the country. Although its results were positive and had a good response from teachers, it did not continue. It was not generalized, since it was addressed only to the all-day and not to the classical Preschool and did not extend to Primary Schools. However, several teachers have realized the importance of a smooth transition and are implementing creative and cooperative approaches to schools on their own initiative.

Next, it is noted that about one in three teachers agree on the role of the socio-economic level of the family (32.4%). There is a remarkable relationship between family income and high socio-economic status, and the achievement of school literacy and thus the smooth transition of children to primary school. Many studies have shown that the transition of children was less successful due to lack of school readiness - which is related to the support and skills of their parents (Peters, 2010; Margetts, 2007; Schulting et al., 2005).

The building and logistics infrastructure of Primary Schools (32.1%) also affect the transition. The size and structure of these institutions differs significantly from that

of preschools. Many children find it difficult to adapt to the new space, both in the classroom with the presence of the desks and the table, and in the vast courtyard without any toys (Niesel & Griebel, 2007).

The recognition of culture and language (ethnic minorities) (31.3%) is identified by teachers as an important feature of the successful transition of children from Preschool to Primary School (Peters, 2010). The mother tongue and the cultural knowledge of children are an integral part of the teaching and learning practices. Teacher awareness of different cultural approaches to learning is useful. There is a moral obligation to teach by respecting the culture of all students. It enhances the results for children with developmental, social or cultural differences, but also offers opportunities to enrich the educational experience of all children (Brooker, 2008, Einarsdóttir, 2007).

In addition, about one in five teachers (21%) is in favor of the importance of the Director's attitude on school management. It seems that teachers have not realized the importance of support from the school administration. The international bibliography highlights the need for a coordinating transition, which will give time for transition planning, communication and building cooperative relationships between all the parts involved. Finally, smaller percentages of teachers argue that the daily schedule (14.6%) and the hours of primary school (11.6%) affect the successful transition of children from preschool to primary school (Einarsdottir, 2007).

It is widely accepted that the first educational transition is very important for children's life, affecting their social and academic abilities and their development in general. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the conditions are successful. The culture of social relations and skills, the recognition of attendance in preschool, the establishment of a closer communication and mutual respect for all parts involved, are important factors that contribute to the smooth transition of children to the next level of education and create the framework for the positive course of learning.

## References

Barnett, W.S. (2011). Effectiveness of early educational intervention. *Science*, 333, 975–978.

Brauckmann, S., & Pashiardis, P. (2011). A validation study of the leadership styles of a holistic leadership theoretical framework. *International Journal of Educational Management,* 25 (1), 11-32.

Brooker, L. (2008). *Supporting transitions in the early years*. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press McGraw Hill.

Bryman, A, & Bell, E. (2015). *Business research methods*. 4nd edition. Oxford University Press.

Camilli G., Vargas S., Ryan S., Barnett W.S. (2010). Meta-analysis of the effects of early education interventions on cognitive and social development. *Teachers College Record,* 112, 579–620.

Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2005). Researching with children: Insights from the starting school research project. *Early Child Development and Care, 175*(6), 507-521.

Einarsdottir, J. (2007). Children's voices on the transition from preschool to primary school. In A.W. Dunlop, & H. Fadian (Eds.), *Informing transitions in the early years: Research, Policy and Practice* (pp. 74-91). London: McGraw-Hill.

Lin, H.L., Lawrence, F.R., & Gorrell, J. (2003). Kindergarten teachers' views of children's readiness for school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *18*(2), 225-237.

Lloyd, D., Austen-Baker, K., Newell, S., Hughes, D., & Dietrich, U. (2007). Box Ridge Transition to School Program 1999-2003: Evaluation Report. Prepared for Health Promotion Unit, North Coast Area Health Service, Lismore, May 2007.

LoCasale-Crouch, J., Mashburn, A.J., Downer, J.T., & Pianta, R.C. (2008). Pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices and children's adjustment to kindergarten. *Early childhood research quarterly*, *23*(1), 124-139.

Margetts, K. (2007). Preparing children for school: benefits and privileges. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 32(2), 43-50.

Niesel, R., & Griebel, W. (2007). Enhancing the competence of transition systems through co-construction. In A. Dunlop & H. Fabian (Eds.), *Informing transitions in the early years: Research, policy and practice* (pp. 21–32). Berkshire: Open University Press.

O' Gorman, L. (2008). The Preparatory Year in a Queensland Non-Government School: Exploring Parents' Views. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33 (3), 51-58.

O'Kane, M., & Hayes, N. (2006). The transition to school in Ireland: Views of preschool and primary school teachers. *International Journal of Transitions in Childhood*, 2, 4-16.

Pashiardis, P. and Brauckmann, S. (2009). Professional Development Needs of School Principals. *Commonwealth Education Partnerships*, 120-124.

Peters, S. (2010). *Literature review: Transition from early childhood education to school.* Report to the Ministry of Education. New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Pianta, R. (2004). Transitioning to School: Policy, Practice, and Reality. *The Evaluation Exchange*, 10(2), 5-6.

Pianta, R.C., & Cox, M.J. (2002). Transition to Kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research & Policy Briefs*, 2(2), 2-4.

Pirchio, S., Tritrini, C., Passiatore, Y., & Taeschner, T. (2013). The Role of the Relationship between Parents and Educators for Child Behaviour and Wellbeing. *International Journal about Parents in Education*, *7*(2), 145-155.

Rimm-Kaufman, S.E., & Pianta, R.C. (2000). An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten: A theoretical framework to guide empirical research. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *21*(5), 491-511.

Rous, B., Hallam, R., McCormick, K., & Cox, M. (2010). Practices that support the transition to public preschool programs: Results from a National Survey. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25, 17–32.

Sakellariou, M., & Sivropoulou, I. (2010). Family and Kindergarten Cooperation within the Framework of Children's Transition from Kindergarten to Primary School. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 5.

Sanagavarapu, P., & Perry, B. (2005). Concerns and expectations of Bangldeshi parents as their children start school. Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 30(3), 45-51.

Schulting, A.B., Malone, P.S., & Dodge, K.A. (2005). The effect of school-based kindergarten transition policies and practices on child academic outcomes. *Developmental Psychology, 41*(6), 860-871.

Sheridan, S.M., Bovaird, J.A., Glover, T.A., Garbacz, S.A., & Witte, A. (2012). A randomized trial examining the effects of conjoint behavioral consultation and the mediating role of the parent-teacher relationship. *School Psychology Review, 41*(1), 23-46.

Wesley, P.W., & Buysse, V. (2003). Making meaning of school readiness in schools and communities. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 18*(3), 351-375.

Wong, N.C. (2003). A Study of Children's Difficulties in Transition to School in Hong Kong. *Early Child Development and Care,* 173 (1*)*, 83-96.

Yoshikawa, H., Aber, J.L., & Beardslee, W.R. (2012). The effects of poverty on the mental, emotional, and behavioral health of children and youth: implications for prevention. *American Psychologist, 67*(4), 272-284.