

# Transition to Primary School the Importance of Social Skills

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## Abstract

*The transition of children from Preschool to Primary School is considered as one of the most critical periods of childhood and it is a dynamic and evolving process, which lays the foundations of the subsequent school years. However, this smooth transition aims not only at the academic success of children / students, but also at their socio-emotional development, which is part of the complex path of learning that contributes to the process of educational and personal development. In this study we have looked into the views of 1602 preschool and primary school teachers about the importance of children's social skills development for the smooth transition from Preschool to Primary School. The teachers give priority to the development of the students' social skills, related to behavior and good communication, while they evaluate the acquisition of academic knowledge by children as a minor factor. From the individual social skills of the children given, they are all marked as important during their transition from Preschool to Primary School. Teachers hierarchize as the most important, knowledge, respect for the rules and for the play or work of others, the ability to wait for their turn, and share and follow instructions from adults.*

**Keywords** - transition, social skills, preschool, primary school.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The transition of children from Preschool to Primary School is considered as one of the most critical periods of childhood. This period marks particularly strong changes in the personality of the child as well as in his / her family and social environment, exposing it to a wide variety of demands (cognitive, emotional and social) to which he / she is called upon to respond according to specified standards. It is a dynamic and evolving process not only aimed at the academic success of students but also in their socio-emotional development, which is part of the complex course of learning and contributes decisively to the process of educational and personal development.

Adaptation of children to new changes during this school period may have long-term effects on the child's further academic development, socialization,

but also in the formation of deeper characteristics of his / her personality [7], [14], [15].

In recent years, policy makers, researchers and educators have put particular emphasis on ensuring successful children's entry into Primary school. Thus, much of the research for the transition to Primary school has been focused on interventions aimed at promoting the specific skills and knowledge that children must have acquired before Primary school.

There is little agreement as to which skills and behaviors will help the smooth transition of children from Preschool to Primary school. International research has generally found that the skills that are identified by teachers as important for primary school children are social skills, independence, language and communication skills, the ability to sit, follow the rules and focus [5], [12], [17], [18]. Also, according to Barnett et al. [1], the enhancement of attention skills is a better strategy to improve school success than the more direct teaching approaches in Preschool.

On the contrary, students with lack of appropriate social skills are at risk during their transition to Primary school. In particular, teachers when they were asked about the factors that make the transition difficult to school education, they reported more frequently the difficulty that children have to follow instructions, work independently and in groups, and lack of academic skills [5], [8].

However, there are many early childhood programs that promote academic skills and have focused on the early exploitation of academic skills, noting that children when entering primary education have to know letters and numbers, since these are the fundamental elements of learning.

In conclusion, the development of social skills allows effective interaction with the environment, the development of interpersonal relationships with others around them, and the smooth adaptation of children to the school life of the classroom. The absence or lack of these skills can lead to isolation and school failure.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is part of a national 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 [3].

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 views of Greek teachers, especially the views of preschool and primary school teachers on the importance of developing social skills in children in order to have a smooth transition from Preschool to Primary School.

### III. 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 [3]. In particular, a questionnaire of closed-ended questions was developed based on the research objective. A list of 15 social skills was provided and teachers were asked to identify their importance for the successful transition of children to Primary school (not important, little important, neither important nor unimportant, important, very important).

#### A. 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.

#### B. Research data

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

Sample teachers were asked to prioritize what requirements they consider most important for children to meet in order to have a smooth transition from Preschool to Primary school. According to the findings of Table 1, there are strong fluctuations in teachers' views on the conditions to be met in order to have a successful transition from Preschool to Primary school. In particular, teachers consider that children's skills (social, behavior, communication) are very important for their successful transition, as shown by the average of their responses, which is well above the middle of the scale, equal to 2.5. In particular, 70.8% of teachers believe that children's skills are the most important condition to be met. Then, teachers attribute relatively high levels of significance to the general attitudes, values, feelings and perceptions children have for school, with 24.5% of them considering it to be the most important prerequisite for a successful transition. On the contrary, according to the average of the answers below the middle scale, it is clear that teachers do not consider that children's academic knowledge is an important prerequisite for a successful transition (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
MEANS (m) and STANDARD DEVIATIONS (sd) of TEACHERS' VIEWS on the CONDITIONS for a SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

<i>Conditions for a successful transition</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
1. Skills (social, behavior, communication).	3,67 (0,54)
2. More general attitudes, values, feelings, perceptions about school.	3,13 (0,59)
3. Academic knowledge.	2,17 (0,53)

Then, from a list of 15 social skills, teachers were asked to identify their importance for the successful transition of children to Primary school. The questions are presented in order of priority, from the largest to the smallest average (Table 2).

According to the findings of Table 2, there are no significant fluctuations in the views of teachers on the importance of the child's social skills for a successful transition from Preschool to Primary School. In the overwhelming majority, teachers believe that the individual social skills that children have are important in their transition from Preschool to Primary School, as it is shown by the average of their responses, which is above the middle of the scale, which equals to 3.

TABLE 2

ABSOLUTE (f) and RELATIVE (%) FREQUENCIES, MEAN (M) and STANDARD DEVIATIONS (SD) of TEACHERS' OPINIONS on the IMPORTANCE of the CHILD'S SOCIAL SKILLS for a SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION from PRESCHOOL to PRIMARY SCHOOL

	«I totally disagree»	«I disagree»	«Neutral Attitude»	«I agree»	«I totally agree»	M	SD
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)		
1. The child knows and follows the rules in the classroom	9 (0,6)	11 (0,7)	59 (3,7)	487 (30,4)	1035 (64,6)	4,58	,65
2. The child respects the play or the work of others	11 (0,7)	11 (0,7)	55 (3,4)	521 (32,6)	1002 (62,6)	4,56	,66
3. The child can wait his / her turn and shares	9 (0,6)	10 (0,6)	73 (4,6)	529 (33,0)	981 (61,2)	4,54	,67
4. The child knows and complies with the rules that are applied in the school yard	9 (0,6)	12 (0,8)	77 (4,8)	535 (33,5)	966 (60,4)	4,52	,68
5. The child can follow instructions from adults	8 (0,5)	11 (0,7)	78 (4,9)	552 (34,5)	953 (59,5)	4,52	,67
6. The child participates suitably in groups of children	6 (0,4)	8 (0,5)	72 (4,5)	599 (37,4)	916 (57,2)	4,51	,64
7. The child faces conflicts without violence	11 (0,7)	8 (0,5)	98 (6,1)	553 (34,6)	929 (58,1)	4,49	,70
8. The child expresses his / her needs, desires, thoughts	6 (0,4)	18 (1,1)	97 (6,1)	634 (39,6)	845 (52,8)	4,43	,69
9. The child respects the teacher	16 (1,0)	14 (0,9)	109 (6,8)	605 (37,8)	858 (53,6)	4,42	,75
10. The child has empathy (understands the feelings of others)	12 (0,7)	14 (0,9)	154 (9,6)	554 (34,6)	868 (54,2)	4,41	,76
11. The child is independent and autonomous	12 (0,7)	14 (0,9)	154 (9,6)	554 (34,6)	868 (54,2)	4,41	,76
12. The child can sit in the work area	13 (0,8)	15 (0,9)	117 (7,3)	675 (42,2)	781 (48,8)	4,37	,73
13. The child knows how to react in changes and adapts appropriately	10 (0,6)	15 (0,9)	146 (9,1)	674 (42,1)	757 (47,3)	4,34	,73
14. The child has good behavior (courtesy, patience, discretion)	10 (0,6)	15 (0,9)	146 (9,1)	674 (42,1)	757 (47,3)	4,34	,73
15. The child finishes his / her homework.	20 (1,3)	47 (2,9)	230 (14,4)	668 (41,8)	633 (39,6)	4,16	,86

The child's social skill that is considered by the teachers as the most important is the knowledge and compliance with the rules that are applied to the classroom. Then the child's social skills that refer to his / her ability to respect the play or work of others, to be able to wait for his / her turn and share, and to know and follow the rules that are applied in the school yard follow. The skills that require pupils to be able to follow instructions from adults, to participate appropriately in groups of children, to face conflict without violence, to express their needs, desires, thoughts, to respect the teacher, to have empathy (to understand the feelings of others), to be independent and autonomous, to be able to sit in the work area, to know how to react to changes and adapt

appropriately, to have good behavior (courtesy, patience, discretion) and finally to finish his / her homework come next.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings from the questionnaire data seem to be consistent with the international surveys on transition from Preschool to Primary school. Teachers consider that social skills play the most important role for children in order to start school in a positive way [5], [17]. They also consider as very important the general attitudes and perceptions that children have for school, and less important the acquisition of academic skills [18].

As it emerged from the answers of the sample teachers, there is no strong fluctuation in the views of the teachers on the importance of the child's social skills for a successful transition from Preschool to the Primary School. In the overwhelming majority, teachers consider that the individual social skills that a child has developed are important during his / her transition from Preschool to Primary School [4], [5], [11], [16]. Behavioral adjustment, by improving skills (following instructions, observing, being part of a group and sharing, respecting, etc.) allows the child to adapt successfully to school [14].

The child's social skill that is considered to be the most important of the sample teachers refers to the knowledge and compliance with the rules in the classroom [9], [16]. The child's social skills that refer to his/ her ability to respect the play or work of others, to be able to wait for his turn and share [8], to know and follow the rules in the school yard [5], to be able to follow instructions from adults and to participate appropriately in groups of children follow. Collaborative experiences promote the interpersonal relationships between students and facilitate the acceptance of all kinds of diversity. The ability to cope with conflicts without violence, to express their needs, desires and thoughts, to respect the teacher [12], to have empathy (to understand the feelings of others), to be independent and autonomous [10], to be able to sit in the work area, to know how to respond to changes and adapt appropriately, to behave properly (courtesy, patience, discretion) and finally to finish his/her homework are also referred as important. These skills will benefit the child not only in Preschool but also in his / her transition to Primary school.

The link between social and emotional well-being and learning has been recognized internationally [2], [16]. The play is what gives the child many opportunities to grow socially. Fabian and Dunlop [6] were particularly interested in learning how the play could support transitions. Through the social-dramatic play the child becomes familiar with his new role as a pupil of Primary School. It becomes an active rather than a passive receiver of situations, finds outcomes and often solves potential problems, using appropriate strategies and behaviors [2], [13].

In conclusion, Greek teachers focus more on social and emotional adaptation of children but they do not diminish the importance of academic qualifications too. They believe that children that are equipped with good social and communication skills are emotionally mature and independent, are more likely to have a smoother transition to Primary school. It is much more important to focus on the ability to learn to sit, to pay attention to the class, and the ability to communicate their needs. This is also reflected in curriculum analyses, which suggest that students acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes about real-life conditions alongside with their academic development.

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