

AWARENESS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL MANAGERS ABOUT TRANSITION FROM HOME TO KINDERGARTEN

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Abstract. The article presents a survey results on the awareness of early childhood education managers of supporting children in the transition period from home to kindergarten through questionnaire filled by 213 managers in some provinces and cities in Vietnam. The results showed that the managers were initially aware of the transition from home to kindergarten such as the time and way of transition. However, they concerned much more with the aspect of “ready schools” than “ready families” or “ready children”. Although managers were aware of the role of parents in the transition from home to kindergarten, the ways which parents supported their children were not considered. In addition, factors related to the children such as development levels and abilities were lacked of attention. Therefore, the school's transition support activities were not diversified, which didn't pay much attention to the participation of families and children by their own. The results also affirmed that it has been many difficulties and barriers from families and communities in the transition period from home to kindergarten of children.

Keywords: managers, transition from home to kindergarten, kindergarten.

1. Introduction

For most young children, the transition from home to kindergarten is the first and important period in their lives [1]. Preschool associating with children's childhood, helps children begin to explore themselves and their surroundings as a “student” before officially entering the first grade.

There are many international studies on general transition process of children from the childhood. A number of research have focused on the transition from kindergarten to primary school, also known as preparing children for first grade, which has more advantages than the transition from home to kindergarten due to getting lower attention from researchers. According to the current social and economic status, more and more children go to kindergarten and start school at a very young age. Thus, researchers have begun to pay more attention to this transition [2], [3]. Some studies explored the transition between groups of age such as from birth to toddler [4], [5], or from nursery school to kindergarten. These studies showed that a child was stressful while facing to a transition that why it happened and the impact of certain factors such as the involvement of their close friends [4]; a child visiting a new classroom; transition time when children reach developmental milestones, ages or appropriate classes [5]. Two studies by Field et al. (1984) and Cryer et al. (2005) also showed that external demands (parents having to work, without a caregiver) could lead to sudden and unplanned transition, then caused temporary stress for children. The main reason is that children were separated from a familiar environment and

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they didn't feel safe and sound. Many studies before have confirmed the importance of preparing children for the changes in transition period. Some studies have also explored the impact of children experience to transition periods, such as research by Daniel (1993) and Weinberger (1996) [6], [7].

A lot of studies on the transition of children from familiar environment to stranger environment was conducted by researchers in Vietnam, however, most of them focused on the age of 5-6 years old that prepared for children to enter the first grade or transition practice of teachers and parents. Therefore, a few studies based on the views of managers were carried out. Christine O'Farrelly and Eilis Hennessyn (2013) investigated 8 female managers of 6 kindergartens in Dublin in their research by using interviews to explore transitional experiences of children of all ages and support activities to this process [8]. This paper provided some findings of the status of managers' awareness on support children to the transition from home to kindergarten.

2. Content

2.1. Research Methods

2.1.1. Participants

213 managers in Kon Tum province (53.05%), An Giang province (24.88%), Hanoi city (15.02%) and some other provinces took part in this research. The average age of managers was reported as 42 include 46% of Principals, 49.8% of vice Principals, the rest proportion was facility owner, professional manager.

The average year of managers' experience is 10 years (at least 1 year and up to 34 years). 86.9% of university degrees; 7% of master degree, 0.5% of the rest two-year training, college degree and doctoral degree were reported.

99.1% of the managers were specialized in preschool education and 1% had other majors including primary education and educational management. 96.2% out of them had certificates of preschool education management; Total managers, who worked in public schools, was reported at 85.6%, whereas in private school, it was 14.1%.

2.1.2. Methods

The researcher conducted the survey by giving questionnaires to early childhood education managers to find out their awareness on supporting the transition from home to kindergarten. At the same time, the research also adopted interviews to find out administrators perspectives on the support activities as well as the difficulties of their children during their transition from home to kindergarten.

2.1.3. Data analysis

SPSS software is used to calculate the frequency, average point to process the results of research obtained from questionnaire. Since then, the objective analysis of awareness of early childhood education managers about the transition from home to kindergarten is given.

2.2. Research Results

2.2.1. Managers' awareness about the transition from home to kindergarten: how and when the transition occurs

When children should start going to kindergarten?

Managers were asked to answer questions about the appropriate age of children to start attending kindergartens (up to 2 appropriate ages can be selected). Then, they were asked to

give any reason why they had chosen that time. Results showed that 45.5% of managers were reported that it should be between the ages of 24 - 36 months and 30% referred the period from 18-24 months. The reasons shared by managers were that a child initially has developed fundamental skills such as movement, self-help, language at that time. 8.9% out of them argued that children should go to school from 6-12 months due to young children could be adaptable or simply it needs to have someone take care babies when their parents go to work. While 24.9% of them chose the appropriate period as from 12-18 months, 26.3% of them suggested the period of 3 - 4 years old because schools only accept children at that age. The data showed that 34.3% of surveyed preschools did not have nursery classes. However, 12.2% of managers agreed the age of 4 - 5 and 14.1% agreed the age of 5 - 6 going to school for the first time. These managers came from kindergartens of ethnic minority areas with disadvantaged socio-economic conditions. Children there mainly went to kindergarten just to prepare for the first grade. Thus, it can be seen that most of the opinions were stemming from the reasons for the child's psycho-physiological features of each age that parents should decide when to send their children to school. There are also many reasons related to family and socio-economic factors, so the time to attend preschool is also different.

Managers' perspectives of the child's reaction during the first time to preschool

Table 1. Children's reaction during the first time to go to kindergarten

N°	Reactions	Level (n= 213)					
		<i>Most children</i>		<i>Some children</i>		<i>No children</i>	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
1	Cling to parents	112	52.58	101	47.42	0	0.00
2	Refused to stay in class	55	25.82	152	71.36	6	2.82
3	Tried gagging to be taken home	6	2.82	165	77.46	42	19.72
4	Crying nonstop	13	6.10	168	78.87	32	15.02
5	Crying and lying on the floor, refuse to be touch by teachers.	2	0.94	180	84.51	31	14.55
6	Carry a backpack or toy	25	11.74	182	85.45	6	2.82
7	Run into class immediately then cry because they can't see their parents	14	6.57	184	86.38	15	7.04
8	Cry for a while then play with teacher and friends	51	23.94	159	74.65	3	1.41
9	Very cheerfully and excitedly greet teacher and parents into the classroom	24	11.27	159	74.65	30	14.08
10	Neither fear nor excitement when entering class	14	6.57	158	74.18	41	19.25
11	Only crying a little but still follow teacher	30	14.08	181	84.98	2	0.94

	to the class						
12	Sitting in a daze, not talking to anyone	8	3.76	163	76.53	42	19.72
13	No sleep at noon	7	3.29	175	82.16	31	14.55
14	No food or drink	0	0.00	134	62.91	78	36.62
15	The child was sick after a few days of going to school	13	6.10	170	79.81	30	14.08
16	Demonstrates the initiative and independence in activities	26	12.21	159	74.65	28	13.15
17	Have a positive emotional state	42	19.72	159	74.65	12	5.63
18	Quickly establishes relationships with teacher and friends	54	25.35	146	68.54	13	6.10

Most managers believed that children had a variety of reactions when they first go to kindergarten with both positive and negative behaviors but actually much more negative. Specifically, clinging to their parents was reported the most with 52.58% and refusing to stay in class was reported as 25.82%. More positive reactions such as quickly establishing relationships with teacher and friends (25.35%) and crying for a while and then playing with friends (23.94%) only accounted for a quarter of the total opinion. In addition, most of the opinions of managers showed that some children have reactions that express feelings of insecurity, looking for familiar things when they first went to school such as crying and lying on the floor, did not want teacher to touch him/her (84.51%), hugged his/her backpack or carry toys (85.45%) or run into the classroom immediately but then cried because he/she could not see the parents (86.38%). Although there was no opinion for most children responded as no eat no drink, 62.91% were reported that some children did not eat and drink anything. In particular, 14.08% of managers were agreed that no child reacted as being very happy and excited to see teacher and their parents in the classroom, while children presented neither fear nor excitement was reported by 19.25% of them.

Managers' awareness of how teachers support children to adapt to the kindergarten

Table 2. Managers' awareness of how teachers support children to adapt to kindergarten

N°	Teachers' ways to support children to adapt to the kindergarten	n (n=213)	%	Rank
1	Advise parents to take their children off school for a few times	6	2.8	13
2	Call parents to pick up the child immediately	1	0.5	14
3	Talk to the child's parents to find a suitable solution	180	84.5	1
4	Suggest parents to pick up the child earlier	37	17.4	11
5	Advise parents to send their child to school for half a day until they get used to	42	19.7	10
6	Allow parents to stay with the child for a little longer and then move the child into class	67	31.5	7

7	Let your child adapt to their teachers and friends	57	26.8	9
8	Advise parents to bring extra kinds of food for their children	20	9.4	12
9	Hold the child to keep his/her from crying	110	51.6	6
10	Let your child play with some toys in the classroom to stop crying	156	73.2	3
11	Let your child sit with friends who are already familiar with the classroom	138	64.8	4
12	Regularly pay attention to children in classroom activities	158	74.2	2
13	Ask children about their own feelings from time to time and give them encouragement	114	53.5	5
14	Let your child carry a familiar object of the child (backpack, towel, doll, toy, etc.)	63	29.6	8

The same situation with various responses to the first time attending kindergarten, the managers also stated different intervention strategies to deal with this. 84.5% of managers paid much attention to communicate with parents and 74.2% of them communicated to children. Moreover, it clarified that teachers used the accommodated environment, peers and influence children's emotions to support children. However, some measures such as suggesting parents to pick up earlier, send their children to school for half a day to get acquainted or bring "transition objects" had received less attentions. Meanwhile, these were some strategies to help children feel safer then, they can have time to adjust, especially for those with persistent negative reactions.

Managers' awareness of how parents support their children to adapt to kindergarten

Table 3. Managers' awareness of how parents support their children to adapt to kindergarten

Nº	Parents' way to support their children to adapt to kindergarten	n (n=213)	%	Rank
1	Talk with your child about moving in a new environment in a positive way	146	68.5	2
2	Let your child visit kindergarten during summer to get acquainted	123	57.7	3
3	Show your child pictures of the new school, class and teacher	111	52.1	5
4	It is possible for children to get acquainted with some classmates before	82	38.5	8
5	Without doing anything, your child will get used to kindergarten	4	1.9	13
6	Tell your children about their experiences in school as a child and how to overcome them	68	31.9	10

7	Ask relatives to talk to your child about kindergarten	14	6.6	12
8	Spend time talking about your child's feelings at school	158	74.2	1
9	Create a story with a child protagonist about your child's first day in kindergarten	79	37.1	9
10	Introduce your child to the kindergarten timetable	111	52.1	5
11	Form a variety of eating habits	101	47.4	7
12	Read other stories about the first day of kindergarten	65	30.5	11
13	Have more contact with peers of the same age	117	54.9	4

Most of managers suggested that parents should implemented some ways to prepare to the readiness of their child, such as talking with children about future changes, let the children get acquainted with new schools and classes. Some comments made it clearer that parents need to be frank and not lie their children about going to kindergarten, picking up their children on time as promised and regularly communicating with teachers. Some other methods were rarely used, such as: thanks to the sharing of relatives, parents talking about their own experiences, or using stories. There were only a few opinions that children can adapt themselves without their parents doing anything. In general, managers were aware of the importance of parents to help their children in the transition from home to kindergarten.

Factors contributing to the success of the child's transition from home to kindergarten

There are many factors that contribute to a child's success in kindergarten. The managers agreed that the classroom environmental factor (4.56 marks) and the teacher's ability (4.52 marks) were the two most important factors. Parents' participation (4.38 marks) and the school age (4.44 marks) both contribute to the child's success in the transition period. However, factors related to children such as health, movement (4.05 marks), language (3.90 marks), behavior control (3.92 marks), and personality (3.60 marks) are ranked at the low rank. If teachers were lack of attention to these characteristics, not based on their own abilities, it was difficult to make support plans to schools (4.37 marks). Legislation factor in local agencies (3.80 marks) was also not appreciated. Actually, managers have high concerned to the school/teacher's preparation more than family-related factors and the characteristics of the child or the participation of the local community.

2.2.2. Managers' awareness of activities used to support children in the transition from home to kindergarten

Table 4. Activities used to support children in the transition from home to kindergarten

N°	Activities	\bar{X}	Rank
	Support for teachers	3.93	
1	Implement the theme “Kindergarten”	4.31	2
2	Organize visit to kindergarten	3.35	12
3	Organize seminars, training courses, professional activities for teachers	4.12	5
	Communicate the importance of transition	3.31	

4	Invite parents to participate in the workshop	3.25	13
5	Invite the participation of authorities, unions and branches	3.04	15
6	Invite the participation of other kindergartens	2.75	16
7	Using pictures, leaflets, banners, etc.	3.71	10
	Coordination between home and kindergarten	3.8	
8	Provides training programs for parents	3.79	9
9	Share activities in kindergarten to support children to go to kindergarten	3.90	6
10	Organize a number of days for young families to visit the classroom before the child officially goes to kindergarten	3.07	14
11	Meet the child's teachers	3.87	7
12	Parent meeting at the beginning of the school year	4.36	1
13	There are spaces for children and families to get used to the kindergarten	3.87	8
14	Take some time (1-2 weeks) for the child and family to get acquainted with the kindergarten	3.62	11
15	Ask parents to provide basic information about the child and family	4.25	3
16	Diversify propaganda forms for parents (short discussions, seminars, leaflets, etc.)	4.14	4

The results in the table above revealed that kindergartens mainly used familiar support methods such as parent meeting, implementing the topic of “kindergarten” or getting information about children from parents. Although managers believed that parents needed to implement ways for children to get used to the new environment (visiting school, class, teachers or new friends), preschools rarely organize specific time for young families to get acquainted with the kindergarten before the child officially goes to the kindergarten. Furthermore, parents were not allowed to participate much in related workshops. Measuring efforts to support teachers were more important than coordinating with parents or communicating about transitions with other organizations.

Managers' awareness of issues that need attention when implementing activities to support transition from home to kindergarten

The results of the survey indicated that the managers paid much attention to raising awareness for teachers about the transition from home to kindergarten (5.69 marks) and ensuring the timing of transition supporting plans (5.62 marks). Other issues were concerned such as initial assessment of children's development (5.41 marks); Capacity building for teachers to cope with the child's negative behaviors (5.28 marks) and consider the children's family situation (5.12 marks). However, they argued that they should not allow teachers to be flexible in using their own measures to accommodate the child's differences (3.92 marks). This showed the rigidity of the school's implementation of supporting strategies. Besides, parent supporting activities (reassuring, guiding, regularly updating information about their children,

etc.) have not really been paid attention (4.67 marks). This was a similar to the current situation of preschool transition support activities.

Managers' awareness of guiding principles when implementing activities to support the transition from home to kindergarten

The majority of managers affirmed that directing the implementation of supportive activities for children in the transition from home to kindergarten needed to grasp the basic principle - child-centered principle (4.69 marks) and ensure flexibility in implementation (4.10 marks). However, one of the essential principles to help the child's transition became a smooth one was that the need for close coordination between family, school and the community (2.94 marks) has not been focused and discussed. While the success of a child in school depended not only on the skills he or she possessed, but was believed to be the result of close, cooperative and supportive relationships between home, school, and the community.

2.2.3. Managers' awareness of barriers in the transition from home to kindergarten

Table 5. Managers' awareness of barriers which teachers cope with in the transition from home to kindergarten

Nº	Barriers	Level (n= 213)					
		Most teachers		Some teachers		No teacher	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
1	The class list is provided too late, too close to the time the child arrives at kindergarten	34	15.96	88	41.31	91	42.72
2	Teachers are not paid to prepare kindergarten over the summer	27	12.68	47	22.07	139	65.26
3	Pick up many new babies at once	100	46.95	83	38.97	30	14.08
4	Not much is known about the child and his family	47	22.07	97	45.54	69	32.39
5	The school's transition plan was ineffective	24	11.27	97	45.54	92	43.19
6	The transition from home to kindergarten is time consuming for the teacher	33	15.49	94	44.13	86	40.38
7	Parents do not take their children to visit kindergarten	30	14.08	136	63.85	47	22.07
8	Parents are not interested	26	12.21	122	57.28	65	30.52
9	Can't see parents, just see grandparents or maids	29	13.62	146	68.54	38	17.84
10	Parents cannot read	15	7.04	117	54.93	81	38.03

11	Parents expect too much on teachers and kindergartens	50	23.47	137	64.32	26	12.21
12	The raw materials and utensils are still few	30	14.08	114	53.52	69	32.39
13	The preschool teacher is not excited	10	4.69	131	61.50	72	33.80

The results from Table 5 showed that the managers also found that teachers faced many difficulties both from young families and schools in the transition period from home to kindergarten. The difficulty that most teachers face was to pick up too many new children at the same time (46.95%), whereas parents who expected too much on them and kindergarten (23.47%) and teachers did not have much information about children, as well as young families (22.07%). According to 68.54% of respondents, teachers encountered barriers when parents did not directly bring their children to school, or did not bring their children to visit the kindergarten (63.85%). 61.50% of the respondents said that some teachers were also not excited about welcoming children to school. Thus, it can be seen that, besides the difficulties in the absence of family cooperation, the transition plans are not really effective, the teachers themselves are not ready for this transition period.

Managers' awareness of the barriers encountered when implementing support activities during the transition from home to kindergarten

The survey results indicated that, the barriers that managers faced to implement support activities in the transition from home to kindergarten, include: limitations of parents' awareness and society on the need to prepare the child (3.32 marks); family's educational level, and low standardized living conditions (3.10 marks); lack of awareness on the transition period from teachers, being afraid to change and inflexible (2.68 marks); no local support for transition activities (2.45 marks); lack of guidance documents, lack of effectiveness evaluation of transition (2.28 marks); no concensus and lack of support in the implementation of transition (2.24 marks); psychological fear of failure, be difficult to control transition support activities (2.10 marks); education sector's direction on preparing children for school is inconsistent (2.06 mark); managers are not fully aware of the importance and implementation of child support activities in the transition period (1.95 marks). This result is quite similar to the study of Pianta et al. (1999) which shows that factors related to family, teacher training and local policy cause difficulties to the transition process.

3. Conclusions

Based on this survey by questioning managers, the author found that:

It is necessary to pay attention to the transition from home to kindergarten through increasing the awareness of managers about this period. To achieve a successful transition, it was necessary to reach out to all three factors equally: school - home - ready child.

Kindergartens needed to have an effective transition support plan, ensuring flexibility when implementing these measures. Attention should be paid to the awareness factor and capacity of teachers in organizing transitional support activities.

Strengthen the school's coordination with families and other organizations in helping children to make the transition easier in the first time when they go to kindergarten.

There were many measures to support kindergarten and young families in areas with difficult socio-economic conditions and low educational background. Meeting the needs of each child, each region would offer supportive measures accommodating in the local context.

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