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## **EDUCATORS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF CHILDREN'S TRANSITION FROM KINDERGARTEN TO SCHOOL ACCORDING TO THE *CHILD-CENTERED* COMPETENCES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (CCECC) CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

**Abstract:** *The importance of early childhood education and care can be seen in the competences of six-month-old to school-age children, making it necessary to continuously establish connections between the two education systems. A good relationship between kindergarten and schoolteachers results in benefits that empower the child from an emotional, cognitive, and social perspective. In this way, the child is put in a familiar environment, and the teacher is familiar with the child's overall growth and development. This study, therefore, aims to obtain a full picture of the importance of the transition from kindergarten to primary school from the perspective of kindergarten and schoolteachers. The survey sample is composed of eight kindergarten teachers and eight primary school teachers in Croatia. Two separate focus groups were conducted through the Zoom application. Participants were familiar with the ethical aspects of the research. The questions used were formulated according to the CCECC (Child-Centred Competences for Early Childhood Education and Care) and covered cultural, organizational, and pedagogical areas, as well as the curriculum design that results in children's well-being. In addition to the above questions, participants had the opportunity to exchange ideas, opinions, and advice on advancing actions that contributed to a smoother transition. The results of the research's thematic analysis point to the need to strengthen the relationship between the kindergarten system and primary school system through actions and the possible establishment of a model that would be embedded in the components of kindergarten and primary school curricula.*

**Keywords:** *holistic approach, primary school, early childhood, transition, values*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The transition from kindergarten to primary school is a milestone in a child's life. The horizontal transition includes moving from the family home to kindergarten, while the vertical transition is defined as the transition from kindergarten to primary school (Besi and Sakellariou, 2019; Kekeritz, 2021; Tatalović Vorkapić and Katić, 2019; Tatalović Vorkapić, 2019). These transition actions play a significant role in the child's emotional and mental state, as the child changes the environment, meets other people, and is compelled to adapt to new educational situations (Longobardi et al., 2019; Visković, 2018). The quality of adaptation to the new educational context can play a role in developing the child's competences (Amani and Fussy, 2023; Conger et al., 2019; Cook and Zimmermann, 2019; Corsaro and Molinari, 2006). The quality of the transition from kindergarten to primary school should be based on preparing the child for life and the shared values of kindergarten and schoolteachers in defining educational outcomes (Shuey et al., 2019; Visković and Višnjić Jevtić, 2020). To help educators strive

for values that support the child's well-being, scientists, educators from seven European Union countries, including Croatia, have established a conceptual framework Child-Centred Competences for Early Childhood Education and Care (2017) to improve children's competences through proper support from adults. The competences refer to the set of knowledge and skills children gain in interaction with other children and adults. The core concept of the framework refers to the educational institution's culture, curriculum, and pedagogical practice and focuses on educators' values and attitudes, which ultimately results in a common focus on the child.

Child's well-being is a core component of the curriculum, implying the quality of the transition (Jahreie, 2020; Tatalović Vorkapić and LoCasale-Crouch, 2020). According to Brown et al. (2020) and Wai Leng et al. (2021), a change in the educational paradigm towards a child-centered education is necessary to base the education process on effective teaching and learning. Teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices are key to improving the educational process. According to the CCECC (2017) conceptual framework, the professional competences of educators are the basis for shaping a cultural environment in which a child grows and develops. The creation of official documents aimed at ensuring an organizational structure and a child-friendly policy is the basis for the development of pedagogical practices geared towards the quality of curricula and a holistic approach to the child. The child's cultural environment encompasses the ethical values and attitudes of educators about the child as an active participant in the educational process. The importance of considering diversity, the individual growth and development pace of the child, developing the decision-making autonomy in children's activities, and children 'listening' culture are components that determine educators' value system. For a child to develop key competencies in the educational process, it is important that educational staff rely on an official document that ensures the quality of the educational process. The joint construction of educational staff's knowledge, theory, and pedagogical practices in creating an official document result in pedagogical practice being viewed as a flexible and adaptable medium meeting the needs of the participants in the educational process. Educators' activities aimed at creating an organizational and structural child-centered environment play a role in changing educational policy for the benefit of the child. Through cooperation and partnership with parents and reciprocal dialogue with local and state administration and self-government, educational staff create the link and the vertical of the child-centered system (Somolanji Tokić and Vukašinović, 2018).

A child-centered approach will result in a more productive development of the child's competences if the child grows in an encouraging environment that allows interaction with other children and adults. Systematic monitoring of the child's growth and development in the educational process in the form of keeping pedagogical documentation contributes to the growth and development of educators' professional competences, the development of parental competences and the awareness of external factors in the educational process (Stacey, 2015). The importance of the developed professional competences of educators is also reflected in the perception of how a child learns, game-based pedagogies, and the autonomy of children in play situations. It is, therefore, important to understand children's games, to recognize the significance of the game in childhood, and the role of the game in the educational process (Sahlberg, 2019). The CCECC (2017) conceptual framework includes 38 indicators pointing to the validation of the professional competences of educational staff focused on the well-being of the child (Bogatić et al., 2018). Looking at the indicators and fundamental determinants of the document, the pedagogical viewing system of the educational process focuses on the child's well-being during the educational process in institutional education.

However, differences in the pedagogical view of the ECEC and primary school education processes can be one of the obstacles to continuity in the child's transition from kindergarten to primary school (Tatalović Vorkapić et al., 2022; Wai Leng et al., 2021). Cook et al. (2019) underline the importance of coordination between the two systems, resulting in the child's well-being, and the need for a conceptual model applicable in ECEC and primary education. The curricular components and conceptual frameworks defining the transition from kindergarten to primary school are the responsibility of educational policies (Alexiadou et al., 2022; Purtell et al., 2020). According to Tatalović Vorkapić et al. (2022), the lack of legally defined guidelines for implementing cooperation between kindergarten and primary school is a fundamental problem in achieving the transition. Research results (Balduzzi et al., 2019; González-Moreira et al., 2021; Sorzio and Bembich, 2021) point to the factors that are barriers to achieving the transition. The lack of communication between kindergarten and schoolteachers, the quality assessment system, and the lack of coherence between the

systems account for different transition practices. According to Visković (2018), the quality assessment system covers measuring children's achievements at a level that may result in their lack of self-confidence. The lack of professional responsibility and accountability of adults in the transition process can play a role in perceiving the transition as a concept of school preparation that focuses more on children's academic achievements and less on their well-being.

Visković and Višnjić Jevtić (2019) discuss the theoretical framework that focuses on learning strategies, identity, and activities that contribute to a smoother transition. One of the activities is to look at the transition from the perspective of all participants in the transition, including children. Puccioni et al. (2020) claim that parents play an important role in the transition and that parental involvement in the transition process greatly contributes to its quality. For all participants in the educational process to be involved in transition activities, it is essential that they have shared values and the same level of understanding the importance of transition and awareness of the development of children's competences in line with the nature of the child's learning (Andiema, 2020; Nicholas et al., 2021; Sodikovna et al., 2023). Vorkapić et al. (2023) believe that a lack of mutual understanding of the teaching and education processes among kindergarten and schoolteachers is a fundamental factor that prevents a smoother transition. A potential factor that would contribute to reconciling values is a protective factor that ensures children's group transition, continuous interaction of schoolchildren with children from kindergartens, children's role play to experience play situations in school, and a learning environment based on pedagogical, cultural, and organizational factors.

According to Balduzzi et al. (2019), the shift from learning through play to formalized learning contributes to the disparity in child-centered pedagogical values. The authors claim that primary teacher's educational planning focuses on pre-defined learning objectives and outcomes to be achieved by all children within a given timeframe, while in kindergarten, the focus is on the teacher's individual approach to observing and understanding the child's learning that results in pedagogical planning of the educational process. A cultural factor encompasses activities aimed at belonging to a group, mutual recognition, and strengthening intercultural competences (Walsh, 2023). An organizational factor refers to focusing on continuity in the joint activities of parents, kindergarten teachers, and schoolteachers during the transition (Puccioni et al., 2020), and a holistic approach to children's competence development (Kokkalia, 2019; Motherway, 2022; Tang et al., 2019). The interplay between pedagogical, cultural, and organizational factors results in a child-centered approach and preparing them for life situations that ultimately contribute to facilitating the child's transition from kindergarten to primary school and further functioning in the educational context.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research objectives and research questions**

While the transition from kindergarten to school has been explored, there is no consensus among the authors on the universal elements and steps necessary for a more successful transition. A qualitative methodological approach was used during the research, which is conducted in 2023, to address this issue and gain a broader perspective on the two education systems. This study aims to get a full picture of the importance of the transition from kindergarten to primary school from the perspective of kindergarten and schoolteachers and to identify their values, attitudes, opinions, and experiences about the child, the child's learning, and the child's transition from kindergarten to primary school. In line with the above objective, three research questions were formulated:

- 1) What attitudes of educators and teachers point to an understanding of the cultural, organizational, and pedagogical dimensions of educational work necessary for achieving an easier transition for a child from kindergarten to primary school?
- 2) What are the experiences of kindergarten and schoolteachers in the child's transition from kindergarten to primary school?
- 3) What are the important elements of the child's successful transition from kindergarten to primary school?

### **Survey sample**

The survey sample consisted of kindergarten and schoolteachers, which leads to a pedagogical conclusion based on pedagogical practice and subjective experiences. The first group consisted of kindergarten teachers ( $n = 8$ ), and the second group consisted of class teachers ( $n = 8$ ). The focus groups were aimed to explore the attitudes, motives, and the value system of kindergarten and schoolteachers as fundamental determinants of children's transition from kindergarten to primary school. A sample of 8 participants per group constitutes the optimal sample for this type of study (Skoko and Benković, 2009). To obtain subjective insight without possible pressure from another group, the groups of kindergarten and schoolteachers were separated. The argumentation and the presentation of opinions and views in a homogeneous group brought about a lenient communication in which the participants felt understood by their group fellows, which contributed to a wider and richer verbalization.

### Survey procedure

To obtain subjective insight from research participants, a qualitative methodological approach was used. Qualitative research data were obtained through two separate focus groups. The conversation between the moderator and other participants was conducted via Zoom's virtual meeting platform. The necessary condition for participation was having cameras on so that nonverbal communication could be recorded. One researcher moderated while the other recorded non-verbal signs when communicating with the focus group participants. With the consent of the participants, the interview was recorded. Each focus group required the preparation of a moderator. Before the conversation started, the participants were informed about the aim and purpose of the survey, their role in it, anonymity, and how the data obtained would be used. Participants were informed about the possibility of opting out of their focus group at any moment.

### Research approach and data processing

In line with the research objective, a qualitative methodological approach was used to obtain the data. Recordings of both focus groups were transcribed, data encoded, and thematically analyzed by CCECC (Child-Centered Competences for Early Childhood Education and Care). In the thematic analysis, the guidelines of Braun and Clark (2006) were followed, in which it is emphasised that the research independently codes each conversation from each individual focus group. After agreeing on the supported codes, it is started to determine the topics that are named by agreement and in a certain way. While respecting the anonymity of the participants, and to distinguish the range of different answers, the answers were marked in the analysis with the letter I, representing the participant, and a number from 1 to 8 to know which participant the code refers to, i.e., whose answer is used in the analysis. The third element was the letter F and the number 1 or 2, depending on the focus group. Focus group 1 relates to kindergarten teachers and focus group 2 to schoolteachers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The coding data identified the themes of each focus group. Table 1 contains the themes and codes obtained by the focus group of kindergarten teachers, while Table 2 contains themes with the corresponding schoolteacher codes. Although the focus groups were guided and questions asked according to the CCECC conceptual framework, the topic of the conversation varied, as did the codes within the conversation.

The cultural dimension of kindergarten and primary school represents the ethics and values of educators. Questions including the ethical component relate to respecting children's diversity in their individual pace of growth and development, and diversity which includes the acceptance and support of children with disabilities through inclusive education in kindergarten and primary school. The value system comprises an implicit and explicit teacher pedagogy that focuses on the child's well-being and puts the child's needs first.

Based on the premise that children are capable and competent and play an active role in the surrounding society, it is the responsibility of adults to achieve appropriate interaction with children by considering children's needs, recognizing their strengths, learning strategies, and individual growth and development. The values of providing children's autonomy in learning activities, children 'listening',

and taking children into account in their active involvement in the learning process indicate the values of the culture of educational staff's professional competences.

Monitoring the child's growth and development through keeping pedagogical documentation is a system of values that indicates reflective pedagogical practice and a reflective role of kindergarten and schoolteachers. Joint construction of knowledge, cooperation with parents and striving to change the education policy paradigm are policy features and implications for changing official framework documents. The organizational dimension implies all efforts by educational staff to create an environment that encourages the child to grow and develop properly and in a quality way. The pedagogical dimension of kindergarten and primary school is an element of the pedagogical work of kindergarten and schoolteachers in the child's transition from kindergarten to primary school.

**Table 1**

*Themes and assigned codes: kindergarten teachers' focus group.*

THEMES	CODES
Cultural dimension of the kindergarten	Importance of children's game
	Individual approach to the child
	Autonomy in children's activities
	Support to inclusive education and care
Organizational dimension of the kindergarten	Partnership with parents
	Transition curriculum
	Development of professional competences
	Cooperation with the teacher
Pedagogical dimension of the kindergarten	Child learning mechanisms
	Spatial and material environment
	Pedagogical documentation

The focus group of kindergarten teachers has shown that the cultural dimension of the kindergarten is most recognized through the culture of games, the activities, and the individualized approach to the child. Under gaming and playing, kindergarten teachers include several different but very similar elements. Play is the child's "primary job" (I/2/F1) and the "basic biological need" (I/1/F1). Kindergarten teachers' perception of play as the main characteristic of childhood and spending the child's time in play, is in line with recent literature (Balduzzi et al., 2019; Sahlberg, 2019). The play activities practiced by a kindergarten child are carried out under pedagogical guidance. The importance of leading in play situations is seen in supporting the organization of play spaces, creating a play context that supports play situations, and planning the incentives that create a rich spatial-material environment for the benefit of the play. Participants report that such activities are mostly tailored to the individual needs of the child: "I always organize children's play according to an individual approach" (I/7/F1). Individual access to the child in play situations is achieved by monitoring the child to understand their needs. Teachers recognize the child's interest by providing the child with autonomy in choosing

activities, materials, and approach: “I provide autonomy... in choosing toys and games, but... I make every effort to accompany all their activities so that I can guide them later” (I/6/F1). The aspect of autonomy is important for the child, both in kindergarten and primary school. It is also an important aspect of the child’s transition from kindergarten to primary school. According to Visković and Višnjić Jevtić (2019), the transition of children from kindergarten to primary school reduces children’s autonomy. Children are more exposed to passive forms of acquiring knowledge and have no choice in making decisions and expressing ideas related to learning and building knowledge and skills. To avoid negative consequences and to make the transition from kindergarten to primary school easier, it is important to support children in self-initiated and self-organized activities. On the other hand, it is important to find a positive balance between school responsibilities and obligations and children’s autonomy. In addition to the value system characterized by recognizing the importance of the child’s play as the basis of the child’s learning, teachers describe the cultural dimension value system as a recognition of diversity and a focus on how to approach a child properly if they need support in their development path: “using private channels for professional doubts” (I/7/F1)... “individual approach” (I/4/F1): “Cooperation with parents and professional services, educational rehabilitators” (I/2/F1). Kindergarten teachers highlight their competence in identifying difficulties in the child’s development but also stress the need for support to dispel professional doubts. They address professional concerns by working with experts in the field of education, thereby also developing their professional competences. The development of professional competences results in strengthening self-confidence and connecting with parents to enable a child with disabilities inclusion in the educational process and to provide proper support for their growth and development. Therefore, Walsh (2023) points out that mutual recognition of diversity contributes to strengthening intercultural competences and strengthening the cultural factors of the value system of educational staff’s professional competences.

When asked about the organizational aspect of the kindergarten in which they work, the participants’ answers related to aspects that could improve and facilitate the child’s transition from kindergarten to school. They believe parents are key participants in this process. They think that parents need to be better aware of the differences between kindergarten and primary school and the expectations between the two institutions: “the parent must know where the child is going... not all parents know it, so they are surprised” (I/4/F1). Puccioni et al. (2017) also claim that parents play an important role in the transition and that parental involvement contributes to a better understanding of the transition from kindergarten to primary school, as it results in having realistic expectations of the educational process, the teaching process, and the expectations of the child and their achievements in kindergarten and primary school.

Societal changes bring together activities that can contribute to a smoother and better child’s transition from kindergarten to school. Some educators consider it essential to familiarize the vertical of education systems to be able to recognize the school’s requirements: “organize meetings with kindergarten and schoolteachers, know each other’s curricula, and find the point where curricula can intersect” (I/2/F1). They consider the administrative aspect an important step towards an optimal transition from kindergarten to primary school, which will function on the national level: “one document... would be super and very important... if we had all together, teachers and educators, one basic, common document for Grade 1” (I/5/F1). In addition to parents, teachers are the main participants in the child’s transition from kindergarten to primary school. To make the transition as smooth as possible, the divergence in key pedagogical aspects and expectations of the child should be minimized. Present research (Andiema, 2020; Nicholas et al., 2021; Sodikovna et al., 2023) point to the importance of all participants in the educational process agreeing on key determinants of the transition from kindergarten to primary school. This is mainly due to the different perceptions and expectations coming from parents, kindergarten, and schoolteachers (Dockett and Perry, 2014) and the lack of a transitional document as a core component of kindergarten and primary school curriculum (Somolanji Tokić, 2018).

The focus group of kindergarten teachers recognizes this problem and underlines the importance of a common document as an initial and starting document in establishing cooperation between kindergarten and primary school. Kindergarten teachers perceive the role of schoolteachers as one of the more important elements for better quality and more systematic monitoring of the growth and development of children from kindergarten to primary school. They think joint teaching activities help schoolteachers to get to know the work of kindergarten teachers, but also the child who starts attending primary school: “We need to have common gatherings definitely... I mean, professional

trainings... this would be a real step forward.” (I/8/F1), “... the school and kindergarten jointly plan lessons.” (I/2/F1).

Teacher highlights the lack of networking and the need to bring professionals together, which is in line with the conclusions of scientific research. Visković and Višnjić Jevtić (2019) claim that bringing kindergarten and schoolteachers together is positive and desirable, and this is legitimate to represent and ask for. According to Vorkapić et al. (2023), a lack of mutual understanding of the teaching and education processes among kindergarten and schoolteachers can result in a more difficult transition from kindergarten to primary school. In addition, the negative attitudes of kindergarten teachers toward schoolteachers and vice versa can contribute to divergences in the value system and a lack of understanding of the importance of the child’s transition from kindergarten to primary school. Some answers show a negative perception of schoolteachers, and participants think that there is a need to change the relationship between teachers and first-grade students: “...teachers should connect with the child... should not address them formally... I mean, stop saying the child is below the teacher, forcing such a relationship.” (I/3/F1).

Kindergarten teachers’ negative perception of schoolteachers and the relationship with them also makes children perceive them as such. The difference can be seen in the way in which kindergarten teachers participate in organizing children’s games and in the game itself, while children see how the schoolteacher does not participate in the game as much as the kindergarten teacher did. The schoolteacher is perceived as a more distant person than the kindergarten teacher (Visković and Mikulandra, 2021). In the triangle consisting of a kindergarten teacher, child and schoolteacher, the relationship between the kindergarten teacher and the child is warmer and closer than the one between the schoolteacher and the child. One reason can be the evaluation process itself, which the schoolteacher must practice in normative, numerical terms.

According to Visković (2018), the lack of children’s self-confidence is due to a quality assessment system that measures children’s achievements and sets levels and scales that are often not in line with the child’s individual pace of development. A lack of understanding of the child’s developmental stage can be one of the fundamental barriers to achieving a smoother transition from kindergarten to primary school. From the initial contact of the child with the school, the teaching process should show the characteristics of modern and child-centered schools. The organizational dimension also includes the development of professional competences, reflective practices, and open dialogue among educational staff. Participants list both formal and informal types of professional development: “free will in the choice of training courses” (I/5/F1), “training through Erasmus projects” (I/8/F1), “training organized by the institution” (I/1/F1), “on-line education that we find on our own” (I/3/F1). Brown et al. (2020; Wai Leng et al., 2021) consider that a paradigm shift in education towards a child-center approach is the result of developed professional competences and that the development of educators’ professional competences is necessary to base the educational process on effective teaching and learning.

Kindergarten teachers highlight participation and the importance of certain joint projects to share experiences and examples of good practice, thus looking at the quality of their own practice and developing into reflective practitioners. The motivation for further professional training lies precisely in finding training courses that meet the individual needs of kindergarten teachers according to the problems faced in pedagogical practice. Therefore, the focus group of kindergarten teachers highlights informal professional development as a priority in their choices as they respond to their current needs.

The topic “The Pedagogical Dimension” includes respondents’ answers to their own pedagogical efforts to organize the child’s transition from kindergarten to primary school. Participants’ thoughts refer to the examples of good practice. To make the transition to primary school as smooth as possible, kindergarten teachers explain why it is important to observe each child individually: “I observe the child, see how they learn, and accordingly further organize the work with them” (I/4/F1), “I acknowledge their learning dynamics” (I/8/F1). An important pedagogical dimension is a spatial and material environment that should be adapted to the needs of the child, both in kindergarten and primary school: “it is necessary to give the child free movement and a place for his or her needs” (I/1/F1); “children need a stimulating environment...” (I/3/F). However, kindergarten teachers also highlight financial difficulties, which are often a barrier to creating a spatial and material environment: “kindergarten partly finances, but we mainly create incentives” (I/7/F1), “we work with parents, and they bring materials to us” (I/6/F1), “...often we make everything alone” (I/1/F1). Kindergarten teachers

compensate for the financial deficit by working with parents. In this way, parents are undoubtedly compelled to feel parental responsibility and fulfill their parental role in the educational process by co-constructing a spatial and material environment that will help developing children's competences. Parents and educators' joint work can reduce parents' motivation through the quality development of partnership relationships that help facilitate the child's transition from kindergarten to primary school.

The third factor of pedagogical action that participants consider important is pedagogical documentation that accurately tracks the child's progress. It provides different ways of documenting the child's development path, which is an important school indicator of the key characteristics of the child: "we document all their activities with photographs..." (I/4/F1), "...we make transcripts of conversations with children." (I/7/F1). Stacey (2015) highlights the importance of pedagogical documentation as a fundamental determinant in developing the professional competence of kindergarten teachers. Careful observation of the child in the activities and in interaction with other children and adults indicates the interest and focus of kindergarten teachers in developing children's competences. Recording children's growth and development through photography and video contributes to a better understanding of the child's learning and further planning of the educational process in accordance with the child's interests.

Unlike kindergarten teachers, the respondents of the focus groups of schoolteachers perceive two key components under the cultural dimension of the school – interaction and game, which are important for the transition from kindergarten to school.

**Table 2**

*Themes and assigned codes: schoolteachers' focus group*

THEMES	CODES
Cultural dimension of the school	Children's game
	Local community
Organizational dimension of the school	Professional competences
	Classroom – child's environment
Pedagogical dimension of the school	Classroom activities
	Teaching method
	Monitoring progress and shortcomings

Participants perceive achieving optimal interaction with first-grade students through tailored activities for children of that age: "The students engage in a pedagogical workshop to get to know and meet each other better" (I/8/F2); "I adapt to this age... e.g., I place carpets with toys on the floor." (I/4/F2). Participants report play as very important, especially for first-grade students. To make adaptation to school easier, participants indicate how they follow students' development through the play: "children focus on toys from home, initially playing most with them." (I/7/F2): "It is important for them to play sporting games... and this is how I see what somebody is like." (I/5/F2). Research by Visković and Mikulandra (2021) shows that the children's perception of the difference between kindergarten and primary school relates to the topic of the play. In their view, play is less represented in primary school, where the sedentary way of spending time dominates, while in kindergarten, play was very much represented.

Teachers' answers show how play is recognized and represented. Although there is no accurate play frequency data, a very important aspect is to recognize play as a child's need through which they



can learn. Somolanji Tokić and Kretić Majer (2015) consider it very important for children and, as such, play should have a leading role in teaching. Children are gradually moving out of the child's role in kindergarten to the role of students. The transition from kindergarten to primary school is a stressful moment for every child (Somolanji Tokić, 2016). To make the transition as smooth as possible, teachers use transitional means such as toys that can serve as a safe 'zone' that makes it easier for a child to enter the classroom. Blažević and Matijašević (2021) state that schools offer a wide range of extracurricular activities for children where they can develop their talents. In the context of the child's transition from kindergarten to primary school, extracurricular activities are an addition to the regular program and can be an area that compensates for the deficit in the expression of one's own interests.

Participants associate the organizational aspect of primary school with potential cooperation with the local community as a factor that can link primary school and kindergarten. Most participants agree that the involvement of the local community is poor: "We have no contact with the city." (I/4/F2). The involvement of the local community is important and can be seen through joint activities of the primary school and kindergarten: "...possibly... it would be good to organize a fair..." (I/1/F2); "It would be good to have more resources... so we could organize something" (I/2/F2). Respondents' answers show that there is no cooperation, partnership, or connection between the primary school and the local community. The child learns not only in kindergarten and school but also by participating in the activities in their environment (Buljubašić-Kuzmanović, 2009). The local community is highly necessary in the child's learning process since the various forms of cooperation give the child new experiences that contribute to a better understanding of the child's environment (Cohen et al., 2010). Teachers recognize the importance of the local community as a link between kindergarten and primary school. Although the answers do not show a concrete initiative, it can be concluded that participants recognise the importance of the local community in the educational process of the child's transition from kindergarten to school.

The participants also believe the organization of primary school and kindergarten in the same setting is important, which they see as the optimal solution to facilitate children's transition from kindergarten to primary school: "If possible, everything would be best in one... both kindergarten and school in the same building." (I/37/F2). Another important aspect of a smoother transition from kindergarten to primary school is the classroom that needs to be organized according to the needs of the child. Teachers put forward a series of proposals that have proven to be good for primary school students: "I ask them to bring the box of interest..." (I/5/F2): "...they bring toys with them. The classroom is full of toys." (I/8/F2): "At the beginning of the year, we decorate the classrooms with the photographs of their family... familiar surrounding, and this also creates a feeling of security." (I/3/F2).

Teachers stress that in formal professional training organized by umbrella institutions, there are no trainings or lectures on facilitating the child's transition from kindergarten to primary school. They believe such training is necessary: "There are no such trainings or training courses. I regularly follow the website of Education and Teacher Training Agency. It should also be organized for teachers and educators together" (I/4/F2).

The last topic, "The Pedagogical Dimension", includes respondents' answers on pedagogical efforts to make students coming to the first grade accustomed to the rhythm of working at school. The group's discussion was based on classroom activities, teaching methods, and monitoring children's progress. Participants implement their pedagogical action through activities with first graders focusing on learning tailored to the needs of the child: "I am not a supporter of learning with a specific objective... this is not good for the first graders..." (I/4/F2): "Mostly we learn through play. It is initially the best for them." (I/2/F2). While the educational process is oriented towards objectives and outcomes (Balduzzi et al., 2019), the focus group of schoolteachers disagree with this. The teaching methods are based on various known psychopedagogical methods: "To better estimate... when I receive the first graders, I always estimate and teach according to Gardner (I/8/F2... I differentiate tasks." (I/1/F2).

Participants report how they monitor students' progress in several common ways: "Usually I write e-notes in the afternoon." (I/3/F2); "Creating a personal development map for the child" (I/5/F2). The main difficulty in monitoring development is the lack of purpose and unused material to monitor students' growth and development in a holistic way. "Although I create and keep a personal development folder, I do not forward the folder to subject teachers. There is no vertical towards subject teaching" (I/6/F2).

## CONCLUSION

The quality of the educational process is reflected in the development of children's competences and in their emotional and psychophysical states. The quality development of institutional education presupposes being aware of important elements that contribute to development. One element is a smoother transition from kindergarten to primary school. Facilitating this transition is often a topic that is considered necessary, but in pedagogical practice and in the teaching process, it is left behind in a certain way, as confirmed by the results of this survey. The intrinsic motivation of kindergarten and schoolteachers is one of the conditions that triggers or drives change in realizing a smoother transition from kindergarten to primary school. The need to connect the systems not only in terms of the early childhood education and care system and school system but also in terms of class and subject teaching is seen in kindergarten and schoolteachers' needs. Systematic monitoring of children's growth and development through pedagogical documentation allows class and subject teachers to understand children's competence development, dynamics, and learning methods. Insight into pedagogical documentation excludes the long-term observation of children at the beginning of a pedagogical or school year, which often causes a slowdown in the teaching process. Kindergarten and school teachers' awareness of the need to pursue activities facilitating the child's transition from kindergarten to primary school contributes to joint curriculum planning, joint class planning, joint education and professional gatherings, the aim of which is to support teachers' professional growth and development related to easier children's transition from kindergarten to primary school and raise awareness of education policy and local self-government of the importance of the transition. The vertical link of the education system contributes to the quality of the educational and teaching process, in which all participants should be oriented toward the well-being of the child. Jointly creating and implementing an official document as a form of support to kindergarten and schoolteachers in organizing the child's transition from kindergarten to primary school, together with education courses and professional meetings organized by the Education and Teacher Training Agency as an umbrella organization, contributes to bringing teachers together to agree on common values and develop the professional competences necessary to achieve the transition of children from kindergarten to primary school. In addition to intrinsic motivation, the professional competences of kindergarten and schoolteachers play an active role in achieving a child's transition from kindergarten to primary school. Teachers often resort to formal and nonformal types of professional development. Guided by professional responsibility, they are finding ways to take initiative to complement their professional skills and knowledge that focus on both the development of children's competences and their overall well-being. While teachers' value attitudes in this research suggest a focus on the well-being of the child, the recognition of the child's dynamics and learning paths, and the individual approach to the child, the activities carried out do not contribute to the continuity of cooperation. The sporadic cooperation between kindergarten and school shows the possibility of careful planning of activities aimed at improving the link between kindergarten and primary school, not only in the year before starting primary school but also during institutional kindergarten education. The experience of kindergarten and schoolteachers regarding the child's transition from kindergarten to primary school is achieved through an occasional initiative, which comes mainly from the kindergarten, has an informal character, and does not result in a link between the continuous teachers' action plan. One of the essential criteria that forms part of the value system is the cooperation and development of partnership relationships with parents, who play an essential role in the transition process. Familiarizing parents with the expectations of educational systems greatly facilitates the emotional situation of the child and parents during the transition. In addition to parents, developing awareness of the local community and joint adult activities focused on the well-being of the child can improve the attitude of educational policy toward the importance of supporting participants in the transition from individual education systems. Kindergarten and subject teachers define the elements that contribute to facilitating the transition. Elements related to kindergarten and schoolteachers include individual approaches to the child; pedagogical monitoring and documenting the child's growth and development; systematic relationships between kindergarten teachers, schoolteachers, parents, and the local community; joint insights into pedagogical documentation and child development maps; and the joint development of teachers' professional competences on a global scale. Given that all these elements contribute to a smoother transition of the child from kindergarten to primary school, the importance of this research is precisely reflected in raising awareness of the

importance of the needs of kindergarten teachers, schoolteachers, parents, and children to ensure continuity in this transition. The research results may provide guidance for further exploring ways to achieve and implement elements that can contribute to facilitating children's transition from kindergarten to primary school.

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