



**THE TRANSITION FROM GREEK KINDERGARTEN TO
PRIMARY SCHOOL: THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND THEIR
COLLABORATION WITH TEACHERS FOR EARLY INTERVENTION –
EXPLOITING BRONFENBRENNER'S VIEWS**

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Abstract:

The transition from kindergarten to primary school is a critical step in a child's life. According to Bronfenbrenner, different systems influence an individual's development. The Microsystems (parents, school) can impact the child's development immediately and directly. Interconnections between the Microsystems (Mesosystem), such as interactions between the family and teachers, can influence children's development and also provide them with the proper preparation for their transition from kindergarten to primary school. The purpose of this research is to evaluate parent-teacher communication and the role of parents in the transition of their children from kindergarten to primary school. In an effort to make new suggestions for enhancing this transition, the quality and frequency of this communication, such as the evaluation of their children's abilities and skills, are thoroughly examined. Data collection was based on structured interviews of 16 parents of children undergoing this transition period and 6 kindergarten teachers. The subject of this study was Thessaloniki and the samples were taken from 5 different schools. The findings of this research reveal that the role of parents in this process can be significant. Parents are trying to prepare their children for their transition by offering them opportunities to express themselves, take initiatives and be able to take care of themselves. The majority of parents that participated in the research believe that their children are emotionally, educationally and socially prepared for their transition to primary school. Furthermore, teachers are trying to equip children with all required skills for a successful shifting despite the difficulties they may encounter. Although the findings of this study show that parent-teacher communication occurs on a regular basis, it cannot be considered a positive outcome, since their partnership has not always been effective or substantial. Both parents and teachers should deeply invest in their partnership, in order to ensure that children will earn all benefits from this collaboration.

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1. Introduction

It is common ground that an individual's development is accompanied by transition phases over the evolution of human life. On the one hand, the transition phases are necessary for a person's healthy adjustment and socialization, while at the same time difficult, especially the ones of early childhood. More specifically, the transition is associated with dual emotions: emotions that derive from the transition shock as well as emotions that are related to the joy of transition. Therefore, even if the change that follows the transition is itself a powerful incentive, it can be neutralized. This could happen when balances in the continuity of the levels of the educational system are not ensured as well as the pedagogical and learning process do not correspond to the child's development. Hence, priorities and shared responsibilities are identified through the partnership and practices of both people and foundations (Sidiropoulou, 2011/ Dale 1996). Within this framework, the dynamic relationship developed among families, children, teachers, classrooms and community is a topical issue of research interest and development of theoretical discourse (Samara 2016/ Catlett, 2018).

2. Theoretical framework

The transition from Kindergarten to Primary school is an essential step in a child's life. Particular attention must be paid to this early educational and social experience for the individual's further cognitive and social development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986), it is not by chance that several systems affect human behaviour and development. Human development is a dynamic and mutual process resulting from interactions through several environmental contexts called systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

In the present study the chosen contexts –as systems of the social environment– are family and school (microsystem) which are fields of natural and social activity affecting a child's development both directly and indirectly. The interface between these two systems, such as the interactions between parents and educators (mesosystem), can influence children's development and properly prepare them for their transition from kindergarten to primary school. On the contrary, invisible difficulties during a child's transition from kindergarten to primary school can trammel his further cognitive, learning and social development unless they receive appropriate counseling support (Samara, Ioannidi, 2018).

Quite interestingly, having adopted a broader perspective on human development, Urie Bronfenbrenner is mainly interested in the "contexts" development occurs within and affected by. This is in fact the core and most appealing element in his approach: the crucial relationship between the evolving biopsychological human

organism and its social environment as well as the quality dynamics of the social systems interconnections and interactions (Petrogiannis, 2003).

In Greece the discussion about the transition is becoming increasingly widespread in recent years, especially with regards to compulsory education at kindergarten and its organic linkage with primary school. It is clear that the offered education in kindergarten and the transition to primary school are key factors shaping later life –learning-wise and socially– of all children and especially the ones who come from disadvantaged families. At this stage, school adaptation difficulties can be detected and addressed with an early intervention in a credible and timely manner. Any learning, socio-emotional and developmental deficiencies incurred by social and cultural disparities are always offset by the benefits of a smooth transition which in turn acts in favor of inclusive education with parents and educators being the leading figures.

Based on this developing scientific debate, the subject of transition from kindergarten to primary school was selected and the mesosystem was defined –the relationship and interaction between parents and educators– due to the significance and impact which the role and quality of their partnership has for the child's further development at that particular period of time.

According to research findings, it is encouraging the fact that most teachers now regard research as a necessary professional activity in order to question their practices provided that they are given positive help from those engaged in research and development. Research is relevant to educational advancement (Verma, Mallick, 2004, p. 366-367).

In view of the aforementioned discussion, the present research was planned within a framework of interactive communication enabled by interviews organized and conducted according to the chosen qualitative research methodology (Mason, 2003, p. 89). In this work the exploitation of Bronfenbrenner's views will fill in an existing gap in Greek reality as well as Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of human development is used to place emphasis on the social aspect of the collected research data. This is where the practical significance of this particular research study lies. Moreover, it should be noted that due to socio-economic difficulties, the role of the social difficulties in Greece in recent years has been transferred to individuals and families of different educational backgrounds.

The originality of this empirical research without wishing to generalize conclusions, is that it focuses on the importance of the cooperation among social systems that affect human development in the present time-period.

3. Research objective and methodology

The primary objective of the present research is the evaluation of the parent-teacher communication and partnership as well as the role of parents in their children's transition from kindergarten to primary school.

More specifically, considering that collaborating with the family is one of the components of the educational work, since parents criticize, express opinions, find solutions and take action as partners and as citizens (Vincent, 2000), the rationale of our research was based on these particular objectives:

- to examine the quality and frequency of parent-teacher communication;
- to evaluate how parents prepare their children;
- to present new proposals for enhancing the transition from kindergarten to primary school.

Following this, converting these objectives into specific research questions was accomplished in such a way that the questions address the proposed research topic with precision and are carefully developed into interview questions. With the interview being not only a data collection tool, but also a means to address the interpersonal, emotional and communicative aspects (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 461) was of significant importance to us.

Research data collection was based on structured interviews of sixteen (16) parents whose children were undergoing the transitional period and six (6) kindergarten teachers altogether.

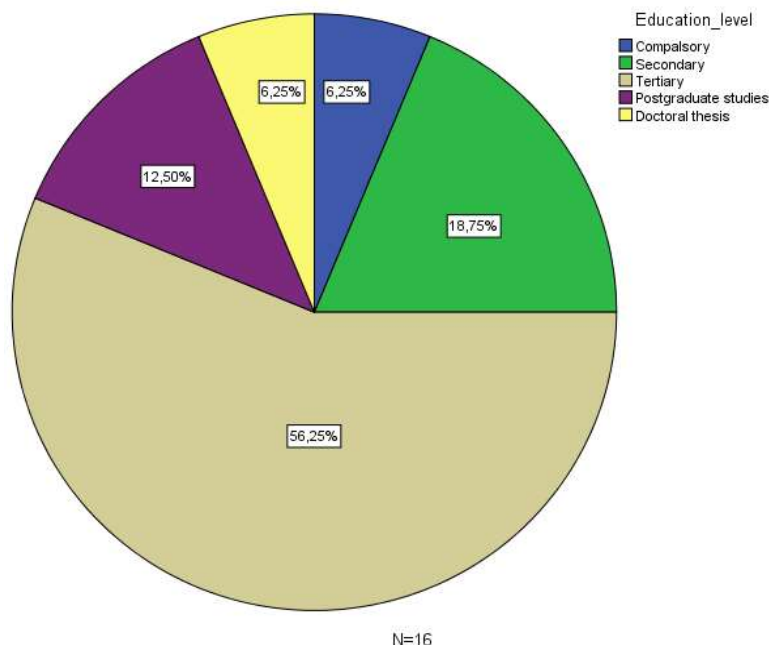
The municipality of Thessaloniki was the subject of study and samples were chosen from five (5) different schools.

4. Results and discussion

All of the parents and teachers who were interviewed were women. With regard to the participants' age, it should be noted that all kindergarten teachers were over 40 years old while 81,25% of the mothers were between 30 and 40 years old.

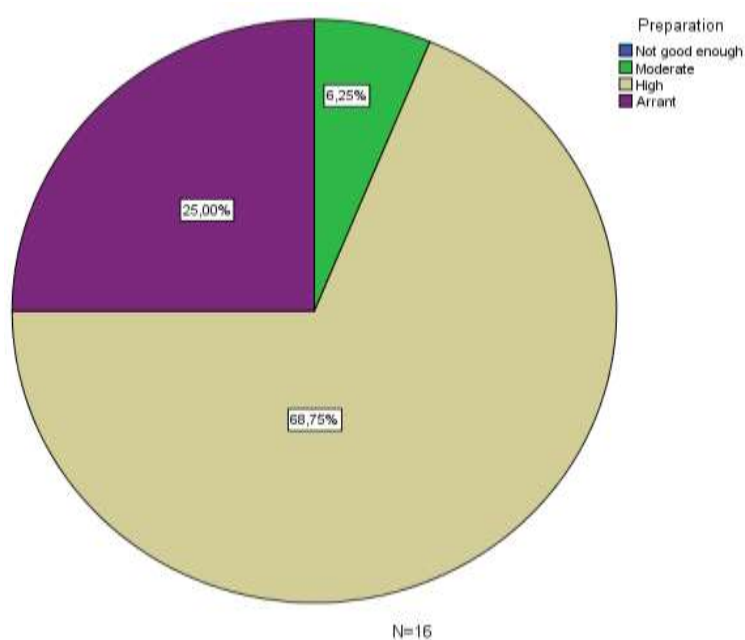
Having a likely effect on parents' responses, their educational level was considered as an important factor. To the question regarding their educational background we notice that the majority has completed tertiary education while the percentage of the participants who have only completed compulsory education or secondary education is small (Graph 1).

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Graph 1: Parents' educational level

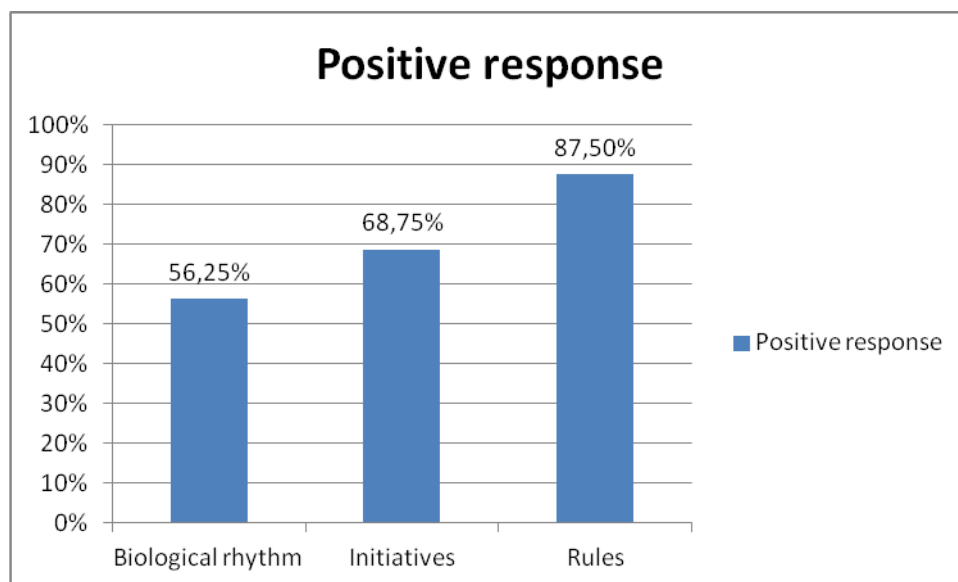
Furthermore, parents were requested to assess their child's preparation by the kindergarten teachers. 68,75% of the parents responded that they are quite satisfied while it is important to note that a quarter of the participants consider the preparation to be excellent. The results reveal that parents have trust in kindergarten teachers and derive satisfaction from their performance (Graph 2). For example, the parents say: *"Kindergarten teachers have been so busy with the transition that they even went on a school trip to the primary school and went on a tour to the places that children will be in a short time"* (parent nr 5).



Graph 2: Preparation for the transition

Over half of the parents (56,25%) responded positively to the question of whether their children maintain a stable circadian rhythm, including meal, sleep, working and rest times. However, 12,5% of the participants do not always achieve that. The percentage of the parents who do not maintain a circadian rhythm is also significantly high (31,25%). Despite the good will that parents have, it is not always possible to keep up with the program. According to the words of the parents “*there is a program that unfortunately is not kept on a daily basis*” (parent nr 11). It is commonly accepted that education systems, which support parental involvement, provide advice and assistance in setting rules for discipline and boundaries for preschoolers (Alevriadou et al., 2008), among these being the maintenance of a stable biological rhythm which can have a positive impact on children and their adaptation during transition.

Additionally, parents were requested to respond to a question as to whether they permit their children to take initiatives on a daily basis. It is quite encouraging that we received a positive answer from the majority of the parents (68,75%). Similarly almost all of the parents responded positively to the question as to whether they insist on their children complying with the established rules with 62,5% of them greatly insisting while 25% enforced absolute compliance. The positive answers to these three questions reveal the parents’ effort to prepare their children for their transition to primary school and adhere well to the daily schedule as well as make them more responsible (Graph 3).

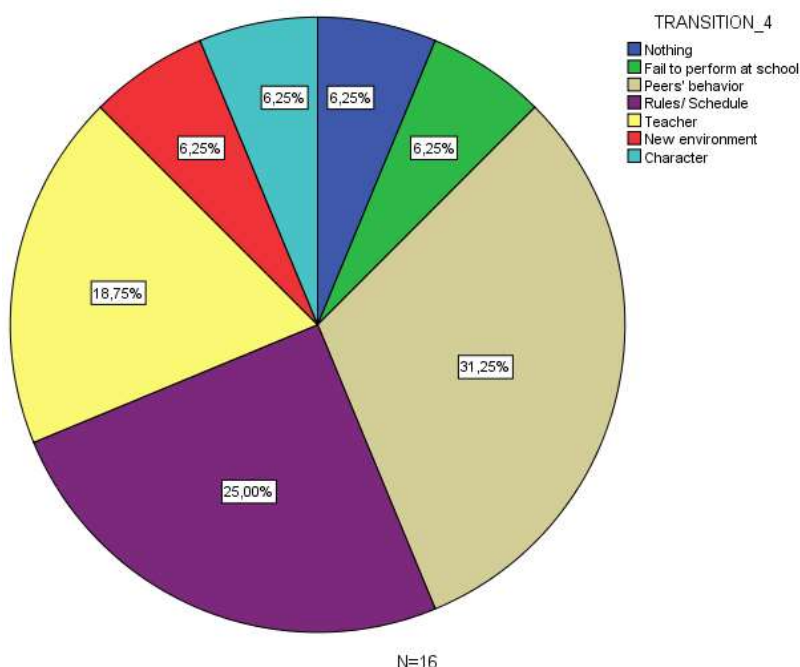


Graph 3: Parents’ positive response

Moreover, parents were requested to name the factors that could affect their children during their transition to primary school. A quarter of the participants referred to the rules and the schedule, since they are both different from what they have been used to.

As a parent explains “the fact that the game will be restricted to a specific time while the rest of the time rules should be followed, can affect my child” (parent nr 4).

It is important to note that 31,25% of the respondents mentioned the behavior of other children, while 18,75% commented on the teacher their children may have. It is indisputable that the relationships children build with their fellow students or their teacher can play an essential role. However, all these references show the parents’ tendency to think that third-party behaviors are considered to be more important than theirs. If children are properly prepared for this transition in order to be more familiar with certain things, such as active participation, harmonious co-existence and problem solving, it would be more likely to enable themselves to tackle peers’ disruptive behaviors and develop positive and healthy relationships with their teachers (Graph 4).

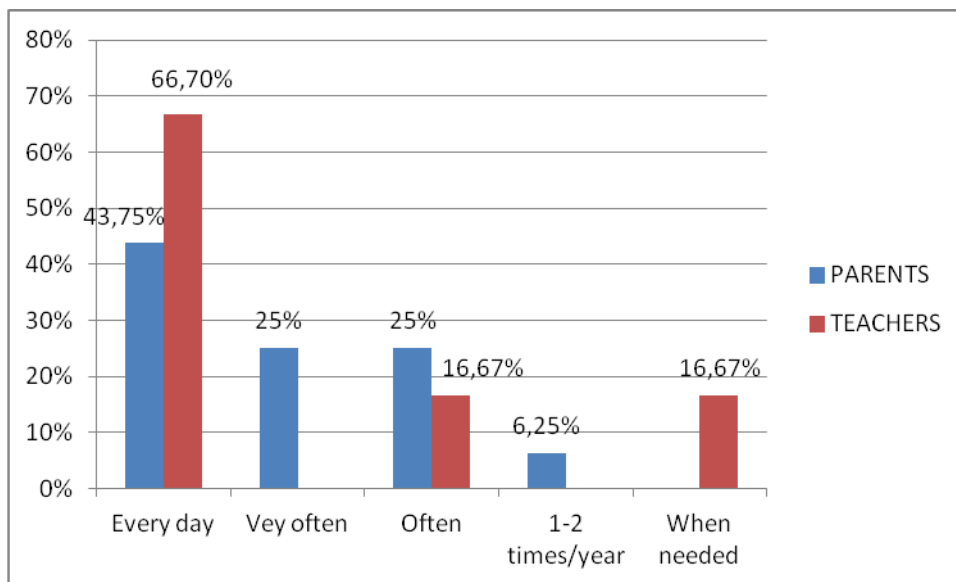


Graph 4: Potential difficulties during transition

With kindergarten teachers holding their viewpoint on the issue of transition intensely, we were given a clear-cut result. 100% of all teachers participating in the research regard the transition from kindergarten to primary school as quite crucial. Equally important is that a similar response was received when another question was asked of whether kindergarten teachers implement a transitional program in primary school so as to ensure a smooth transition for preschoolers. These results show that kindergarten teachers are aware of the importance of transition and how they strive to make it as smooth as possible. According to research, it is necessary for the transition to occur in such a way that children along with their families can have a positive attitude towards school and children can be perceptive as students (Dockett, Perry, 2001).

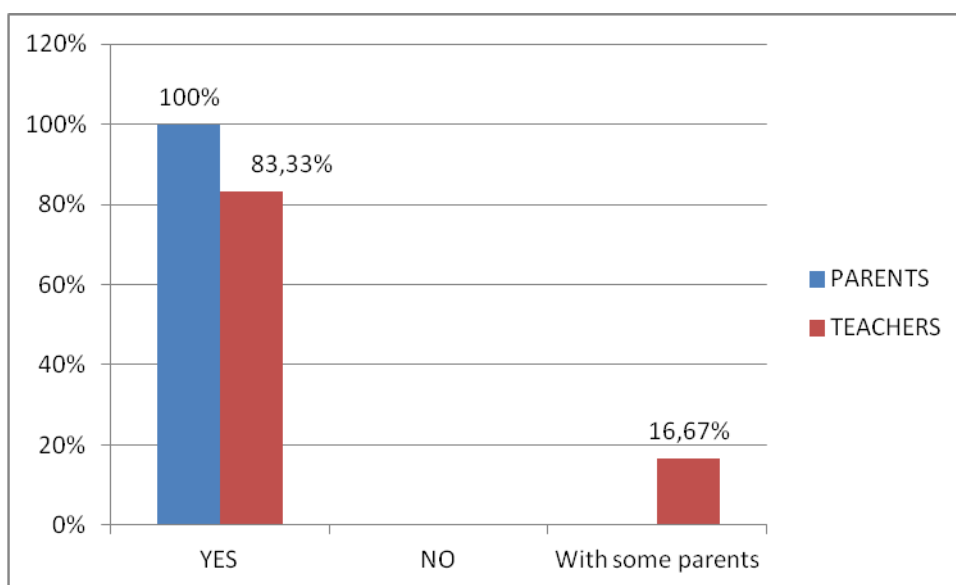
As far as the relationship and communication between parents and kindergarten teachers is concerned, the results reveal a positive insight. 66,70% of the kindergarten

teachers estimated that communication with parents occurs on a daily basis. Quite similar was the percentage of the parents (43,75%) who share the same view while a quarter of them stated that it is quite often (Graph 5a).



Graph 5a: Frequency of communication

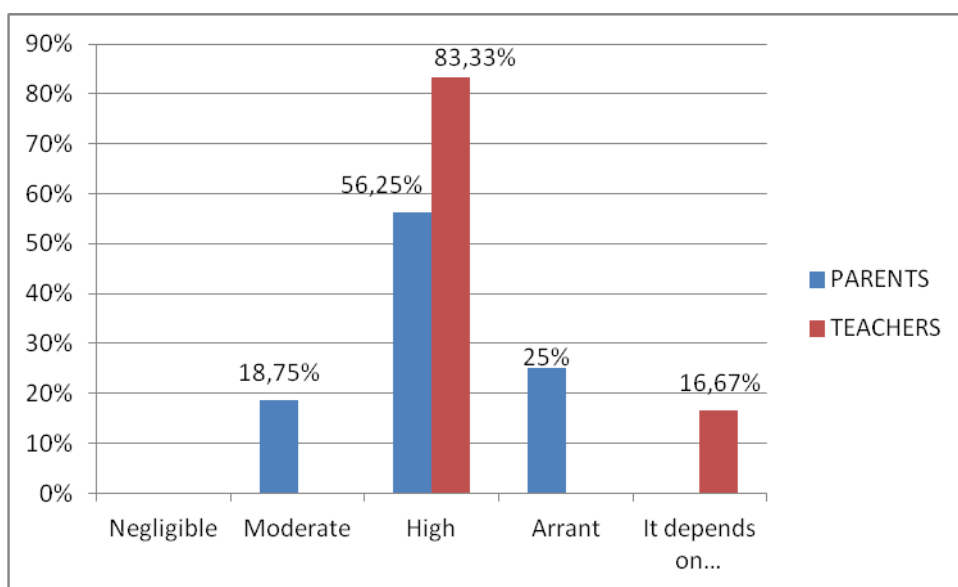
Both the kindergarten teachers and the parents believe that what they have developed between them is more than just reciprocal communication. It is collaboration with 100% of the parents and teachers, with only a small deviation of the latter, sharing the same view (Graph 5b).



Graph 5b: Frequency of communication

With regard to the quality of their collaboration the response rate was high from all the participants. To the question whether they consider their cooperation with the

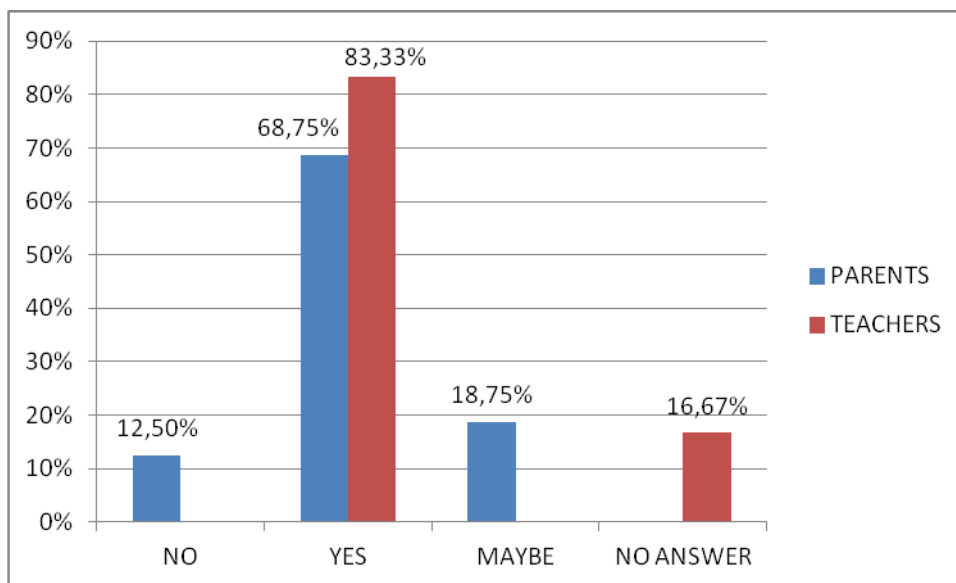
parents substantial and fruitful, almost three quarters of the kindergarten teachers (83,33%) show a high level of agreement. To a corresponding question addressing the parents, over half (56,25%) hold the same viewpoint, while 25% are absolute regarding this matter (Graph 6). As a parent is characteristically mentioned *“working with the kindergartens is essential and constructive to the fullest extent.(Kindergartens) are really interested in listening to the parent, if they have anything to say about their child. They care about the children and they inform as soon as they even observe something insignificant”* (parent nr 1). This statement demonstrates the parent’s confidence in the kindergarten and feels that his own opinion can be heard too, something that enhances and facilitates collaboration between family and school.



Graph 6: Quality of cooperation

Finally, the fact whether counseling would facilitate the transition process, parents and kindergarten teachers’ views were considered important. This question served the objective of highlighting the essential role of counseling and to what degree this educational tool contributes to the mitigation or even elimination of invisible difficulties that children are likely to encounter while transitioning to primary school. The majority of both teachers and parents, 83,33% and 68,75% respectively, believe that counseling could provide the answer to a number of questions that parents may have as well as help them prepare themselves or even tackle unforeseen difficulties (Graph 7). The statement of parent nr 14 is typical: *“I believe that counseling would help with informing- preparing patents both psychological and practical about difficulties and issues that may arise and obstacle to a smooth transition”*. The views of the kindergarten teachers are in full agreement with this statement. According to kindergarten teacher nr 1 statements: *“certainly counseling support would help parents both to support their children in the transition and to manage their own difficulties and changes, as their children’s transition to the elementary school marks changes in their role and their feelings too. Counseling support*

would broaden the parent's vision of potential difficulties of their children. The cooperation between teachers of the two institutions is important and essential because without it there is nothing to be done. It is also important to inform and engage parents throughout the process". This response demonstrates both the need for advisory support to prevent possible difficulties as well as the need for parental cooperation and involvement in the whole process. This recognizes the essential role parents can play in achieving a smooth transition.



Graph 7: The importance of counseling

5. Conclusions – Suggestions

The findings of this research indicate that not only communication between parents and teachers occurs on a regular basis but it is also considered a positive outcome, since their partnership has been effective and substantial. Both parents and teachers should deeply invest in their partnership, in order to ensure that children will earn the most benefits possible.

Moreover, according to the findings parents can play a leading role in the transition process as they endeavor to prepare their children for the passage at this significant juncture by providing them with the ability to express and look after themselves as well as take initiatives. The majority of parents who participated in the present research believe that their children are emotionally, educationally and socially prepared for shifting to primary school. Additionally, teachers make efforts to provide children with all the necessary skills for a successful transition regardless of the difficulties that may arise.

Parents' counselling support could prove to be useful in their effort to prepare not only themselves for the upcoming changes in their everyday lives but also their children so as to cope effectively with their new lives and the different therefore

unfamiliar everyday circumstances. Parents always act on the basis of promoting their children's overall well-being. However, not all parents are in a position to comprehend the significance of their role in their children's lives or understand how critical it is to provide them with the ability to take initiatives, make decisions, resolve simple daily life problems, take over responsibilities, and they do not even consider it necessary from an early age. Counseling support services could assist parents with properly preparing their children for this transition by making the latter more independent and enabling them to respond in the new and different settings accordingly. Furthermore, counseling could fortify the relationship between schools and families by helping parents gain a sheer understanding of the role schools serve, but also of the significance an active and constructive family engagement has in children's education.

To recapitulate, parents' role and their partnership with teachers is a contemporary challenge in the field of education, but also a requirement for bringing successful results, since the child belongs to different subsystems simultaneously (family and school) which, without excluding one another, they have a constant interaction and a dynamic communication based on four core elements: process, person, context, and time. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1994, 2007), these elements are considered to be the driving forces of human development.

Research substantiates the significance of the support that a family can provide (Temble et al., 2000). The quality of parent-teacher communication, qualitatively and quantitatively, enhances their collaboration and makes educational interventions more effective to the community (Michael et al., 1992/ Kindergarten curriculum) and especially to inclusive schools with regard to the curricula for disadvantaged groups (Bermudez, Padron, 1987).

Inclusive/Integrated education is actually an *“approach to increase students' achievements while its design and implementation is a process that concerns the whole of the education system”* (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education). However, this model, inter alia, addresses individuals and families from disadvantaged backgrounds and refers to an early intervention and their support through education.

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