

OPTIMIZING THE KINDERGARTEN-SCHOOL-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP, A PREREQUISITE FOR A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL START*

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the optimization of the partnership kindergarten - school - family, as a key condition for ensuring a successful start to schooling. The general objective is to analyze the collaborative dimensions among the three entities and to highlight how these relationships support, or fail to support, children's preparation for the transition to primary school.

The transition from kindergarten to school represents one of the most significant stages in the child's educational and emotional development. It involves changes not only in environment and daily routines, but also in social status, cognitive and behavioral expectations and, above all, in the educational relationships children form with adults and peers. For this reason, the transition must be intentionally designed, systematically supported, and treated as shared responsibility among all educational involved actors: preschool teachers, families and primary school teachers.

The importance of this moment is supported both by empirical data from practice and by numerous psycho-pedagogical studies which demonstrate that a sudden, unsupported or inconsistent transition can generate anxiety, adaptation difficulties, decreased motivation for learning and, in some cases, early educational failures. In contrast, a properly managed transition path, based on collaboration and communication among kindergarten, family and school, contributes to the faster and more natural integration of the child into the preparatory class, providing him with emotional security and confidence in his own abilities.

Key words: *Early education, Kindergarten - school - family collaboration, Educational partnerships.*

1. Introductory aspects

In contemporary society, education can no longer be viewed as the exclusive responsibility of the school. The child's harmonious development requires close

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collaboration between school and the family. The relationship among kindergarten, school, and family plays a fundamental role in building an educational climate favorable to learning and to the formation of the children's personality. In this study school refers to all those institutions related to formal education, beginning with early childhood education, including nurseries and kindergartens.

The benefits of a strong kindergarten-family relationship include (Andrasciuc, 2020):

- The child's sense of safety, love and support.
- the development of social, cognitive, and emotional skills.
- the increased parental involvement in the child's education and the ability to learn new parenting strategies.
- the educators' enhanced understanding of children's individual needs and their ability to adapt activities accordingly.

Despite challenges and potential conflict situations, teachers are responsible for developing cooperation with parents, who are essential partners in the child's learning process. Research by Kovienè, (2017) identifies several effective approaches to working with parents, including activity, kindness, explaining goals and outcomes to the parents, developing an action plan, solving problems, initiating conversations with a positive feedback, maintaining communication about the achievements of both children and problem-solving. In his research, he found that parents in preschool institutions mainly expect support from specialists, such as the psychologist, social pedagogue and nutritionist. Ecirli (2012) emphasizes the importance of interaction between the family and the preschool institution. Both the family and the preschool institution are the first significant socialization agents, therefore, Ecirli believes that certain characteristics formed within the family cannot be changed by the educational institution, unless its cooperation with a family and with parents in particular is based on common values. He also emphasizes that the objectives of preschool education include supporting the child in developing physical, mental, emotional and social abilities by stimulating a healthy environment, so necessary for the development of the child's personality.

According to general agreement, parental influence is central in the upbringing and education of their children, because the family is responsible for shaping communication, unconditional help, interest in discovering or participating in group activities; the family environment has a great influence on learning activities, on the formation of prosocial behaviors, but it is also conditioned by several factors: social, educational, material, cultural, etc. Prejudices that children carry from home are often difficult situations, which inexperienced teachers can find challenging in the development of key competencies for students in secondary school classes. For this reason, the importance and necessity of implementing the School-Family Collaboration Protocol is supported, as a means of optimizing collaborative relationships and efficient learning. It would also be necessary for the school-family educational partnership to be included in the continuous teacher training programs (Dorobanțu-Dina, 2022).

Starting from the benefits that a partnership with the educational actors can bring to the school and students, school managers must apply certain strategies that are meant to establish school priorities, attract and engage stakeholders, their role in promoting quality education, the direct participation of parents and local community representatives in the activity of advisory and management bodies of general education institutions, their involvement in extracurricular activities. The development and application of these strategies require to prepare the school staff for constructive dialogue, mutual knowledge and collaboration (Orîndaş, 2019).

The kindergarten-school-family partnership becomes a priority of the strategies aimed at developing the quality educational process. Although the importance of parental involvement in the intellectual and emotional development of the child is widely acknowledged, uncertainty persists regarding its exact definition and operationalization.

McAllister Swap (1993) describes four models for developing parent-professional relations: the protective model, transmission model, curriculum enrichment model, and partnership model.

These models are based on beliefs, expectations, and conscious and unconscious strategies in the interactions between parents and professionals. The McAllister Swap protective model describes the power relationship between the family and institutions. The goal pursued in this model is to prevent conflicts between parents and professionals. Parents are expected to transfer the responsibility for their children's education to the school and to assume a position of non-interference in the educational objectives.

Epstein (2001) contributed to determining parental involvement in children's education. His typology of parental involvement provides a theoretical framework for several researches in this area. According to Epstein, parents can be involved in six domains:

- Type 1: Parenting
- Type 2: Communication
- Type 3: Volunteering
- Type 4: Learning at home
- Type 5: Decision making
- Type 6: Community involvement

At first, parenting has little to do with the relationship between parents and educational institutions, given that it is a relationship between parents or guardians with one or more children, intentional activities being used to care for and encourage the child. By providing a stimulating environment, parents influence the child's well-being, which indirectly affects the child's functioning in preschool education environments. However, from Epstein's perspective, parenting as involvement refers to the characteristics of the parents. Therefore, it is about the type of involvement that most parents display simply by the fact that they are parents. Although the importance of parenting quality is acknowledged, it is not explicitly described. However, teachers can contribute to the upbringing of children by strengthening parental skills (Sandberg, Vuorine, 2008).

2. Challenges for children in today's society and insufficient school readiness

School readiness has a positive effect on a learner's academic performance in the formal school setting, and quality early learning experiences are essential to achieving the proper stage of school readiness.

A significant number of young learners have not reached the necessary level to cope with formal learning in the preparatory class, due to their inadequate early learning experiences at home and/ or limited access to quality preschool programs. Green, Parker, Deacon, and Hall (2011) state that quality learning opportunities in the early years of life have a significant impact on a child's development and future school career, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. They go on to say that preschoolers are vulnerable and fragile during their kindergarten years and point out that, due to poverty, most children are deprived of quality learning opportunities in the years prior to starting school. According to statistics, 68 % of South African children live in poverty. As a result, many of them do not reach the required level of school readiness by the time they start it and, therefore, do not meet the criteria that would qualify them as ready for formal learning.

The approach to learning, for the personal school readiness of the preparatory class student, refers to the learning-related behavior that allows the student to engage in classroom activities, including motivation; a positive attitude towards learning; the ability to tolerate frustration and curiosity, initiative, persistence and imagination. Pagani, Fitzpatrick, Archambault and Janosz (2010) refer to these aspects of school readiness as a learner's classroom work habits, which, together with the cognitive skills, determine academic progress and success.

These skills can be seen as the optimal learning behaviors during engagement in classroom activities. Chen, Masur, and McName (2011) state that learning approaches are mastered as learners engage in classroom activities and respond positively to the demands of the formal learning environment. Similarly, other authors explain that staying focused for longer leads to prolonged engagement in learning activities, which leads to better academic outcomes. In other words, learning approaches are developed through a process of growth during participation in the learning process (Bruwer, 2014).

3. Curricular continuity between kindergarten and school

The transition from kindergarten to school is a crucial moment in a child's educational journey, significantly influencing their adaptation to new academic and social demands. Curricular continuity between these two stages is essential to ensure a smooth transition and to prevent potential discontinuities that may affect the child's development. According to a report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), curriculum alignment between early childhood education and primary education contributes to the creation of coherent educational experiences, facilitating thus the children's involvement in the learning process, and promoting positive long-term outcomes (Shuey, Kim, Cortazar, 2019).

A 2019 OECD study of kindergarten and primary school curricula in 54 countries found that there is a clear curricular continuity in key areas such as language and literacy, mathematics, and science, with these being covered in both kindergarten and primary school. This overlap ensures a smoother transition for children and facilitates the consolidation of basic skills from the earliest years of formal education.

However, in other areas, such as health and well-being or practical skills, there is a predominant coverage only at the kindergarten level, with a considerable decrease in the emphasis placed on these aspects in the early school years. Such discontinuities may fragment the socio-emotional development of children and affect their holistic transition to primary education. Also, areas such as leisure and play, considered essential for early development, are mainly addressed in kindergarten but less emphasized in primary school, which may contribute to a difficult adaptation of children to the new, more formalized and less flexible educational environment.

In contrast, areas such as ethics and civic education, religion, social studies and ICT skills are only introduced in primary school, without a good basis in kindergarten. Children may have difficulty adjusting due to this lack of early preparation, which creates a sudden jump in educational standards. In addition, the analysis shows that certain topics, such as social activities, media activities or extracurricular activities, are not addressed either in kindergarten or primary school. This indicates that the curriculum has significant gaps.

A lack of curriculum continuity can lead to confusion and stress for children as they have to adjust to different teaching methods and also meet different expectations. A study by the Education Review Office in New Zealand highlights the importance of supporting children during transition, stressing the fact that effective collaboration between educators, teachers and parents is vital to ensure continuity of learning and to facilitate children's adaptation to the new school environment. Children who experience a smooth transition gain confidence in themselves as teachers who can manage change. They had a coherent educational experience when nurseries and schools shared a common vision and collaborated closely with the parents (Holsted, 2015).

More than just a simple continuity of content, this alignment should also cover the teaching methods, pedagogical approaches and assessment strategies. For example, if in kindergarten the emphasis is on learning through play and exploration, and school suddenly demands a rigid, formal way of learning, the child may face major difficulties in adapting. Studies show that a harmonized, child-centered approach in both kindergarten and the early school years improves children's academic performance, intrinsic motivation and socio-emotional skills (OECD, 2017)

Sharing information between educators and teachers about each child's progress and challenges is essential for a successful transition. According to an article published in the *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, active communication among teachers promotes children's adaptability and increases their academic

performance. This exchange of information helps to identify difficulties early and provide personalized intervention. (Cook, Dearing E., Zachrisson, 2017).

Thus, without authentic and systematic communication among educators and teachers, the children's transition risks becoming a fragmented experience, which can compromise both their academic progress and emotional well-being.

4. The experimental – applicative dimension.

4.1. Partial results of an educational micro-research

The micro-research undertaken *aimed* to examine and analyze the collaboration among kindergarten, school and family, from the perspective of senior group educators in several kindergartens, with an emphasis how important this collaboration is in facilitating the children's school start. The research is based on a questionnaire survey, applied to educators working with senior groups in kindergartens.

The questionnaire is structured as follows:

- Section I - Demographic data (age, experience, group size)
- Section II - Activities for school preparation (frequency and intensity scales)
- Section III - Collaboration with teachers (scales + open items)
- Section IV - Family involvement (multiple choice, frequency, open items)
- Section V - Observations on the impact of collaboration (evaluations and general reflections). *The research sample* consists of senior preschoolers group educators from several kindergartens. The aim was to fully cover preschool educational institutions from several geographical areas in Romania, primarily from the South-West Oltenia area. This choice ensures a relatively complete and stable local representativeness and allows for the outline of an overall picture of educational practices in different areas.

Considering the purpose of the research, we proposed the following *research objectives*:

- Analysis of the extent to which constant communication between the kindergarten and the family contributes to the emotional balance of the children at the end of the senior preschoolers group;
- Analysis of the impact of joint activities between kindergarten and school on the level of children's familiarization with the school requirements;
- Identification of educators' perceptions regarding the need to strengthen collaboration with teachers, in order to facilitate a smoother transition to school;
- Highlighting how educators perceive the influence of kindergarten-school-family collaboration on the overall development and preparation of children for school entry.

In order to achieve the proposed objectives, we established a *general hypothesis*, according to which kindergarten-school-family collaboration has a positive influence on the development of preschoolers and on a school start without anxiety and fear of the unknown/ beginning of the school year (reduction of school shock).

For validating the general hypothesis, we formulated the following *secondary (particular) hypotheses*:

1. Regular communication between the kindergarten and the family supports the

- children's emotional adaptation at the end of the senior group;
2. Joint kindergarten-school activities (visits, workshops, worksheets exchange) help familiarize the child with the school requirements;
 3. The educators would like a closer collaboration with the teachers, in order to help children more when they start school;
 4. The educators' perception of the influence of kindergarten-school-family collaboration is a positive one in terms of the preschoolers' development and their preparation for their school start.

The main used methods were a questionnaire-based survey and a final evaluation form (School Transition Report). The questionnaire was sent via Google Forms (Google Docs) or by email to the educators, reducing the risk of responses given under the influence of time pressure.

The questionnaire covered the following aspects:

- Section I - Demographic data (age, experience, group size);
- Section II - School readiness activities (frequency and intensity scales);
- Section III - Collaboration with the teachers (scales + open items);
- Section IV - Family involvement (multiple choice, frequency, open items);
- Section V - Observations on the impact of collaboration (evaluations and general reflections).

The final evaluation sheet (school transition profile) refers to several important areas: Language and communication, Mathematics and science, Psychomotricity, Autonomy and emotional regulation, being also accompanied by sections on: educator comments, parent comments, teacher's final observations, areas where additional support is needed, recommendations on home practice activities and a section intended for primary school teachers (who welcomes the child in the preparatory class), initial observations at the beginning of the school year and suggestions for adaptation or personalized support.

Among *the limitations of the research* there is the relatively small sample, limited to a geographical area (South-West Oltenia region), which reduces the degree of generalization and possible subjectivity in the open answers and self-evaluations of educators and, nonetheless, the answers, which reflect only the perception of educators, not the perspective of parents or teachers.

4.2. Results and interpretations

The responding educators had between 3 and over 16 years of experience in this field, which proves that preschoolers have experienced educators, prepared to guide them towards their school debut. As shown, all senior preschool groups taught by the responding educators are made of 10 to 15 children.

We are presenting below a selection of their responses:

Table 1. Aspects pursued within the micro-research

Pursued aspect	Quantitative and qualitative interpretations
How often did educators introduce activities to familiarize children with letters and numbers before the end of the year	According to the data collected, 72.7 % of the respondents chose the score 4- "To a great extent", and 27.3 % chose the score 5- "To a very great extent". This shows that all educators have frequently introduced activities to familiarize children with letters and numbers, which indicates a constant concern for the early development of pre-alphabetical and pre-mathematical skills. Although the majority opt for a high level (but not the maximum), the uniformity of the data in the upper part of the scale highlights a common educational practice in this direction.
How much did educators organize practical autonomy exercises (backpack preparation, space organization)	The data show a favorable distribution: 72.7 % of the educators stated that they organized practical autonomy exercises to a very large extent, and 18.2 % of them stated that they organized these exercises to a large extent. This indicates that practical autonomy exercises are integrated into the daily kindergarten activities. Therefore, educators recognize the importance of making children responsible in order for them to adapt more easily to the formal school environment.
How often did educators use role-playing games that replicate tasks from the preparatory class (e.g. "at the desk", "at the board")	The responses reflect a frequent application of role-playing games, which constitute an effective method of simulating the school environment and psychological preparation for it. Educators thus integrate elements of emotional familiarization with the preparatory class in a playful and age-appropriate setting.
How much did educators include activities to organize strong attention (puzzles, following game instructions)	For this question, the results were really close, between 4 and 5, meaning "To a large extent" and " To a very large extent". The findings demonstrate that educators emphasize the development of attention and concentration, through games and structured tasks. This type of activity is essential for the child's cognitive preparation, for the specific demands of the school environment.
How often did educators complete the observation sheets for each child, noting key skills for school	The answer chosen by over 60 % of the respondents was "Biannually", followed by "Annually" with 18.2 %, and "Monthly" and "3-4 times a year" both having 9.1 %. It is noteworthy that individualized assessment is a widespread practice, and educators show interest in monitoring each child's progress in relation to the developmental milestones necessary for entering school. Positively, no "Not at all" type answers were ticked, which denotes interest and involvement on the part of educators, whether these forms are completed monthly or annually.
How often did educators organize mutual meetings or visits with teachers (school visit, "Open Day", etc.)	63.6 % of educators organize such meetings/ visits once a year, and 36.4 two-three times a year. The results show that all respondents organized at least one annual meeting with the teachers.

How much did educators consider that these joint activities (visits, workshops) helped children to adapt more easily to the school requirements

To this question, all respondents consider that joint activities between kindergarten and school (such as visits and workshops) have helped children significantly in adapting to the school requirements. Of all these, 54.5 % considered that they help “to a large extent”, and 45.5 % that they help “to a very large extent”. No respondent indicated a low level of impact, which reflects a unanimously positive perception. It can be said that these activities are not only well received, but considered effective by all the educators involved.

The educators' suggestions for optimizing collaboration with the teachers

According to the received answers, 3 of the respondents consider that it would be useful to have a common calendar or guide with the teachers for planning visits and transition activities. Secondly, there are two other answers, namely, kindergarten-school partnerships recognized by the County School Inspectorates, through which the responsibilities of each party would be clearly established and the organization of several joint workshops, in order to create a smoother bridge between the two stages. Educators express a clear desire to strengthen the relationship with the teachers and to be actively involved in the transition process. The findings suggest that, although there is collaboration between the parties, there is a need for a more solid and continuous structure, which would allow a more natural transfer of responsibility for the child.

How much were educators involved, together with the teachers and the parents, in establishing common objectives for the children's school start

63.6 % of the respondents stated that they were involved, together with the teachers and parents, in setting common objectives for the children's school start to a moderate extent, and the others stated that they were involved in such an activity to a small extent. These data indicate that, although there is collaboration among kindergarten, school and family at a declarative level, in practice it is carried out in limited forms. The results suggest the need for a clear structure through which the parties can effectively participate in setting common objectives.

How much did educators share with the parents and future teachers, teaching materials (worksheets, games, guides) designed to ensure the continuity between kindergarten and school

The responses show that 81.8 % of the respondents stated that they occasionally shared teaching materials with the parents and future teachers, in order to ensure a smooth transition between kindergarten and school. In contrast, 18.2 % stated that they do this monthly, which indicates a more regular form of collaboration. These results suggest that, although there is an openness to curricular continuity and support for the child, only a small proportion of the educators collaborate frequently with the parents and teachers in this regard.

How much did educators use integrated feedback (combined with the parents' and teachers') to adjust kindergarten

The majority of educators (81.8 %) reported that they use integrated feedback from the parents and teachers to a moderate extent to adjust kindergarten activities. Only 18.2 % of the respondents reported using this feedback “to a great extent,” and none indicated a very high or low level of use.

activities in preparation for school	This distribution shows that, although feedback is recognized as useful, in practice it is used sparingly—on an occasional basis rather than as a consistent educational strategy.
Kindergartens organize sessions/ invitations for parents on the topic "How to prepare your child for school"	The unanimous response shows that all teachers involved in the research considered it important to organize sessions dedicated to the parents, within a series of meetings. This reflects how important is the educational partnership with the family and the fact that it is a practice consistently applied in kindergartens.
How often do educators communicate with the parents about the school start	The results show that all educators mention the existence of communication with parents on the topic of school start, which reflects a responsible educational practice that is attentive to the needs of the family. The fact that the vast majority stated that they discussed it several times during the year, and one teacher even periodically (monthly), highlights a real concern for informing the parents and maintaining a partnership.
How often do parents followed the recommendations and resources sent by the educator	All responding educators evaluated the compliance of parents with the recommendations in positive terms, with them complying to a large and very large extent with the educators' recommendations. Nevertheless, most educators were reluctant to state that the recommendations are complied with "to a very great extent", because there are exceptions in any group. However, this unanimity of favorable responses reflects a high degree of involvement and receptivity on the part of families, who not only receive the recommendations, but also apply them consistently.
Examples of good practices regarding parents' involvement	This question was an open one, where educators were able to give various examples of parental good practices. The educators' responses highlight a variety of valuable initiatives through which parents actively supported the preparation of children for school. Creating learning corners at home, getting involved in reading workshops, completing online activities, but also organizing meetings with teachers or informal support groups (such as WhatsApp) show an active and creative involvement on the part of families. These examples reflect a responsible attitude of parents, who not only follow the recommendations of the educators, but also become partners in the educational process. Their involvement strengthens the bridges between kindergarten, family and school, contributing decisively to the formation of routine, motivation and emotional security so necessary for the start of school.
The educators' perception of children's emotional balance at the end of the year, compared to the beginning of the year	Most educators observed a positive emotional development in the children in the senior group, with 90.9 % of respondents stating that preschoolers were "more balanced" at the end of the year compared to the beginning. These results suggest that the activities carried out in the

How educators appreciate children's autonomy in preparing materials and organizing space (at the end of the year)

kindergarten, the collective routine and the collaboration with the family contributed to the development of children's emotional regulation. The fact that negative options were not selected indicates a stable, safe and supportive educational framework, essential for a successful transition to school.

All respondents indicated that the level of autonomy is "high", which reflects a unanimous perception of children's progress in this direction. The result obtained on this question reflects significant progress and an educational environment that supports children's initiative. It is an indication that pedagogical practice promotes independence and children are encouraged to actively participate in organizing their own learning.

The educators' perspective on how children view the activities similar to those in school (writing, letter recognition)

The responses of the educators indicate that preschoolers view school-type activities (such as writing and letter recognition) with openness and confidence, which reflects a good level of preparation for transitioning to school. More than half of the teachers (54.5 %) observed that these activities are approached by children with enthusiasm, and 36.4 % consider them received with interest and curiosity. What is important to see is that no respondent indicated reluctance or fear on the part of the children, which shows that the kindergarten atmosphere, working methods and progressive preparation have created an environment in which school-type activities are associated with pleasure, play and the desire to explore.

The number of children who bring "homework" or work items that they have talked about with their parents at home

All educators included in the research indicated that most children in the senior group bring to kindergarten homework or work items that they have completed at home with their parents. This unanimous response shows an active involvement of the family in supporting educational activities, as well as the existence of a concrete connection between the home and preschool environments. The fact that educators frequently observe materials worked on in the family indicates the parents' interest in the continuity of learning.

The educators' general observations on how the kindergarten-school-family collaboration will influence the children's school start

This was an open question, where educators were able to express their opinion on how the kindergarten-school-family collaboration will influence the children's school start. All educators participating in the research emphasize, through their answers, the major importance of a real, constant and balanced collaboration between the three parties. This collaboration is perceived by educators as having the role of ensuring continuity, stability and coherence in the educational process, but also of reducing differences in preparation between children and the child's anxiety. The risks generated by the lack of collaboration were also mentioned, which can manifest themselves in adaptation difficulties and states of insecurity during the first months of school.

4.3. Validation of hypotheses

The first hypothesis: *Regular communication between kindergarten and family supports the emotional adaptation of children at the end of the senior group*, is validated, given the answers for the question regarding the frequency of communications with parents about the start of school, all educators stating that there is communication with parents several times a year on this subject. Also, to the question regarding the methods by which parents supported the recommended activities at home, there was no negative answer, on the contrary, some educators added other examples in addition to those proposed in the answer options. To the question regarding the extent to which parents respected the recommendations and resources sent by educators, most stated "to a large extent", a few also ticking "to a very large extent". The question regarding good practices was given numerous examples of good practices from parental involvement, and the question regarding emotional balance was answered by the educators that preschoolers are more balanced at the end of the year.

The second hypothesis: *Joint kindergarten-school activities (visits, workshops, exchange of materials) help to familiarize the child with school requirements*, is validated. When asked about the frequency of organizing meetings or mutual visits with teachers (school visit, "Open Day", etc.), most educators stated that they are organized once a year, and the rest stated that they are organized two to three times a year. Also, when asked about the extent to which educators consider that these joint activities have helped children to adapt more easily to school requirements, most educators stated "to a very large extent", and few ticked "to a large extent". Moreover, educators' suggestions for improving collaboration with teachers can also be mentioned. However, despite certain aspects that can be improved, all educators consider that the involvement of preschoolers in joint activities and visits is beneficial for the start of school. A notable finding is the children's involvement in joint activities and school visits. Most educators indicated that joint activities contributed significantly to the way children view activities similar to those at school. As a result the answers were "with enthusiasm", "with interest and curiosity" and "as a serious activity", which shows that preschoolers are not scared and do not view the start of school with reluctance.

The third hypothesis: *Educators would like a closer collaboration with teachers, in order to help children more at the beginning of school*, is confirmed. When asked about the suggestions of educators for optimizing collaboration with teachers, they mentioned several aspects, such as a common transition guide, institutional support, more common workshops, common professional training on the topic of curricular continuity. Also, when asked about the extent to which educators were involved together with the teachers in establishing common objectives for children's school start, over 60 % answered "moderately", and the others "a little". These answers show that this joint activity could be organized much more often.

The fourth hypothesis: *The educators' perception of the influence of kindergarten-school-family collaboration is positive in terms of preschoolers'*

development and their preparation for school debut, is validated. When asked about the educators' general observations on how the kindergarten-school-family collaboration will influence the children's school entry, all educators stated that this collaboration helps to: reduce anxiety, increase the child's confidence, better adaptation, emotional and cognitive preparation. All answers were positive for optimizing kindergarten-school-family collaboration. All four hypotheses formulated in the research are confirmed based on the data from the questionnaire. They support the idea that the relationships among kindergarten, school and family represent an essential pillar in the process of preparing for school entry.

5. Conclusions

The results of the quantitative research, obtained following the application of the questionnaire, highlighted the fact that educators are aware of the importance of collaboration with the family, and this dimension is often well implemented in practice. Most teachers communicate frequently with the parents and organize activities that involve the family in supporting the child's education. In contrast, collaboration with primary school teachers is still perceived as insufficient, limited to isolated events (visits, workshops) and without a structure that would allow a transfer of educational information between the two levels. Even so, educators express an explicit interest in strengthening the relationship with the primary school, recognizing that this could better support the child in the transition stage.

The applied component, carried out in the senior group, provided the opportunity to test some collaboration activities with the family, as well as some evaluation sheets developed by areas of competence, which also included a rubric for parents, but also for the teacher. This approach allowed for the establishment of a functional link between kindergarten and school, even in the absence of a formal institutional framework for collaboration. In addition, the involvement of teachers in establishing the areas and evaluation criteria is a meaningful step towards building an educational bridge between the two levels.

Family collaboration activities have clearly shown that parental involvement can support the emotional, cognitive and social development of the child. Children whose parents actively participated in the proposed activities obtained high scores on the evaluation sheets, easily adapted to school-like tasks and demonstrated balanced and cooperative behavior. In contrast, children who come from family environments where collaboration with the educator was lacking, had difficulties both in completing tasks and in the emotional regulation or motivation for the activity. These findings indicate the importance of family involvement in education and, indirectly, the need to support parents to assume an active role in preparing the child for school.

The final evaluation sheets, designed as transitional tools, have brought added coherence to the educational process. The fact that they include not only the educator's evaluation, but also the parents' comments and a rubric for the future primary school teacher reflects an integrated and collaborative approach, which can be replicated and adapted in other educational units. This type of tool can function

as a form of indirect communication between kindergarten and school, in the absence of direct collaboration, and can support primary school teachers in better understanding the profile of each child at the beginning of the preparatory class.

In conclusion, the study confirms that a genuine collaboration among kindergarten, family and school is a decisive factor in the success of the school start. This must be supported by clear activities, common tools and an educational culture based on mutual trust and continuity. The results and models proposed in this research can constitute starting points for local educational policies and institutional strategies oriented towards supporting the child's transition, with an emphasis on collaboration and pedagogical coherence.

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