

FACTORS INFLUENCING TRANSITION FROM HOME THROUGH PRESCHOOL TO PRIMARY SCHOOL

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In the early childhood field, the word *transition* is used in many different ways. Traditionally, *transition* has been used to describe the period of time that falls between two different types of activities. *Transition* may also be used to describe the time period in which children move from home to school, from school to after-school activities, from one activity to another within a preschool, or from preschool to kindergarten. In each case, early childhood professionals have been concerned with easing the transition between two different types of activities or environments. With more and more children participating in early childhood programs before entering school, there is an increasing focus on the transition between preschool and kindergarten. Many children have problems adjusting to elementary school programs that have a different philosophy, teaching style, and structure than those programs they underwent during their earlier years. Transition efforts are designed to help ease the entry into school by preparing both children and families for the differences children will encounter. In the recent study, the emphasis on the influence of home on preschool children and from preschool to primary school was considered to be an important variable to support the notion that children's socioeconomic status plays an important part in their educational success.

Objectives

It is the aim of the study:

1. to identify factors influencing transition from home to preschool and from preschool to primary school.
2. to investigate parents, preschool teachers, principals and headmasters perceptions of factors influencing transition from home to preschool and from preschool to primary school.
3. to study the demographic factors influencing children's adjustments in preschool and primary school.
4. to study the administrative and management aspects of preschool education.
5. to propose constructive recommendation to the department of education specifically to preschool policy makers and principals.

Research Questions

Based on the aims highlighted above, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What do parents do to facilitate their children's transition from
 - a) home to preschool
 - b) preschool to primary school?
2. What are the factors that influence transition as perceived by the parents?

3. What do preschool teachers do to help in their students' transition from preschool to primary school?
4. What are the factors influencing transitions as perceived by preschool teachers?
5. What do primary school headmasters do to help preschool children's transition to the primary school?
6. What factors do primary school headmasters perceive influence transition as perceived by preschool teachers?

Methodology

In this study to investigate the factors influencing effective transition from home to preschool to school, a survey research design was employed to gather the necessary data and to answer the research questions formulated from parents, preschool teachers, principals and headmasters in four states representing the main zones in Malaysia, namely, Kelantan, Johor, Sabah, Sarawak and the Klang Valley.

The sample comprised parents of preschool children in 18 randomly selected preschools (Annex) in government aided schools in Malaysia, including the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak.

School selection was designed such that both rural and urban preschools are equally represented. Each preschool was given ten questionnaires titled Parent Transition Facilitation Questionnaire (PTFQ) to be filled out by parents of ten randomly selected preschool children.

A questionnaire called Preschool Teacher Transition Facilitation Questionnaire (PTTFQ) was also administered to two preschool teachers. This questionnaire comprised items that relate to activities carried out by the teachers and the preschool to facilitate transition to primary school and their perception on the effectiveness of these activities.

The Headmaster Principal Transition Facilitation Questionnaire (HTFQ) was also designed for preschool principals or headmasters to elicit information on how programs and activities were organized in the schools to facilitate transition. All respondents were also asked about their perceptions of factors that they think facilitate transition and also their opinion on whether their programs have been successful in facilitating transition.

A pilot study was carried out using two schools -- one urban and one rural -- to refine the instruments especially in relation to the suitability and clarity of the items. The three instruments, namely, Parent Transition Facilitation Questionnaire (PTFQ), Preschool Teacher Transition Facilitation Questionnaire (PTTFQ) and Headmaster Principal Transition Facilitation Questionnaire (HTFQ) were given to each preschool headmaster for distribution to the relevant parties. Based on the feedback obtained, several items were rewritten to improve clarity.

The resulting edited version of all three instruments were then sent to one urban and one rural school in the North, East, West and South zones in Peninsula Malaysia and to the Eastern states, Sabah and Sarawak. A total of 177 completed questionnaires from parents, 45 from preschool teachers and 18 from primary school headmasters were received.

Findings

This study identified that a range of variables influenced and added to adjustment outcomes. The diversity and complexity of school transition needs to be valued and understood by teachers as they support children moving into the first year of school. Teachers as well as parents should reflect on the extent to which practices in the early weeks of schooling are responsive to the diversity of children's backgrounds, needs and abilities. Some of the findings and implications from this study are:

1. The understanding of how ready for school the children are as they enter primary school is critical.
2. To adequately prepare children for school, preschools should address holistic aspects of children's growth and development
3. Addressing the disparities in quality of preschool services will improve children's development and school readiness.

4. Children who may require special attention should be identified at an early age in order to improve their school readiness.
5. Ensuring that children enter primary ready to learn may be affected by:
 - o Policies (are there policies on school readiness and smooth transitions?)
 - o Assessment criterion (what is the best criteria and are there appropriate tools?)
 - o Transition arrangements (what type of linkages are there between pre-school and primary?)

Discussion and Conclusion

Above all, researchers, policy makers and practitioners should critically reflect on and proactively introduce the conditions of care and education that best support children's early school development. Schools should develop transition programs with many opportunities (formal and informal) for children and their families to visit the school prior to commencement. There should be additional or targeted opportunities for children including those from low socio-economic backgrounds and those who do not attend preschool.