



Ensuring Warm and
Inclusive Transitions



PEDAGOŠKI INŠTITUT



BASELINE STUDY REPORT

Pre-service training of professionals working in pre-primary
and primary education in Slovenia

PH.D. JERNEJA JAGER, MS.C. MATEJA REŽEK, MATEJA MLINAR

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Introduction

The baseline study aims to survey the pre-service situation in Slovenia. It comprehends the following:

- an overview of the training system and profiles of professionals working in preschool and school;
- main curricula contents of the Preschool Education and Primary Teacher Education study programmes;
- results of focus group discussions with representatives of preservice training organisations;
- results of focus group discussions with new graduates of the Preschool Education and Primary Teacher Education study programmes.

In the preparation of this report the following types of sources were used:

- a systematic review and analysis of the professional education/training systems of early childhood staff in 30 countries (SEEPRO-R),
- data from pedagogical faculties in Slovenia;
- Higher Education Act – ZviS;
- data from focus groups conducted by Educational Research Institute (ERI) with the representatives of Slovenian pedagogical faculties and graduates of the Preschool Education and Primary Teacher Education study programmes.

1. Descriptions of the pre-service training system in each participating country

1.1 Brief overview of institutions and study programmes

In Slovenia, there are three faculties of education, which conduct pre-service training for preschool and primary school practitioners: Faculty of Education in Ljubljana, Faculty of Education in Maribor and Faculty of Education in Koper. These organisations provide separate study programmes for both, future preschool and primary school professionals who work with children in kindergartens and primary schools.

At each of the above stated faculties, the study programme of Preschool Education is available for future preschool professionals who work in public or private kindergartens.

School teachers who work in the first grades of primary schools finish the study programme of School Primary Teacher Education.

With Slovenia having a unitary preschool education, children aged 11 months to 6 years can attend the preschool programme, which is conducted in public or private kindergartens or home care units. The preschool education in Slovenia is not obligatory. The obligatory education starts in primary school, at the age of 6 and finishes at the age of 15.

Teaching and education in kindergarten groups is provided by preschool teachers and preschool teachers' assistants. In the first grade in the primary school, there is one core school teacher who has assistance in a second professional (either a school teacher or a preschool teacher).

The number of their common working hours in the classroom depends on the number of children in the first grade:

- 10 hours/week (with 15–23 pupils);
- 15 hours/week (with 24–28 pupils);
- If Roma children are included in the classroom: 15 hours/week (10–14 pupils); 20 hours/week (15–21 pupils);
- In a heterogenous classroom: 10 hours (12 pupils from 2 different grades) 10 hours (10 pupils from 3 or more grades).

1.2 Preschool and primary school teacher profiles¹:

Job title	MAIN ECEC work-place settings and age-range of children	Main position/s	Minimum qualification requirement
KINDERGARTEN			
Preschool teacher <i>Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional</i>	Kindergarten (ECEC centre – unitary system) 11 months-6 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility Centre head of a freestanding ECEC setting Head of an ECEC unit in a primary school	3 years higher education Bachelor's degree
	1 st grade of primary school 6–7 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility (works along primary school teacher)	
Preschool Teacher's Assistant <i>Assistant Profile in family day care: Early Childhood Pedagogy</i>	Kindergarten (ECEC centre – unitary system) 11 months-6 years	Qualified co-worker (works with core practitioner or alone with group during absence of preschool teacher, e.g. rest time for children, morning assembly, pick up time etc.)	4 years upper secondary/vocational qualification; vocational <i>Matura</i> (final exam)
PRIMARY SCHOOL			
Primary school teacher	Primary school (first 5 grades of primary school) 6-11 years	Core teacher with group responsibility	4 years higher education Master's degree (3 years undergraduate study programmes + 1-year

¹ http://www.seeepro.eu/English/pdfs/SLOVENIA_ECEC_Workforce.pdf

			master study programme)
Preschool teacher/primary school teacher	Primary school 1 st grade	Qualified co-worker (works with core practitioner or alone with group	3 years higher education Bachelor's degree OR 4 years higher education Master's degree

2. Development and evaluation of training curricula

2.1 Introduction of the Higher Education Act

The Higher Education Act² (HE, 1993) regulates issues pertaining to the status of higher education institutions and the requirements for the performance of higher education activities, defines public service in higher education and regulates its system of funding. Education and supplementary education programmes shall be adopted by the senate of the university on the proposal of the senate of a university member or the senate of an independent higher education institution. It is the domain of the National Agency Quality Assurance (hereafter: the Agency), established by the Republic of Slovenia, to accredit the study programmes. The Agency is a public law entity for quality assurance in HE and for development and advisory work. There are no differences in requirements and condition for recognising the degrees among the regions. Among other tasks, the Agency is responsible for (acc. To Article 51f):

- carrying out external evaluations of higher education institutions and study programmes and of higher vocational colleges;
- implementation of accreditations of study programmes;
- verifying changes to the compulsory components of study programmes.

The Agency Council is the highest decision-making body of the Agency. It consists of 11 members (Article 51h):

- three members appointed by the Rectors' Conference;
- one member appointed by the representative association of independent higher education institutions;
- one member appointed by the representative association of higher vocational colleges;
- two members appointed by the representative organisation of students in cooperation with the student councils;
- one member appointed by representative employers' associations by agreement;
- one member appointed by the representative trade unions in the field of higher education by agreement;

² The Higher Education Act

- two members appointed by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia – one shall be an expert in the field of higher education or quality assurance therein who studies or works in the Republic of Slovenia, while the other shall be an expert in the field of higher education or quality assurance therein who studies or works abroad.

Among other tasks, the Agency Council:

- decide on accreditations of study programmes and evaluations on a sample of study programmes;
- appoint groups of experts for external evaluations and accreditations ([The Higher Education Act³](#), 1993).

2.2 Accreditation of study programmes (Article 51p)

Within one month of a complete application for the accreditation of a study programme, the Agency Council appoints an expert group.

The expert group prepares a report on the fulfilment of the accreditation criteria for the accreditation of the study programme within three months of the date of appointment of the expert group. The report on the fulfilment of the study programme is then submitted to the applicant, who may submit comments within one month of receipt thereof. If the applicant does not submit any comments on the report within one month it becomes final. If an applicant submits comments on the report, the expert group prepares a final report assessing all of the comments of the applicant.

For the accreditation of a study programme, the expert group carries out an inspection of the facilities where the higher education institution is to carry out its activities if this is necessary to fully establish the actual situation

The final report of the expert group is submitted to the Agency Council within one month of the preparation of this report. The Agency Council decides, within three months of receipt of the final report, on the accreditation of the study programme without considering any comments or new evidence sent by the applicant to the Agency after the issuance of the final report by the expert group.

The Agency Council grants accreditation for an indefinite period of time to a study programme if the conditions have been met ([The Higher Education Act⁴](#), 1993).

2.3 Evaluation of a sample of study programmes (Article c51t)

The Agency implements annual evaluation of a sample of study programmes in order to advise higher education institutions as to the quality assurance of study programmes. This sample of study programmes is determined by the Agency Council. Higher education institutions may propose the inclusion of individual study programmes in the sample.

The evaluation of a sample of study programmes is determined in the annual plan of the Agency in such a manner that each year the sample includes at least 2% of the accredited study programmes carried out in that academic year by higher education institutions in the Republic of Slovenia. The list of the study programmes included in the sample for the evaluation of study programmes is available publicly on the Agency's website.

³ [The Higher Education Act](#)

⁴ [The Higher Education Act](#)

The procedure is initiated by the decision of the Agency Council to initiate the evaluation procedure for a sample of study programmes, which shall be sent to higher education institutions implementing study programmes. The procedure concludes recommendations to higher education institutions as regards improving the quality of study programmes. The detailed procedure for evaluating a sample of study programmes is adopted by the Agency Council ([The Higher Education Act](#)⁵, 1993).

3. A summary of the main curricula contents regarding to the inclusive early childhood education, preschool and school transitions in pre-service training

The following chapter presents in more details the study programmes of Preschool Education and Primary Teacher Education.

3.1 Examples of study programmes from the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana

The pedagogical study programs have to include pedagogical-psychological knowledges (psychology, pedagogics, didactics, andragogy, methodology of pedagogical research), knowledge in humanities and social sciences (philosophy, sociology, anthropology, etc.), as well as subject or special didactics related to the study of the primary discipline, as well as at least 15 credits of pedagogical practice.

⁵ [The Higher Education Act](#)

General curricular areas⁶		
Curricular Area	University of Ljubljana Preschool education	University of Ljubljana Primary school teacher education
Art	*Art education	Creative Movement and Puppetry in the Classroom
	Education through Art	The Theory of Art with Didactics
Dance	Dance expression	
Inclusive/special pedagogy	Inclusive education	Inclusive Education
	Responses to Difference and the Formation of Identity	Pedagogical Aspects of the Inclusion of Marginalised Groups
Language and Literature	Slovene language	Slovene Language I, II,
	Language and Literature	Foreign Language – English or German
		An Introduction to Literature
		Youth Literature
		The Didactics of Slovene Language and Literacy in the Slovene Language
		Intercultural Youth Literature
Mathematics	The Early learning of mathematics	Mathematics
Motor development	Movement – fieldwork	The Theory of Physical Education and the Didactics of Physical Education I
	The Motor Skills of the Preschool Child	
Music	Music	Music
	Music in early childhood	The Didactics of Music Education I
Natural Sciences	Beginner Natural Sciences – Fieldwork	Natural Sciences – biology,
		Natural Sciences – chemistry
		Natural Sciences – physics
Pedagogy/ didactics	Preschool pedagogy	Didactics with Pedagogical Practice

⁶ <http://www.pef.uni-lj.si/383.html>, <http://www.pef.uni-lj.si/391.html>, <http://www.pef.uni-lj.si/376.html>, <http://www.pef.uni-lj.si/385.html>

	School pedagogy with didactics	The Theory of Education with Pedagogical Practice II
	Theory of education	The Didactics of Slovene Language, Literature, Mathematics, Physical Education, Social Studies, Natural Sciences, Music Education, Art
	Childhood and Education	
Pedagogical methodology	Pedagogical methodology	Pedagogical Methodology
	Researching Pedagogical Practice	The Methodology of Scientific Research
	The Methodology of Scientific Research	The Teacher-Researcher
		Research of Practice
		Research of the Practice of English Instruction in Primary School
Philosophy	Selected Topics in Philosophy	The Philosophy of Education
Psychology	Developmental psychology	Developmental Psychology with Pedagogical Practice
	Educational psychology	Pedagogical Psychology with Pedagogical Practice II
	Pedagogical Psychology	
Practice	Classroom Practice up to 3 Years	Pedagogical Practice I, II, III, IV
	Practice from 3 to 6 Years	
	Practice in the 1 st Grade of Primary School	
Social Sciences	The Child in Society	Social Studies
	Social studies	The Sociology of Education
	The Sociology of education	
Technics	Technical education	
Theatre	Puppets, drama, media	
Other	Intersubjective connections (projects)	ICT in Education
	Graduation Project	The Form Teacher
	The Democratisation of Preschool Education	Development and Innovation Work in School
	The Development and Quality of Kindergartens	Interdisciplinary Seminar
	The Integrated Curriculum	Intersubject Connection,

*Black coloured subjects belong to the First Cycle Bachelor Study Programme, whereas green coloured subjects belong to the Second Cycle Master Study Programme

Elective curricular areas⁷		
Curricular Area	University of Ljubljana Preschool education	University of Ljubljana Primary school teacher education
Art	Artistic creativity	Spatial Design in the 1st and 2nd Educational Periods
	Art in the Curriculum of the Kindergarten	Visual Didactics Resources in the 1st and 2nd Educational Periods
		Artistic Tasks and Expression with Artistic Materials
		The Contemporary Context of Teaching Art Education
		Performance Arts in Teaching
Children with disabilities	Special Pedagogy	
	Pedagogical Discourse in the Kindergarten	
Dance	Dance theatre	Creative Movement in Instruction
Foreign language	English language I - Strategies for learning a foreign language	English I – Strategies for Learning a Foreign Language
	English language II – Language Skills	English II – English Pronunciation for Teachers,
	Teaching a Foreign Language in Childhood	English III – Preparation for the IELTS Exam
		English and Computing in the Pedagogical Profession
		Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening in English
		Reading and Writing Pedagogical Profession Texts in English
		Spoken Communication in English for Teachers
		The Didactics of Teaching English on the Early Level I, II
Language and literature/ literacy/ communication	Family literacy	Literature with Didactics
	Interpersonal communication	Pragmatic Linguistics
	The Early Learning of Slovene Language	Language Instruction
	Interaction and Communication	School Interpretation of Contemporary Youth Literature
		Pedagogical Communication in Slovene Language
	Youth Literature	Creative Writing
Mathematics	Mathematical challenges in kindergarten	Didactic-Mathematics Workshop
	Selected Themes from Mathematics	Calculation in the Past and Today

⁷ <http://www.pef.uni-lj.si/383.html>, <http://www.pef.uni-lj.si/391.html>, <http://www.pef.uni-lj.si/376.html>, <http://www.pef.uni-lj.si/385.html>

		Selected Themes from the Didactics of Mathematics Mathematics in Education
Motor development/sport activities Music	Movement – Methods of Play, Swimming, Mountaineering	Winter Activities in the Outdoors
	Gymnastics in Primary School	Athletics and Racket Sports in Primary School
	Ball Games in Primary School	Gymnastics in Primary School
	Athletics and Racket Sports in Primary School	Ball Games in Primary School
	Movement in the Kindergarten Curriculum	Hiking, Mountaineering, Movement for Health Additional Physical Education Content in the Primary School Selected Themes from the Didactics of Physical Education
	Communication with music	Instrumental Performance I, II, III
		Choir I, II, III
		Research in Music Education
		Selected Themes from the Didactics of Music Education
Nature	Kindergarten in Nature	Natural Science Visits
	Play and natural sciences	Didactic Games in Natural Sciences
	Children in the animals' kingdom	The Evolution of Mankind
	Nature in Kindergarten	Natural Sciences in Research Boxes
	The Laws of the Natural Sciences	The Development and Assessment of Early Natural Sciences Activities in Teaching Natural Sciences
Pedagogical methodology	Interpersonal Communication	Research in Physical Education
Puppets	Puppetry	Theatre in the Classroom
		Social Studies - History, Theatre and Creative Movement in Teaching
Sociology		The Cultural Heritage of Slovenes
		The Slovene Folk Music Heritage I, II
		Traffic Education and the Cycling Test in the Primary School
		Selected Themes from the Didactics of Social Studies
		Selected Themes from Social Studies Cooperation with Parents and the Family
Technics	Creative technical workshops	Technical Creativity in Primary School
Other	Foundations or Fields of Activity in Kindergarten	Didactic Play in Slovene
	The Kindergarten – A Democratic Community	The Pedagogy of Maria Montessori for Primary Teachers
	Comparative Studies in Education	The Psychology of the Family and Cooperation with Parents
	Leadership for the Development of the Kindergarten	The Pedagogy of Maria Montessori
	Active Citizenship in Childhood	Excursions
	Professional Development through Areas of the Curriculum	The Fundamentals of Supervision
	Non-Discriminatory Operation	Teamwork in Education
	The Family – Women's Studies and Gender Studies	The Self-Image of the Child and the Young Person in School,

	Educational Policies	Inclusive Educational Practices
	Institutional Aspects of Difference	After-School Care,
	Leading Groups and Group Dynamics	Ways of Establishing Discipline
	The Theoretical and Experiential Bases of Supervision	School, Justice and Effectiveness
	Forming the Educational Plan in Kindergarten	Leadership
	Cooperation with Parents and the Family	Self-Evaluation
	Master's Seminar and Thesis	Quality Assurance
		Solving Educational Problems
		Talent in the Learning Context
		Creating a Culture of Cooperation

**Black coloured subjects belong to the First Cycle Bachelor Study Programme, whereas green coloured subjects belong to the Second Cycle Master Study Programme*

4. Focus group discussions with representatives of education faculties

4.1. Results from the focus group discussion

The focus group was conducted in November 2021. Representatives of each of the Slovenian faculties of education (Ljubljana, Koper, Maribor) participated in the meeting. Participants are all lecturers, either at the Preschool Education or Primary Teacher Education programmes.

Transition in the curricula

The topic of soft transition is not explicitly mentioned in the study programmes of the faculties of education in Slovenia. Yet, the faculty lecturers, who participated in the focus group, explained that the topic is perceived as very cross-curricular and therefore present in discussions with students in various courses. In classrooms, they discuss how it is the role of the institution to be ready for the child, not the child for the institution. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of preschools and schools connecting and cooperating with each other.

The study programmes of Preschool Education and Primary Teacher Education are carried out at the same institution, which means that despite different programmes, they have some common lecturers, who teach at both levels. Besides, the focus group participants also mentioned that students often decide to change their study programmes - they finish the Bachelor level of Preschool Education and continue their Master level in the Primary Teacher Education programme.

Faculty lecturers agreed that there should be more continuity between these two study programmes, which are developed separately and have no influence one on another. Therefore, they are aware of the importance of increasing the cooperation between these two programmes, among lecturers and the students in the sense of synchronising objectives, contents).

Transition from the faculty to classroom practice

In both programmes, students are obliged to attend practice during their studies. The focus group participants reported that students' experiences show that in many cases the practice in preschools and schools differ to what they discuss and learn at the faculty. For example, students report to notice how preschool teachers' methods of working still focus on preparing the children for school.

Furthermore, students are supported by mentors during their classroom practice. Yet it often occurs that these mentors have not been additionally educated about this task, they have been employed for a while and do not attend further trainings to learn about recent approaches, research results in the field of education. Therefore, students often do not receive sufficient support from such mentors. However, the pandemic situation brought some positive results in this area. Faculty lecturers had namely good experiences during the period of distance learning as they were able to connect with students and their mentors over Zoom. This was a great opportunity to gather mentors from different institutions at the same time and give them the time to discuss about their expectations, pedagogical dilemmas etc. In this way, mentors were empowered, they gained immediate feedback and improved their practice. This experience was very welcome for the lecturers as well as for mentors and that is why they will remain such contact also in the future.

Focus group participants exposed another dilemma regarding graduates of Preschool Education and Primary Teacher Education programme. Namely, they notice difficulties of their students transferring from the faculty to the new working environment. The issue is that when graduates start working, they often face the situation, where they do not have the conditions to implement what they have learnt at the faculty, but need to adjust the prevailing institutional culture, which is often based on traditional teaching methods. Therefore, the faculty lecturers see room for improvement also at the level of in-service learning. It would be necessary to put some emphasis on multigenerational learning, on the exchange of contemporary knowledge brought by new professionals and extent experiences brought by longer employed ones.

The role of preschool and school management

The faculty lecturers also emphasized the role of the preschool and school management. They are namely the ones who have the power to set adequate conditions for smooth transition. In Slovenia, two professionals are present for a dedicated number of hours in the 1st grade – a primary school teacher as the first teacher and a preschool teacher as the second professional (this system was initiated in 1999 when obligatory education started for one-year younger children). However, it often happens that school managers decide differently due to easier logistics. Furthermore, there is also the possibility for the preschool teacher to transit with their group of children to school for a year and then return back to preschool (there are legal foundation for such practice, but again only a minority of preschool and school managers decide to use this option).

The importance of cooperation

The focus group participants pointed out the need for better cooperation between preschools and schools. Frequent and structured connections would in their opinion result in different views of each other's work and expectations. They now often experience how school teachers expect preschool teachers to better prepare children for school; on the other hand, preschool teachers share their opinion that first grade learning process is not adjusted to children's development etc. The faculty lecturers think that better cooperation would give preschool and school professionals the opportunity to re-consider what the role of both institutions.

Another significant factor cooperation is the one with parents. As they have the final decision on keeping their child a year longer in preschool, preschool and school professionals should be aware of their obligation to support parents in the phase of their child's transition. If professionals work transparently, communicate regularly and establish a stronger cooperation with parents in the last year before school, parents would gain more trust in both institutions, which could lead to a lower number of postponed schooling.

The importance of connecting preschool and school teachers was also emphasized during the focus group. Inter-institutional learning communities were recognized as a very efficient way to enable better, structured cooperation among professionals from both institutions. Such team work could also lead to easier transfer of information about the children. Whereas it should be pointed out that such sharing of information requires full professionalism of preschool and school teachers. They are required to be objective as well as respect the confidentiality of such personal data.

Final remarks

All participants agreed that more continuity is needed in developing new documents relating to education. In the phase of planning new guidelines, curricula or similar acts., professionals from both preschool and school levels should be included and the focus should be set on children, not on professionals.

Faculty lecturers share a common view that in Slovenia, the school is perceived as superior in comparison to the preschool. Referring to transition, this means that more initiative for smoothening transition comes from preschools, the attitude of parents toward preschool/school is different etc. This was evident also during the pandemic: only schools received certain guidelines how to work in this difficult situation, the preschool principals needed to respond accordingly on their own, without any support from the government.

The focus group discussion concluded with the agreement that education in Slovenia is on a high level, yet it still has room for improvement on certain areas (such as establishing a standardized way of monitoring – improving and maintaining this level of quality).

5. Focus group with graduate students

5.1 Focus group with preschool teachers

Preschool teachers from two different faculties of education participated in the focus group, which was held in September 2022.

At the beginning, they shared their view on smooth transition of children from preschool to school. In their opinion, a smooth transition means a change of environment without any stress, with as little differences between two settings as possible. They think that the children should feel welcome and included in school and being exposed to as little stressful situations as possible. They pointed out the importance of enabling children in school enough movement, which also improves their concentration during school work.

The focus group participants agree that it is also their role to adjust their work and discuss with children how their life in school would look like. In this way they can help reducing the stress of children. In their opinion, parents also play an important role in this process, as well as school teachers. The cooperation among all of them (parents, preschool and school teachers) should be more present. Some of the focus group participants confirmed to have good cooperation between school and preschool (they visit each other, organize common events and enable families to learn about the new environment).

Such perception of smooth transition is based on preschool teachers' experiences. What they learnt in their practice, in discussions with their colleagues, from parents' sharing their fear of the unknown future of their children in school, or from their experiences after enrolling their children to school (disappointment with children's passive role in the classroom, lack of movement and play). The preschool teachers see it would be useful if they could share some information about the children with the school teachers (such as their strengths and weaknesses) in order to ensure a smooth transition of children as well as make the work of school teachers easier.

The focus group participants reported that the topic of smooth transition at the faculty was not much discussed. It was only mentioned at some subjects (such as Preschool pedagogy, Psychology, Partnership with parents), but any special emphasis was given to it. However, they see the necessity of debating it

more and connecting better with the school teachers. The preschool teachers often feel to be treated by their school colleagues as less worthy, instead of being more equal and cooperative, which would make it easier for the school teacher to better accept new children in the first grade. The preschool teachers also mentioned the problematic of their transition from the faculty to the practice. They notice that it often happens when young professionals start a new job in preschool, they do not implement their knowledge from the faculty into the practice and just follow the practice of their older colleagues which is often not as adequate it could be.

In their opinion, preschool and school teachers should be more cooperative, they should meet more often to discuss their work, children's development and needs. This would help the school teachers to better prepare for the new first graders. Such cooperation could be established already at the faculty as both programmes are carried out at the same institution, some courses are even led by the same professors. The preschool teachers think that any common lessons would enable them to even better discuss the topic of smooth transition. Furthermore, they feel that the obligatory practice during the study should also be carried out in the first grades. In this way, the future preschool teachers would see how children learn at school, how they react to the change of education environments. If such opportunity was enabled, they emphasized it would also be important to have the time afterwards to discuss their experience together with their colleagues and professors. Some of the participants had the opportunity to see the work in the first grades, but discussions at the faculty after their visits were not very detailed, they did not write any action plan on how to implement any necessary changes. The preschool teachers agreed that a common course for students of preschool and school study programmes on the topic of smooth transition would be very welcome.

Yet, the current reality shows that there is no cooperation between these two study programmes and their students, even worse - the attitude of Primary school teacher education students is somehow superior in relation to the students of preschool education. They often hear: "Oh, the only thing you do in preschool is play". Instead of being aware that the preschool teachers are the one who actually set the foundations for the children's development. None of the participants feel to have gained enough knowledge on the topic of ensuring smooth transition during their study. They alone have to be eager to learn more about this. They say that the work with children teaches you that you need to follow them, listen to them and then you are more able to respond accordingly to their needs. You need to establish partnerships with parents, initiate cooperation with school and with the first-grade teachers, organize some common events etc. At the moment, it is up to the preschool teachers', to start any cooperation with the school, not the other way around. They would appreciate if schools were aware of the preschool teachers' knowledge on their future first graders. The work of school teachers would definitely be easier if they could learn more about the new children more (for example, how they react in certain situations, how they feel, what are children's fears, how is the cooperation with parents, what dilemmas they have etc.).

5.2 Focus group with school teachers

School teachers, who studied at two different Slovenian faculties of education, participated in the focus group, which was held in September 2022.

The participants consider smooth transition as keeping similar pedagogical approaches in school as they were in preschool and learning through play. In their opinion, children should gradually adjust to school work, learning and school activities and they are the ones who should enable that.

However, they agree that the reality is different to such expectations. When children come to school, they face a different system where they need to sit more, they start using work books, teachers conduct lessons frontally. All participating teachers admitted they are not informed enough about the work in preschool, which would make it easier for them to ensure a smoother transition of children to school. They see the need of being more connected with preschools and preschool professionals.

All participants shared the opinion that they learnt very little about work in preschool during their study. The topic of transition was mentioned only at some subjects (such as Slovene language, Mathematics or Natural Sciences – preparing didactic materials or games). The teachers need to be self-initiative and research on their own if they want to better prepare for the arrival of new first graders. Therefore, they see it would be of great importance to discuss how to enable gradual transition within each learning areas.

Despite the fact that the students of the Preschool education and Primary School teacher education programmes study at the same faculty, they are not well-connected. There are some professors (for example of Pedagogy, Didactics and Music) who teach at both programmes, however there was not much cooperation among them. One of the participants only mentioned common preparations of students for certain faculty events.

The school teachers agreed that they would need to gain more information on how to ensure smoother transition from preschool to school. They are aware that learning through play should be more present also in school. Some of them confirmed that they try to follow this approach also in school, but lack the knowledge to fully implement such practice.

»I prepared activity centres for one of the Math lessons. Children learnt about patterns in a more playful manner. And at the end of the day, one of the first graders asked me if we won't have Math today.«

6. Reflecting and constructing inspiring ideas to improve the curricula and pedagogical practices

Some key points were identified based on the analysis of the higher education study programmes and results from focus groups with faculty lecturers and with former students of Preschool Education programme and Primary Teacher Education programmes:

- The topic of smooth transition is not represented in the curricula of the study programmes of Preschool Education and Primary Teacher Education. However, the faculty lecturers report to discuss smooth transition within other subjects.
- Former students of Preschool Education and Primary Teacher Education share the opinion that more focus should be put on this topic.
- Despite the fact that both study programmes are conducted at the same faculties of education, the students think that there is not enough cooperation among the lecturers to connect the content from both programmes.
- The students of the Preschool Education programme feel to be treated inferior by their colleagues from the Primary Teacher Education programme.
- The students report the importance of having the opportunity of visiting each other's working environments during their study practice (students of the Preschool Education have experiences with observing the practice in the first grade, while the students of Primary Teacher Education do not).
- The participants of all three focus groups agree that more attention should be given to the topic of smooth transition. Transition should not only be considered as a cross-curricular topic but should be held as a separate subject.
- The participants of all three focus groups agree that both study programmes should be more connected with the aim of raising better awareness of each other's work and being better empowered to ensure the smooth transition of children from preschool to school.

7. Sources

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