

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Pedagogical and Psychological Problems of Primary School Students' Adaptation to School and Their Solutions

Komiljonova Nigora Azimjon qizi

1st-year student, Primary Education program at Tashkent University of Applied Sciences, Gavkhar street, Chilonzor district, Tashkent city, Uzbekistan

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Abstract

The transition from preschool or family life to formal schooling is one of the most important turning points in a child's development. This article analyzes the pedagogical and psychological problems that first- and second-grade learners face during school adaptation, including separation anxiety, low school readiness, difficulties with discipline, peer relationships and learning motivation. Based on the ideas of Vygotsky, Erikson and Bronfenbrenner and on modern research in school psychology, the article proposes a set of practical solutions for teachers, parents and school psychologists.

KEY WORDS

School adaptation, primary school, school readiness, learning motivation, school anxiety, teacher-child relationship, family cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

Entering school changes a child's whole way of life. A six- or seven-year-old who was used to play, freedom of movement and constant adult attention suddenly has to follow a timetable, sit through lessons, obey rules and be assessed by a teacher. This change is not only organizational but also psychological: the child's leading activity gradually shifts from play to learning, and the social role of "pupil" appears. If the child does not manage this shift successfully, problems with health, behavior and achievement may arise and affect later schooling.

In Uzbekistan, the modernization of primary education, the introduction of competency-based standards and the growing attention to preschool preparation make the issue of adaptation especially relevant. A teacher today must be not only a source of knowledge but also an observer of the child's emotional state and a partner of the family. The aim of this article is to identify the main pedagogical and psychological problems of adaptation among primary school students and to

suggest effective ways of solving them.

The Essence of School Adaptation

School adaptation is the process by which a child adjusts to the new social environment, to the requirements of educational activity and to the rules of school life. Researchers usually distinguish three interrelated aspects: physiological adaptation (adjusting to workload, daily routine and sitting posture), psychological adaptation (emotional comfort, self-esteem and motivation) and social adaptation (relationships with teachers and classmates). Most children need from several weeks to several months to adapt, and the first term of Grade 1 is considered the most sensitive period.

From a theoretical point of view, Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development shows that a child learns best when tasks are slightly more difficult than their current level and are supported by an adult (Vygotsky, 1978). Erikson described the school years as the stage of "industry versus

inferiority," in which success in learning builds confidence and repeated failure creates a feeling of inadequacy (Erikson, 1963). Bronfenbrenner's ecological model adds that adaptation depends on the interaction of the family, the classroom and the wider community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Together these approaches suggest that adaptation is not an individual problem of the child but the result of the whole educational environment.

Psychological Problems of Adaptation

The first group of difficulties is emotional. Many first graders experience separation anxiety, fear of making mistakes and fear of the teacher's negative evaluation. This anxiety may appear as tearfulness, headaches, stomachaches, sleep disturbances or reluctance to go to school. Anxious children often avoid answering in class, which reduces their opportunities to practice and, as a result, lowers their achievement.

The second group concerns personality and motivation. Some children come to school with an inadequate self-image: overestimated self-esteem leads to conflicts when the teacher's assessment is lower than expected, while underestimated self-esteem leads to passivity and dependence. In addition, the "external" motivation that attracts children at the beginning (a new backpack, a uniform, the status of a schoolchild) quickly fades. If real cognitive interest does not replace it, enthusiasm for learning declines already in the first months.

The third group relates to cognitive and voluntary-regulation skills. Children with underdeveloped attention, memory and self-control find it hard to listen for 35–40 minutes, follow instructions and finish tasks. These features are often wrongly interpreted as laziness or disobedience, although they usually reflect insufficient school readiness. Studies of the transition to school also show that stress is higher when children have weak social skills or come from environments with limited support (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Pedagogical Problems of Adaptation

Pedagogical problems arise mainly from the gap between the preschool and school systems. Kindergarten is built on play, while school is built on academic tasks, which creates a lack of continuity. When the teacher begins the program at a high tempo without taking into account the children's different levels of preparation, weaker students quickly fall behind and lose confidence.

Other typical problems include the following:

- an authoritarian style of teaching, excessive criticism and the use of marks as the only form of evaluation;
- overloaded lessons, with few dynamic pauses, games or physical activities;
- lack of an individual approach to children with different temperaments, learning paces and needs;
- insufficient cooperation between the teacher and parents, and unrealistic parental expectations or excessive pressure at home;
- weak classroom community, which leads to conflicts, isolation of some pupils and even bullying.

Research confirms the central role of the teacher. Pianta and Steinberg (1992) and Birch and Ladd (1997) found that close, warm and low-conflict teacher–child relationships are associated with better school engagement and fewer behavioral problems, whereas conflictual relationships predict school avoidance and lower achievement. Ladd, Birch and Buhs (1999) also showed that children who are accepted by peers participate more actively in class and like school more.

Ways of Solving the Problems

Effective solutions must be systematic and involve the teacher, the family and the school psychologist. The most important directions are described below.

1. Creating a supportive emotional climate. In the first weeks the teacher should greet every child personally, establish simple and clear rules, praise effort rather than only results, and avoid comparing children with each other. A child who feels safe in the classroom is more willing to take part in learning and to ask for help.
2. Gradual and play-based introduction to learning. During the adaptation period it is useful to shorten lessons, include game-based tasks, movement breaks, songs, storytelling and drawing, and to increase academic demands step by step. Didactic games, role-play and group tasks help preserve the familiar form of activity while forming educational skills.
3. Individual and differentiated approach. The teacher should observe children during the first month and use diagnostic methods such as observation sheets, short conversations and school-readiness tests. Tasks of different complexity, additional support for slower learners and enrichment for faster ones prevent both failure and boredom.

4. Psychological support. The school psychologist can organize adaptation trainings, relaxation exercises, art therapy and group activities that reduce anxiety and develop communication skills. Children with persistent fear, aggression or withdrawal should receive individual counselling.

5. Cooperation with parents. Parents should be informed about the age characteristics of first graders and advised to maintain a stable daily routine, enough sleep, a calm attitude toward homework and an encouraging tone at home. Regular meetings, open lessons and short individual conversations turn the family into a real partner of the school.

6. Building the class community. Collective games, joint projects, class traditions and the "buddy" system, in which older pupils help newcomers, strengthen friendship and a feeling of belonging. The teacher should react quickly to signs of rejection or bullying.

7. Continuity between kindergarten and school. Joint events, visits of future first graders to school before September, and exchange of experience between kindergarten educators and primary teachers make the transition smoother and reduce stress.

CONCLUSION

School adaptation is a complex and multi-level process in which psychological readiness, pedagogical skill and family support are equally important. The main difficulties of first graders (anxiety, low motivation, weak self-regulation, a gap between play and academic activity and an insufficiently individual approach) can be overcome when adults create a warm, predictable and developing environment. For a future primary school teacher, understanding these problems means being able to notice them early, to prevent them through humane pedagogy and to cooperate with psychologists and parents. A child who adapts successfully gains not only knowledge but also confidence, curiosity and a positive attitude toward learning for many years ahead.

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