

Transition from Preschool to Elementary School: Family Perspective in the Dominican Republic

Transición de preescolar a primaria: perspectiva familiar en República Dominicana

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Abstract

The transition from preschool to elementary school affects everyone in the education process cognitively, academically, socially, and psychologically. Although widely studied internationally, this transition has not been examined in the Dominican Republic from a family perspective. This paper uses a qualitative, exploratory case study to explore the perception of the preschool-to-elementary transition among Dominican parents. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with 178 participants from two schools, one public and one private, between 2021 and 2023. The data were analyzed using the MAXQDA® software program, triangulation, and constant comparison. The participants perceive the transition as an education process that affects children and families emotionally, socially, cognitively, and academically. They maintain that schools are primarily responsible for the proper implementation of this transition, acknowledging that although they do engage in activities to support the transition at home, they do not involve themselves due to a lack of information and training.

Keywords: early childhood education, primary education, parent participation, educational articulation

Resumen

La transición de educación inicial a primaria afecta cognitiva, académica, social y psicológicamente a todos los participantes del proceso educativo. Ampliamente estudiada en el ámbito internacional, esta transición no se ha analizado en República Dominicana desde la perspectiva familiar. El presente analiza la percepción de la transición de preescolar a primaria de padres dominicanos a través de un estudio de casos exploratorio y cualitativo. Se realizaron entrevistas y grupos focales a 178 participantes de dos escuelas, una pública y una privada entre 2021 y 2023. Los datos se analizaron usando el programa MAXqda®, la triangulación y la comparación constante. Los participantes perciben la transición como un proceso educativo que afecta emocional, social, cognitiva y académicamente a niños y familias, y sostienen que la escuela es la responsable principal de la adecuada implementación de la transición pues, aunque ellos realizan actividades para apoyar la



transición en el hogar, reconocen que no se involucran debido a la falta de información y formación.

Palabras clave: educación de la primera infancia, enseñanza primaria, participación de los padres, articulación educativa



I. Introduction

School transition is a normal, non-linear, dynamic, and continuous process experienced by those involved in the education process as students move from one grade level to another (Daniel et al., 2017). However much education systems may differ, starting school is a significant step in the development of children, schools, and families (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007), and the process is often very intense, demanding, and complex – and occasionally problematic. Viewed as a process of continuity, school transition includes adaptation, induction, and negotiation activities with respect to the spatial, environmental, pedagogical, normative, functional, and social changes for all involved (Viskovic & Višnjić-Jevtić, 2020).

School transition has been explained by certain theoretical models (Balduzzi et al., 2019). Most are based on the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), whereby children's development is influenced by their sociocultural context (preschool education, school, family, home, neighborhood, etc.).

These contextual components become environmental systems that interact with each other: microsystems, mesosystems, macrosystems, chronosystems, and exosystems, in which children develop during their education (Bagué, 2019; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Li & Hung, 2019; Webb et al., 2017).

Microsystems include the child's interactions with individuals and the environment in school and at home; mesosystems include interactions between the domains involved in the microsystem, the relationships between school and home; the macrosystem, meanwhile, concerns the way social and education policies affect and influence what happens in microsystems and mesosystems; the chronosystem focuses on the interaction between the different systems and their effects on one another over time; and lastly, the exosystem contains the environments that children do not actively engage with, but which nonetheless have a profound effect on their development (Bagué, 2019; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Li & Hung, 2019; Webb et al., 2017).

Under this model, children are in a non-linear process of meaningful appropriation of their environment. This is why they act on their environment and restructure it, at the same level or at a more complex level. During the transition from preschool to elementary school, children are influenced by these ecological systems and their interactions (Bagué, 2019).

The model was also the starting point for Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta's (2000) proposed ecological and dynamic model of transition, which stresses the importance of the child, the child's surrounding contexts (school, neighborhood, home), and the child's relationships and how these relationships change over time. In this sense, children's transition to school is influenced by their family, school, and social and community experiences, and by the connections between these systems as time goes on (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Meanwhile, Griebel and Niesel's (2013) family development transition approach has served as a basis for addressing transition from a family perspective, as it provides insight into the changes in family relationships when individual roles are reorganized and transformed as a result of a transition. This is a multi-perspective, constructivist approach that defines transitions as a set of socially embedded transformations governed by the learning processes of the individuals involved, entailing shared responsibility and a joint, constructive effort by everyone involved (Griebel & Niesel, 2013; Webb et al., 2017).

From the ecological perspective, during the process of the child's school transition, all family members are in transition (Webb et al., 2017). The home, care center, preschool, and school are subsystems that children pass through and are affected by, and which, in turn, are themselves affected by a child's passage (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000).



As Robinson and Tyler (2020) and Su et al. (2020) have noted, transition can have a wide-ranging impact on students and their families, socially, psychologically, emotionally, and academically.

Separately, Turunen and Dockett's (2013) transgenerational model of transition explains the influence of parents' perceptions and narratives on the way they experience and deal with their children's school transitions (Turunen & Dockett, 2013; Webb et al., 2017), their involvement in activities at home and in school, and the quality of parent-child interactions (O'Kane, 2016).

There is a consensus that educational transition should be addressed comprehensively, from multiple perspectives and dimensions (Bagué, 2019; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Griebel & Niesel, 2013; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Turunen & Dockett, 2013; Webb et al., 2017); families should assume joint responsibility given that they play an essential role in making the transition a success (O'Kane, 2016); and coordination between social, family, and school systems empowers parents to take responsibility, become involved in children's education, and help make the best decisions (Li & Hung, 2019; Tao et al., 2019).

As a result, some studies recommend that families receive education on school transition and take part in planning and implementing school and extracurricular activities aimed at promoting closer links between grade levels and comprehensive student development (Webb et al., 2017). Viskovic and Višnjić-Jevtić (2020) suggest that parent education programs improve the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of parents in their children's transition (Apostolou & Stellakis, 2020).

Some studies have assessed the impact of family education programs on the transition to first grade. Their findings have shown that parents who have received transition education are able to support successful integration between preschool and first grade (Balduzzi et al., 2019; Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016; Shinali, 2020).

Previous research based on the transgenerational model (Turunen & Dockett, 2013; Webb et al., 2017) and ecological model (Bagué, 2019; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Griebel & Niesel, 2013; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Turunen & Dockett, 2013; Webb et al., 2017) have observed that emotions and attitudes toward the new grade are spontaneously conveyed in the home environment (Turunen & Dockett, 2013; Webb et al., 2017), resulting in the formation of perceptions of the transition to first grade and all that this entails (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2019; Robinson & Tyler, 2020; Su et al., 2020). If transition is conceptualized as a negative, traumatic, and challenging experience, children may become negatively predisposed, which can produce anxiety, fear, and a lack of confidence, delaying and slowing their adaptation and leading to a traumatizing, problematic, and difficult transition process (Li & Hung, 2019).

This explains the importance of exploring – as proposed by Correia and Marques-Pinto (2016) and Tao et al. (2019) – the perceptions, attitudes, and practices of parents regarding transition, the factors that support or hinder a successful transition process, the role of the child's family and educational and sociocultural context, and parents' expectations of their children and the school. Some research has been conducted to explain family perspectives regarding transition at an international level, mostly based on the ecological approach.

Wilder (2019) found that social and family interactions, socioeconomic inequalities, ethnicity, schooling, family immigration status, children's preschool experience, and school conditions all have an impact on transition success.

Other studies have found a significant association between family involvement in the education process, transition success, and students' academic performance (Balduzzi et al., 2019; Tao et al., 2019). Wildenger and McIntyre (2011), Wickett (2017), and Lau (2014) observed little parent engagement in transition activities, a lack of communication with



teachers, and an absence of family education programs to support children with transition. Lau (2014) and Fridani (2021) found that parental involvement was confined to developing children's skills and household rules to prepare them for elementary school. By contrast, Kaplun et al. (2017) did observe participation by families in the hope of sparing their children from negative experiences in first grade, akin to their own experiences of transition.

On the one hand, Griebel et al. (2017) found a significant association between mothers' previous positive school experiences in their own transition to first grade and their involvement in their children's transition, and Daniel et al. (2017) found that parents with a positive perception of school and academic programs were more involved in school activities. On the other hand, Ring et al. (2016) observed that, for parents, transition was facilitated by visits to the first grade classroom before the beginning of the school year, while Recchia and Bentley (2013) found that parents felt that the skills and abilities acquired in preschool supported a successful transition to new, more structured school environments. Separately, Lau (2014), Wickett (2017), Kaplun et al. (2017), and Fridani (2021) found that, from a family perspective, effective and assertive communication between the school system and the family system (in terms of the ecological model) was essential to achieve a successful transition in terms of attendance, student persistence, grade promotion, level of satisfaction, academic performance, success in school (Tao et al., 2019), and reduced grade repetition and behavioral problems (Li & Hung, 2019). Meanwhile, Ring et al. (2016) found that parents believed that class enrollment, teacher attitude, rules, and academic demands were hindering factors.

In sum, and in line with Kaplun et al. (2017) and Griebel et al. (2017), parental perceptions, attitudes, and education; the emotions conveyed by parents; the quality of communication with teachers and children; and parental involvement in educational activities all have a significant impact on transition.

It follows that there is a need to design and implement school transition programs to guide family members. This calls for research on the concerns, problems, and expectations of parents, which can lay the groundwork to design family education programs to improve their involvement in educational activities and thus support a successful transition from preschool to elementary school (Tao et al., 2019).

Despite receiving considerable attention internationally, few studies have been conducted on family perspectives in the Dominican Republic. Until now, only one study has explored family involvement in the transition between these two levels of education, albeit based on a quantitative approach. Padilla-Faneytt (2022b) observed that parents encouraged their children to take part in remedial activities, vacation camps, and homework clubs aimed at developing early literacy and basic mathematics. At home, parents develop learning routines that mimic first-grade activities, thus helping to prepare children for first grade.

This work offers a contribution to this discussion by providing a qualitative examination of parents' expectations, concerns, and experiences regarding school transition, their perceptions of the factors that affect their children's educational success, and the role of family education in improving transition in the Dominican Republic.

II. Method

A qualitative, exploratory study was conducted following a case study approach, with the goal of analyzing and interpreting the perceptions of family members with regard to the transition from preschool to first grade in schools in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years.

A purposive sample was selected, comprising 178 parents with children in early education and first grade in two schools: one public ($n = 116$), located in a low-income, disadvantaged



urban area (coded as A); and one private ($n = 62$), located within an upper-middle class, urban community (coded as B). The study included all parents of both sexes from two classes from the last year of preschool (known in the Dominican Republic as *preprimario*, or pre-primary year, ages 5-6; $n = 76$) and two first-grade classes (ages 6-7; $n = 102$), one from each school. The size of the sample appears sufficient for the purposes of this study, which included parents who gave informed consent, were willing to take part voluntarily in the research, and attended the interviews and focus groups at the schools.

Table 1 compares the characteristics of both subsamples. In general, they share similar demographic, institutional, and academic profiles; 92% are female and between 23 and 55 years of age, and of this female subset, 75% are married and 55% have a university degree and a monthly income of over US\$400.

Table 1. Comparative description of sample

Variables	Public school	Private school
Demographic		
Sample	$n = 116$	$n = 62$
Income \geq US\$400	45%	65%
Gender	90% female	85% female
Marital status	60% married	80% married
Education	40% hold a university degree	65% hold a university degree
Age	23-55 years	26-50 years
Institutional		
Involvement by educational community	Yes	Yes
Type of administration	Participatory and democratic	Participatory and democratic
Form of administration	Decentralized	Decentralized
Enrollment	26-32 children per class	12-15 children per class
Curriculum	Dominican Curriculum Framework (DCD)	Dominican Curriculum Framework (DCD)
Pedagogical		
Pedagogical model	Humanistic, cultural-historical constructivist approach	Humanistic, cultural-historical constructivist approach
Teaching methodology	Competency-based teaching	Competency-based teaching
Teacher training	Pedagogical support on general issues	Conventional teacher training on general issues
Family education	Yearly meetings, at the end of the school year	Yearly meetings, at the end of the school year
Joint planning	Not systematic or institutional	Not systematic or institutional
Teaching strategy	Project-based in early education, by subject area in first grade	Project-based in early education, by subject area in first grade
Induction for children and families	Yes	Yes
Visits to elementary school classrooms	Yes	Yes
Suitable physical environment and furniture	Yes	Yes
Transition activities	Informal and irregular, at the teacher's initiative	Informal and irregular, at the teacher's initiative

Note: US\$: U.S. dollars.

Data collection. Semistructured interviews (SSIs) and unstructured interviews (USIs) were conducted with open-ended questions to guide an open discussion between the parents and the researcher in formal and informal school environments. The interviews were recorded with the informants' permission. Researcher-moderated focus groups (FGs) were also



conducted, in which parents from the same grade and from each school discussed aspects of school transition. In both cases, the discussion was framed around the following topics:

- Characterization of school transition.
- Expectations, concerns, and problems perceived.
- Factors that affect this process.
- Family involvement and the family's role in a successful transition.
- Actions taken to support transition at home and in school.
- Impact of transition on their children's education.
- Guidance and information received on transition.

Procedure. First of all, the school administrations were contacted to request permission to conduct the research in the participating schools. At the same time, parents were invited to participate in the study, they were asked to provide informed consent and were given information about the purpose, scope, and implications of their participation. At the end of the school year, interviews and focus groups were conducted upon completion of preschool; at the beginning of the following school year, interviews and focus groups were conducted in the first grade of elementary school. Lastly, the data was tabulated, processed, and analyzed.

Data analysis. The data from the interviews was transcribed for processing and analysis, and an effort was made to maintain the integrity of the data. Initially, data validity and reliability was determined by triangulation, meaning the combined use of different methods, sources, and data (Berg, 2001). For this study, data was obtained from four sources of information, with three data collection techniques, at four time points, and in three different settings.

Subsequently, the information was analyzed using two complementary methods. First, a preliminary analysis of the data was performed, using the MAXqda software program, which made it possible to code and group data, create categories, and identify prototypical text fragments to organize and exemplify categories. Next, to continue the analysis, the constant comparative method was used, with open, axial, and selective analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The open analysis made it possible to group general themes and overarching concepts, which were used to generate categories. The axial analysis was used to identify patterns and subcategories grounded in the evidence. Lastly, the selective analysis highlighted specific, defined discursive patterns: key elements that provided prototypical examples.

III. Results

3.1 Characterization of transition

Similar findings were observed for parents from each of the two schools: transition is viewed as a natural educational process, experienced individually by children as they progress from one grade or level to another. It tends to affect children and their families academically, emotionally, socially, and psychologically. For children to mature and develop holistically, it is crucial that they become literate and acquire work habits and standards. Academic success in first grade requires a process that is not traumatic for children.

Both groups of parents believe transition contrasts two academic realities that are at times mutually exclusive. On the one hand, preschool emphasizes freedom, play, and flexibility in adherence to rules and standards, but first grade comes with an increase in the amount and complexity of schoolwork, academic demands, responsibilities, and student autonomy.



For me, the first issue is "responsibility." First grade involves much more commitment. There's homework and the responsibility that comes with assignments set by the teacher. (FG- school A-3)

3.2 Problems associated with transition

In this category, the similarities between parents from the two schools are also notable. The curricular differences between the two levels and an inappropriate pedagogical approach to transition can result in a challenging, problematic, and traumatic process for some children, parents, and teachers, on academic, socio-emotional, and psychological levels.

Parents reported some challenges faced by first-graders during the transition. The required in-class workload and reading, writing, and mathematics homework assignments; the academic demands; and the severity of sanctions, punishments, and penalties for missed assignments, tardiness, poor discipline, and irresponsibility exceed the children's abilities and skills. As a result, children feel overwhelmed and stressed and develop an aversion to school.

Parents agree that the differences in the programs, guidelines, and teaching methodology set by the Ministry of Education for these levels of education hinder children's adaptation, socialization, integration, and academic performance during the transition, rather than promoting coordination between the two levels of schooling.

The problem is there's a program to be followed. Preschool is more about play and in first grade, the demands and workload are high. (USI- school B-5)

Early education is project-based, but first grade can't be planned in the same way. This sudden change causes a lot of issues. The kids hit a wall when they start first grade. They can't progress, don't adapt, and sometimes fall back. (FG- school B-4)

The informants believe that fears conveyed by families, whether due to ignorance or past negative experiences, pose challenges. This is illustrated in the following comment:

Sometimes the kids go into first grade fearing – dreading – the teacher and what they're going to experience. As parents, sometimes we scare them. (FG- school A-3)

3.3 Parental participation and involvement

Parents from both schools do not generally participate or get involved in transition activities, viewing themselves as outsiders to this process. This lack of interest stems from the fact they have not received sufficient guidance to support transition by helping with assignments at home and taking part in educational activities. The school does not carry out any institutional initiatives to inform or educate parents about the transition.

In fact, I did nothing. We only bought some stuff. We bought some school supplies, but nothing else. (SSI- school A-3)

I didn't do anything ahead of time to prepare for the transition; I preferred to wait and see how it all played out. If there were a problem, the teacher would have told me soon enough. (FG- school B-2)

3.4 Parents' expectations

Preschool parents from both schools' sense that their children will inevitably struggle in their transition to first grade due to a lack of knowledge, skills, and academic competencies, together with difficulty following rules and a lack of maturity.



My son doesn't know his letters and is not used to homework. In first grade there's a lot of homework. No doubt I'll be tied up with the school day and night (FG- school B-4).

My son struggles with discipline. He won't follow instructions. He's rude and self-willed. In first grade he has to be organized and well-behaved, so I think we're going to have trouble with that. (USI- school A-10)

In addition, both groups of parents expressed concern that the amount and complexity of schoolwork and reading, writing, and mathematics homework may surpass their children's capabilities and skills. This perception may be influenced by family members' own beliefs and traumatic experiences.

Not being able to read or write is going to make first grade hard going. (SSI- school A-4)

First graders must be able to properly write their own name and the names of lots of people and things. That's very hard. (FG- school A-5)

At both schools, parents hope that, before the start of the school year, family education and guidance programs will be offered about how to provide support and deal with the transition and the difficulties children may face.

I hope the school will give us some guidance. I hope they call a meeting, a "School for Parents." That way, we can all avoid problems in first grade. (FG- school A-4)

I'd like them to give us ideas and guidance on transition. (FG- school B-5)

3.5 Initiatives to improve transition

Parents from both schools suggest certain practices to prevent and resolve problems that arise in the transition to first grade. They feel a need for parents and teachers to communicate and interact regularly, not just during special occasions like civic ceremonies. This would empower parents to support and take part in coordination activities to ensure a seamless, formative transition that does not traumatize children.

As families, we find it difficult to adapt and assist, but no one talks to us. Teachers could educate us, give us information so we can be of help. (FG- school A-6)

We do what we can – for example, by bringing school supplies. And keeping an eye on how the kids are adjusting over the first few days. But nobody explains to us what we should be doing in school or at home. (USI- school B-6)

Given the potential difficulties with early literacy and mathematics, prior to the start of first grade, both groups of parents establish homework routines; study, leisure, and meal schedules; wake-up and bedtime routines; and routines for arriving at school on time. In addition, some parents encourage children to take part in intensive remedial classes so that they can learn to read and write and get to grips with basic mathematics at the level required for first grade.

I send him to remedial courses during vacations so he can learn to read and write. (USI- school A-6)

The problem is our own as well as our children's. So reading and writing can be worked on during vacations. (FG- school B-3)

Parents from both schools acknowledge that certain practices to adapt first-grade classrooms are a positive step. They also note that teachers attempt to use similar teaching strategies to those in the pre-primary year. For example, they hold informational meetings, display student work, and carry out civic ceremonies and artistic and cultural events.



At the beginning, the first-grade classrooms are decorated and arranged in a similar way to the pre-primary year. (SSI- school B-7)

In their first classes in first grade, they do projects similar to those in the pre-primary classroom; they make posters and get together in groups to read on a rug. (USI- school A-8)

Often the teacher will invite us to project presentations, the flag ceremony. (SSI- school B-1)

Both groups of parents suggest they should be included in the children's educational activities and receive support to assist with the transition from preschool to first grade.

The school should start advising us while the children are still in the pre-primary year. There are many things we could do at home, in school, and during vacations. (FG- school B-2)

We should be given information on how to support children for first grade. This could be done at the parents' meeting, before starting first grade, [where we could be told] what's going on, what we can do to help the children succeed. (SSI- school B-7)

3.6 Guidance received on the transition

Participants from both schools reported that their schools had not provided them with guidance or support to engage with the transition to first grade. There are no work meetings to review transition formally or systematically. Practices that could be considered formative include informational meetings on academic achievement and school activities, and informal discussions with teachers before and after classes.

When we receive the children's assessments, they give us a superficial overview of what we should be aware of, the difficulties observed, and how we can help. (USI- school B-2)

I asked several times here at the school if they were going to tell parents how we could help in first grade. Because I suspected the change would be very tough. I asked several times. They said that later on, before the end of the year, they would call us for a meeting about it. The pre-primary year ended, and we never received a call. (USI- school A-7)

At the end-of-year farewell event, we were told they were moving on to a new grade, a new level. But we weren't given any details about what was going to happen or what we could do... we weren't told anything. (FG- school A-5)

3.7 Role of families in the transition

In both cases, parents believe they play a secondary, peripheral role in the transition, with teachers and schools bearing primary responsibility. At home, it is their responsibility to ensure that, at the beginning of the school year, children participate in activities recommended by the school to help them adapt to the new grade level and attain the competencies and skills required in first grade. Nonetheless, parents would like to receive guidance to take on greater responsibility and support a successful transition.

The informants were aware that conveying their own fears and past traumatic experiences may have a negative impact and hinder the transition.

We're so apprehensive with our kids because of the bad experiences we've heard about. That fear we feel is passed on to the children and this makes them fearful and traumatizes and frightens them. (SSI- school A-1)



My work schedule made it difficult for me to help him with homework, so his elder brother did instead. This year I'm finishing work earlier so I can have more time and help him with his homework. (FG- school B-3).

IV. Discussion

School transition is a non-linear, dynamic, and continuous process typically experienced by children, schools, and families as students move from one grade level to the next (Daniel et al., 2017). Given its demanding, intense, and complex nature, this process calls for sustained involvement from everyone, both in school activities and at home (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2019; Robinson & Tyler, 2020; Su et al., 2020).

The transition to first grade has received considerable attention internationally. However, parental perceptions of this transition have not been sufficiently studied in the Dominican Republic (Padilla-Faneytt, 2022a); there have been no publications of studies on this phenomenon from a qualitative perspective. Given this backdrop, this article explores the perceptions, attitudes, and practices of parents with respect to the transition to first grade.

The results indicate that participants from both groups view themselves as outsiders and place primary responsibility for a successful first-grade transition on teachers and schools. This finding differs from explanatory models of transition, which maintain that school-family integration, family interventions, and the quality of interaction between families and schools and between families and children support children's socioemotional learning, academic achievement, and future success in school (Bagué, 2019; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Griebel & Niesel, 2013; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; O'Kane, 2016; Turunen & Dockett, 2013; Webb et al., 2017).

Parental involvement in the transition is a response to a fragmented educational model, contrary to intergenerational and ecological approaches to transition. In the absence of information and support programs, parents believe their role is only peripheral and seldom take part in transition activities.

They do, however, acknowledge that their involvement is important to support a successful transition, and for this reason do want guidance. As reported by some previous studies, they agree that families and schools share responsibility for a successful transition, as described by the ecological model (Balduzzi et al., 2019; Shinali, 2020). In line with parents' expectations, Tao et al. (2019) recommend educating family members for the transition. Webb et al. (2017), Shinali (2020), O'Kane (2016), and Taveras-Sánchez (2022) suggest designing and implementing teacher training and support programs, together with family education handbooks on transition to enable family members to become better involved (Tao et al., 2019).

There is a perception that families are not integrated into the school transition process and are not part of the biosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Webb et al., 2017). As a result, they have little involvement in transition activities, only attending informational meetings on student achievement and school planning, and curricular and extracurricular events held at the school. This trend contrasts with the findings of Apostolou and Stellakis (2020), Balduzzi et al. (2019), and Correia and Marques-Pinto (2016), who observed that families participated in school activities to support their children's transition.

This study found that families engaged in remedial, induction, and catch-up transition activities at home, which is consistent with findings by Correia and Marques-Pinto (2016).

In line with our own findings, Lau (2014) observed that parental involvement was inadequate in activities at school but was greater at home. Similarly, Fridani (2021) found that families



worked on early literacy and first-grade curriculum content at home. In addition, Padilla-Faneytt (2022b) suggests certain activities for children to begin developing literacy at home.

However, parents do believe that their participation and effective communication between families and schools support a successful transition and student academic achievement (Kaplun et al., 2017). In this sense, schools and families are perceived as part of a mesosystem, in ecological terms, with interactions that have significant influences on children's transition (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Webb et al., 2017).

Informants draw on their own experiences to understand and deal with their children's transition, consistent with the transgenerational model (Turunen & Dockett, 2013) and ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Griebel & Niesel, 2013; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Webb et al., 2017). Success depends on family members' own experiences of transition (Webb et al., 2017), as they may engage in negative practices that lead to anxiety, insecurity, fear, and mistrust. This can result in children developing negative attitudes toward the new grade level and experiencing adaptation problems (Li & Hung, 2019).

Along these same lines, Griebel et al. (2017) observed that parents' wellbeing, assurance, and previous positive experiences, together with good communication with teachers and involvement in school activities, have a positive impact on the success of children's transition. Separately, Hosokawa and Katsura (2019) and Wilder (2019) observed that parents drew on their own experiences of school transition. If past experiences have been good, they project a positive attitude toward starting first grade and highlight its benefits (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2019; Robinson & Tyler, 2020; Su et al., 2020).

By contrast, Wildenger and McIntyre (2011) found that a lack of parental engagement in educational activities, limited support for children at home during the transition, a lack of guidance, and previous negative experiences result in parents conveying a negative representation of this process, which tends to hinder transition.

Lastly, parents hope to receive guidance so that they can properly engage in transition activities. These family expectations are consistent with previous research, including by Daniel et al. (2017), Griebel et al. (2017), Kaplun et al., (2017), Tao et al. (2019), and Webb et al. (2017), who propose involving parents in the first-grade transition process and educating them so they can support their children in this process.

V. Conclusions

Family members play a key role in the transition process. Families' experiences and perspectives are liable to affect their involvement and thus influence the success or failure of the first-grade transition. When the transition process is successful, children feel secure, confident, and optimistic and develop a positive attitude toward their education. They also perform better in school. By contrast, a traumatic transition has a negative impact on children, resulting in anxiety, stress, and a lack of confidence. It slows down adaptation and the literacy process, and education becomes a challenging and problematic process.

It was found that parents do not see families as a microsystem in the transition biosystem. They are external to the transition process and, as a result, their participation is limited and of low quality. This can be explained in a number of ways. First, formal education is structured by the prevailing social and school culture in the Dominican Republic, which determines the relationships, interactions, and practices of actors (mesosystems) in the education process and assigns families only a secondary role in the transition, which has an impact on their perception, attitude, and involvement in transition within family and school contexts. Second, this could be linked to a lack of information and guidance for parents on how they can support the transition between the two grade levels. Just as with the family



microsystem, the school microsystem does not see families as an essential microsystem for the proper functioning of the education biosystem, resulting in an absence of policies to educate parents for the transition. Lastly, the prevailing educational approach limits formal educational practice, giving priority to the relationship between students and teachers in schools, leading parents to mirror this vision in their own perceptions, attitudes, and practices.

There is a need to rethink Dominican education and reshape the environmental systems involved in educational practice, from the biosystemic perspective discussed previously (Bagué, 2019; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Webb et al., 2017). Parental perceptions, practices, and attitudes toward transition need to be transformed and parental support must be developed so that parents can be better integrated and more engaged. These changes could include developing formative programs and preparing educational material to promote a holistic, inclusive, and constructive school culture.

Parental participation at home involves establishing work routines and behavioral guidelines conducive to children's gradual adaptation to first grade. Where necessary, parents also encourage their children to take part in remedial and induction activities in reading, writing, and mathematics outside of school hours (in the afternoons, on Saturdays, or during vacation periods). This may be due to a perception that families should not ordinarily become involved in the education process, but rather only on an exceptional basis, for remedial purposes or as circumstances may require. This view of formal education means that families are not regularly involved in their children's education, but only under special circumstances. In the prevailing system, non-participation is the norm.

Parents perceive challenges associated with the transition, including an excessive workload in reading, writing, and mathematics; demands that exceed the children's level of maturity, capabilities, and skills; and a lack of flexibility in school rules and teaching practices regarding punctuality, discipline, responsibility, and academic performance. This could point to parental ignorance of the structure of the general education system and of the curriculum, more specifically. It would appear that parents view preschool and elementary school as independent, unrelated systems, probably due to the disconnect between educational practices in the two levels. These differences are found both in the formal curricular, pedagogical, and instructional design for preschool and first grade and in the teaching strategies employed, the preschool exit profile, and the demands of first grade in language and mathematics. These factors influence parents' experiences and views of the transition process and may therefore hinder the transition to first grade and have an adverse impact on student performance.

Although this study achieved its objectives, there are some limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the size of the sample made it impossible to explore in greater depth the perceptions, practices, and attitudes of parents concerning transition; future studies with smaller samples could conduct more interviews and focus groups. Second, the breadth of the subject matter made it impossible to study specific variables in depth; more targeted research on specific issues is therefore recommended. Third, while theoretical models to explain transition do exist, this study did not seek to confirm these models. Subsequent work could evaluate the validity of these models in a Dominican context. Lastly, future research could also include other family members involved in school transition, not just parents.

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