

Research on the Current Status and Improvement Strategies of Preschool-Primary School Transition Courses

Luoyao Fang*

School of Education, Hubei Business College, Wuhan 430079, China

*Corresponding author Email: fangly_2020@163.com

Abstract

The transition from preschool to primary school, based on the concept of lifelong education, is a process designed to promote children's healthy development and help them smoothly transition from kindergarten to primary school. It involves phased and continuous processes, necessitating collaboration among parents, schools, and society as a comprehensive system. This study examines the implementation of preschool-primary school transition courses in five kindergartens within a prefecture-level city in Hubei Province. It evaluates various aspects such as kindergarten teachers' understanding of the transition, the establishment of course goals, selection of course content, organization of course experiences, and teaching evaluation. The study found several issues with the transition courses: most kindergarten teachers lack sufficient understanding of these courses, the goals of the transition courses seldom focus on cultivating children's willpower and sense of responsibility, and there is no unified standard for evaluating the courses. To enhance the current implementation of these courses, the study proposes several recommendations. These include deepening understanding of the courses, refining course goals, establishing unified evaluation standards, and promoting integrated cooperation between kindergartens and primary schools.

Keywords

Preschool-primary School Transition; Courses; Kindergarten Teachers.

1. Introduction

The transition from preschool to primary school is a critical stage that is not only significant for children's transitional phase but also has a profound impact on their lifelong development. According to the *Guidelines for Kindergarten Education* (2001): "Kindergartens should closely cooperate with families and communities, align with primary schools, and comprehensively utilize various educational resources to create favorable conditions for children's development." This indicates that the preschool-primary school transition is not merely about kindergartens aligning with primary schools but is a multi-faceted collaborative process involving kindergartens, primary schools, families, and society to support children's successful development. The transition course is an essential component of this process.

Differences exist between kindergarten education and primary school education, making the preschool-primary school transition course indispensable in bridging the educational gap[5]. The transition should unify both its phased and continuous aspects; however, in practice, these are often seen as opposing or separate, leading to a tendency towards "primary schoolization" of course content or form. Although most teachers recognize the importance of the transition, the lack of in-depth theoretical reflection often results in superficial application of theory to practical courses. Kindergartens are often perceived as inferior, prompting measures to align with primary school formats and curricula, which can contribute to this "primary schoolization"

tendency. Moreover, parents' excessive expectations and kindergartens' stringent requirements on teachers are also reasons for the unsatisfactory outcome of transition courses[1]. This study focuses on investigating current practices of preschool-primary school transition courses in China. It explores how goals are set, experiences are organized, methods are employed, and evaluations are conducted within kindergarten transition programs. By examining these aspects, the research aims to provide valuable insights into enhancing the implementation of preschool-primary school transitions nationwide.

2. Current Status of Preschool-Primary School Transition Courses

Based on questionnaire surveys and interviews, the current status of preschool-primary school transition courses can be summarized as follows:

1) Early Implementation of Transition Policies and Importance Attached by Kindergarten Teachers

In a prefecture-level city in Hubei Province, significant changes occurred starting in 2012 when 13 model kindergarten preparatory classes were discontinued. By 2013, all kindergartens in the city had phased out such classes. With the cancellation of preparatory classes, kindergartens were also prohibited from using primary school textbooks, conducting advanced mathematics training, abacus training, writing instruction, assigning homework, or organizing any form of tests or exams. This marked the formal implementation of the preschool-primary school transition, with over 90% of teachers attaching great importance to it.

2) Course Goals Focus on Learning Ability and Good Study Habits

The preschool-primary school transition is a process that helps children transition from kindergarten to primary school, based on the phased and continuous development of children's physical and mental characteristics and their lifelong development needs[2]. When selecting course goals, teachers primarily choose preliminary learning abilities and good study habits, while goals like willpower and responsibility are less frequently chosen. The transition course content mainly includes children's learning habits, lifestyle habits, and daily routines, with teachers focusing course goals on learning-related content.

3) Diverse and Integrated Teaching Methods

As a crucial transitional stage between kindergarten and primary school, kindergartens have incorporated preschool-primary school transition into their annual and class work plans, focusing on children's adaptation and changes in parental perceptions[3]. In choosing teaching methods for transition courses, kindergarten teachers adhere mainly to kindergarten's play-based methods and demonstrations, supplemented by primary school methods such as demonstrations and lectures, resulting in diverse teaching methods. The main forms of activity include taking children to visit primary schools, organizing parent-themed meetings, and sharing experiences with primary school teachers during graduation ceremonies.

4) Course Evaluation Methods Combining Formative and Summative Evaluation

Although a few teachers consider only formative or summative evaluation in their assessment criteria, most kindergarten teachers prefer combining formative and summative evaluations, which better reflects the actual situation of children's transition and provides teachers with correct guidance, facilitating changes in teaching concepts and innovation in teaching methods.

3. Problems and Causes in the Current Status of Transition Courses

3.1. Most Kindergarten Teachers Lack Understanding of Transition Courses

With the issuance of transition policies, have kindergarten teachers' perceptions truly aligned with policy implementation? From the questionnaires and interviews conducted by the author, the current status of preschool-primary school transition is not promising. Although nearly 90%

of teachers place great importance on it, only 13.7% of teachers have a deep understanding of it, and most teachers lack sufficient knowledge of transition courses. In assessing the effectiveness of the transition course implementation, most teachers believe that their kindergarten's transition implementation is quite effective. The effectiveness of transition course implementation depends on the difficulty of the course goals and evaluation standards chosen by kindergarten teachers. The author conducted follow-up interviews with some teachers regarding this phenomenon.

First, teachers believe that preschool-primary school transition is important for two reasons: one is due to national policy and societal perception emphasizing its importance, urging everyone to prioritize it, and the other is that transition work is often highlighted in internal meetings and work plans. However, these reasons clearly stem from external factors, with few teachers stating that they discovered the crucial importance of transition after personal exploration, leading them to view it as very important. Most kindergarten teachers' understanding of the significance of transition remains at the initial, lower level of recognition, only acknowledging or agreeing with its importance. However, for educators implementing transition, its significance must not remain merely verbal; education cannot be compromised. The importance of transition work must be internalized before it can be externalized, and there is still a long way to go for teachers in kindergartens in a certain prefecture-level city in Hubei Province to deepen their understanding of transition.

Second, kindergartens have already incorporated transition courses into annual and class work plans, forming official content and models within kindergartens. This leads to two issues: first, established course content and models reduce teachers' enthusiasm for understanding and innovating, hindering spontaneous exploration of transition and innovation in courses. The above-mentioned factors are key elements affecting the investigation of an issue—enthusiasm and innovation awareness. Second, since transition courses are already formalized, teachers often select fixed models and content, but there are differences in understanding and practice among teachers. Even if the same transition course is selected, teachers often lower course requirements, failing to achieve the intended goals of the transition course, and some teachers merely go through the motions. This explains why teachers in the city do not deeply understand transition courses and primary school content but consider their transition course implementation effective. This is due to self-lowering of course goals and not fully evaluating implementation effectiveness based on learning processes and outcomes, or evaluating by combining learning processes and outcomes while lowering evaluation criteria.

3.2. The Transition Curriculum Objectives Pay Little Attention to Developing Children's Willpower and Sense of Responsibility

According to survey reports, teachers primarily focus on two objectives when setting goals for transition courses from preschool to elementary school: developing preliminary learning abilities and fostering good study habits. While identifying these as primary goals for the transition is appropriate, it is crucial to recognize that they should serve as the ultimate and highest objectives of transition activities, rather than as sub-goals for each segment of the transition curriculum. As the transition process progresses, we should emphasize selecting objectives that ultimately lead children to achieve preliminary learning abilities and good study habits.

The emphasis on learning over developing children's willpower and sense of responsibility in setting course objectives largely stems from the pressure exerted by parents and primary schools. After the abolition of preschool classes, transition course content became a key task for kindergartens, but the course objectives and content are often influenced by the needs of principals and parents[4]. Additionally, kindergarten teachers lack a clear understanding of transition course objectives, confusing ultimate goals with intermediate ones and overlooking

the principles of children's physical and mental development. This is one reason behind the tendency for kindergartens to become more like primary schools.

For example, teachers aiming to achieve the ultimate goals of transition must focus on cultivating willpower as a fundamental ability. Willpower can be divided into physical and emotional aspects. For physical willpower, the standard can be set as the ability of a child to complete tasks independently and orderly. For emotional willpower, it involves actively listening to others and clearly expressing their own thoughts.

3.3. Lack of Unified Standards for Evaluating Transition Courses

National regulations stipulate that children who turn six by September 1 can enter the first grade, but apart from age, there are no specific requirements for children about to enter primary school. What level of ability should children possess to smoothly transition to primary school and effectively adapt to the differences between kindergarten and primary school? This is an issue that transition courses nationwide need to address[6]. Currently, most kindergarten teachers tend to use a combination of formative and summative assessments in evaluating transition courses. However, the lack of standardized evaluation criteria and the quality of assessment methods have not received adequate attention.

Of course, there are reasons for not establishing a unified evaluation model for transition courses. From the child's perspective, the development patterns of children vary. Differences exist among children of the same age group, gender, and region, making it challenging to establish a unified evaluation for transition courses. From the perspective of transition courses, there is no standardized curriculum nationwide, with each kindergarten having its own transition curriculum. Without a unified curriculum, how can there be unified standards? From the teacher's perspective, because evaluation standards are entirely objective, the actual implementation requires teachers to conduct comprehensive assessments of children's developmental levels and speeds. If teachers lack competence, errors in course evaluation and assessment of children's developmental levels and speeds could have severe lifelong impacts on children.

4. Reflections and Recommendations

4.1. Deepening Understanding of Transition Courses

To effectively implement transition work, kindergarten teachers must first deepen their understanding of transition courses. This understanding should go beyond verbal acknowledgment. Teachers should enhance their learning of transition courses, focusing on every aspect of transition activities, gaining an in-depth understanding of transitions, and fostering innovative thinking in transition courses. Through extensive discussion and study, teachers should actively build a knowledge system of transitions and adopt a modern perspective on transition courses. Kindergartens should keep pace with the times, collaborate with experts, scholars, and social institutions to conduct activities related to transition course concepts, and strengthen teachers' learning of transition courses.

4.2. Refining Transition Course Objectives

Clarifying transition course objectives is crucial for curriculum reform. Kindergarten teachers should select educational objectives for transitions based on the characteristics of children's physical and mental development and educational principles. To ensure children smoothly transition through this important stage, kindergarten teachers should refine transition course objectives. Two main skills need to be prepared before children enter primary school: social skills and academic skills. Refining course objectives requires making them specific while avoiding tendencies to mirror primary school formats, thus promoting children's holistic development. Teachers should also utilize existing curriculum resources, integrate course

content, introduce advanced international resources, and deeply study methods for refining transition course objectives.

4.3. Establishing Unified Transition Course Evaluation Standards

Kindergarten teachers often combine formative and summative assessments for evaluating transition courses, but there is no unified evaluation standard. While age is an important factor for entering primary school, the key consideration should be whether the child's physical and mental development meets the requirements[7]. The government should establish evaluation standards for transition courses targeting children entering primary school, setting them for the second semester of the final kindergarten year. Children who meet these standards can enter primary school. For those who do not, teachers should focus on developing and enhancing the required skills over the next six months.

5. Conclusion

Transitioning from kindergarten to primary school is a significant process involving the collaboration of parents, schools, and society. The need for transition arises because kindergartens and primary schools are entirely different environments; friends, teachers, surroundings, schedules, and content all undergo significant changes. The transition phase is crucial for supporting children's physical and mental development through this major change. However, kindergartens and primary schools should represent a unity of continuity and stages. We should not separate the two when considering them. To enhance the transition experience, there is a call for greater integration between kindergartens and primary schools. Establishing unified kindergarten-primary school structures would allow children to progress directly from kindergarten to primary school with familiar classmates and teachers, thereby reducing anxiety and discomfort. Such integration would also facilitate the development of educators capable of teaching across both kindergarten and primary school levels. This approach supports the continuity of educational goals and curriculum content, providing a seamless developmental pathway for children from early childhood through primary education.

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