

The Challenges and Possibilities of the Preparatory Class

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Abstract: *From the school year 2012-2013 due to the introduction of the preparatory class, in Romania the compulsory school was enlarged to 11 years. The aim of this was to make children's schooling smoother and easier. The aim of this paper is to present the opinions of the Hungarian teachers working in primary, regarding this step. In order to give a vivid view of the subject, we present first some characteristic features of the Romanian school system in general, then we analyze the benefits and drawbacks of the introduction of the preparatory class all these based on the answers of the teachers. During the research we used on-line questionnaires among the teachers from Kovaszna county (N=134). The outcome of the research shows that this procedure was mostly successful among most of the teachers but it has not fulfilled all the expectations so far.*

Keywords: early enrollment, preparatory class, integrated curriculum, primary school.

Introduction

In Europe, the quick economical and social changes have had their effect on the educational system as well. The social, economical and cultural differences can be seen more often. The European countries try to get closer with certain reforms in education as well. Our research is aimed to present the reforms in the Romanian educational system, which can be seen mostly in the introduction of the preparatory class into the primary education. This procedure tries to give equal chances, to compensate certain social groups as well as certain educational gaps. In Europe the average school starting age is 6. Based on the data given by the Eurydice¹ the researchers mostly follow two major tendencies: one points out and highlights the importance of the sooner the better idea of starting school. The other points out that children should start school at the age of 7 or even older. In most European schools the school starting age is 6. In North Ireland and Luxemburg this age is 4, in England, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland and Scotland this is 5. In Finland, Sweden children start school at the age of 7. In support of early schooling there is the necessity of socializing. The support of children coming from lower social classes is also an aim of this system. Besides this social criteria there appears a political one as well, which stands that those children who enter the schooling earlier will be part of the job market earlier.

Some characteristic features of the Romanian school system

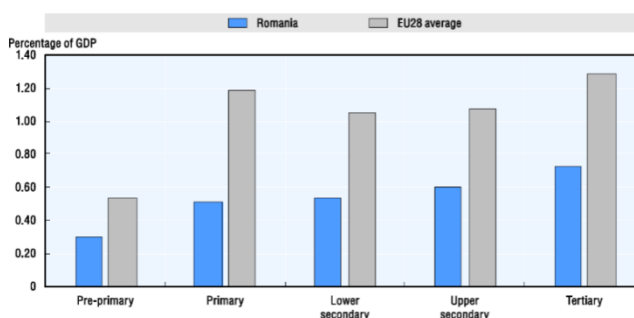
There are major differences within Europe, regarding the financial support given to the educational system, the teacher training. Although

¹ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat (2014): *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe* 2014 Edition. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union; Eurydice European Unit (1994): *Pre-school and primary education in the European Union*. Brussels.

statistics show certain economic development in Romania, the educational system is still weakly supported by the government. We can also mention that the financing of the primary is even lower than the other levels of the compulsory education. In contrary to this we have to highlight that the support of this would be essential to prevent the early school leave and to increase the level of school exam results.

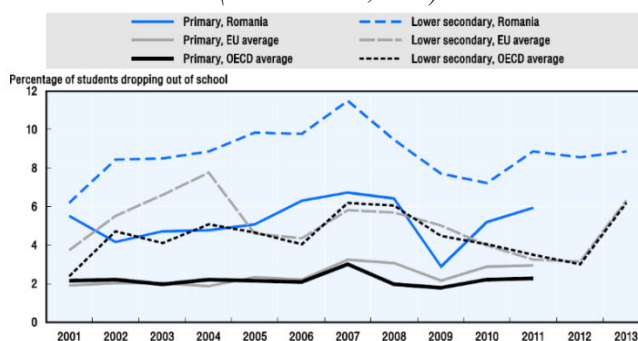
Nevertheless, in the last decade the financial support of the primary has decreased from 21 % in 2007 to 3 % in 2013, this is way under the average European 6 %. So, there is a little chance that till 2020 Romania will fulfill the expectancy of lowering early school leaving to 11,3%².

Figure 1. The financial support of education in different school levels
(Source: OECD, 2017)



School abandonment is the highest in Romania compared to other European countries both on primary (ISCED1) and lower secondary levels (ISCED2). Early school abandon is mostly characteristic to territories with lower social and economical development.

Figure 2. School abandon in primary (ISCED1) and lower secondary (ISCED2)
(Source: OECD, 2017)



² H. Kitchen et al. (2017). OECD, *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Romania*, 2017, from https://www.unicef.org/romania/OECD_Reviews_en_pt_web.pdf, 06. 12. 2017.

Steps taken in Europe to reduce school failure

In order to reduce school failure, in order to make integration easier for children in need or with certain difficulties, many schools voted for an earlier schooling. This way there is a longer period of adjustment to the requirements of the school system. In those countries where immigration is high these preparatory classes would enable the learning of the language of the new country³. In Hungary there is a big emphasis on the coeducation and integrated education. These complex procedures help the children's integration lowering all kinds of social, economical or other differences.

The research highlights the sooner the child is integrated into the educational system, the better will be the development and the more equal their chances will be. In most of the European countries the immigrants are those who belong to the lower developed social groups, while in Romania, the majority of the population can be regarded like that⁴.

In Hungary the early school start is known as well in the form of helping children with certain learning, speaking and other difficulties. The use of the integrated method is characteristic here as well. In the European countries the transition period from the pre-primary cycle to the primary cycle is seen for the pupils as a period of huge transformations activating important physical and mental energies. So, the school environment brings with it in the life of a child a multiply dimensioned reality which is new, with a specific profile, different from that of the kindergarten environment, from various perspectives. The learning activity acquires a strong systematic nature, activating the entire personality of the small pupil, opening numerous possibilities. Everything changes in the life of the child starting from the environment up to the daily routine⁵.

The characteristics of the children between 5- 7

According to Piaget and Vigotszkij in this age children are not capable for abstraction. They love the group games, keep the rules and need a lot of movement. In differentiating up and down they use the parts of the body as well as in defining right and left. Firstly, they differentiate the dominant hand, then they can make a difference between left and right directions. The 6-7 years old children lack the motivation for production. They mostly work and fulfill tasks for the sake of the teacher and parents, they want the love and appreciation of the beloved ones. According

³ I. Mihály, *Életkor és iskolakezdés – a viták tükrében*. in *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 5. Sz., 2001 <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00035/00049/2001-05-eu-Mihaly-Eletkor.html>, 01. 04. 2018..

⁴ K. Darvasat al., *Óvodai hátránycsökkentés, eredményes iskolakezdés*, Educatio Társadalmi Szolgáltató Nonprofit Kft. Köznevelési Osztály, Óvodafejlesztési Iroda, 2015, p. 7-15.

⁵ M. Szabó, "Az iskolai kezdő szakasz helyzetének feltárása," in *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, III (2005), p. 17.

to Vigotszkij, the child's closest environment and people have the strongest effect on his/her development. That's why the preparatory class can help the children of 6.⁶

Vigotszkij highlights the utmost importance of the social environment in the process of learning. He created the concept of the nearest developing zone, according to which the child can easily fulfill those activities which are closest to his/her previously gained knowledge. He believed that if a person acts role in the process of learning then that becomes a lifelong learning process. As regarding the kindergarten pupil, he considered playing the most fruitful learning process. He focused on the importance of the personal interaction as well as of the cultural, social depth.⁷

Vigotszkij's theory states that children develop their knowledge in an active way but the measure of the cognitive development is also influenced by the social and cultural environment. According to his theory the best form of this in the development of children is the preparatory class.

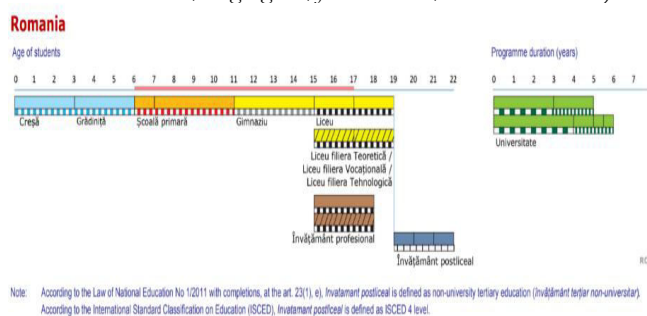
Changes in the Romanian school system

In Romania the kindergarten is not compulsory. According to statistics in 2010-2011, before the introduction of educational reforms, 20% of the children did not go to kindergarten at all. There is a higher tendency to early school abandon to these children.

The educational progress is strongly linked to the everyday life and its problems. The preparatory class and the introduction of the integrated curricula opened a new area in education. There is more emphasis on the beginning phase of the education where skills and competences are developed, which later will help children in the process of learning.

Figure 3. The structure of the Romanian school system

(<https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0e54460d-d585-11e7-a5b9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-53918966>)



⁶ K. Porkolábné Balogh, "A tanulási képességet meghatározó pszichikus funkciók fejlődése, a tanulási nehézségek korai felismerésének lehetőségei, a fejlesztés perspektívái," in *Porkolábné Balogh, K. (ed.): Iskolapszichológia*, Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, 1988.

⁷ L. Fodor, *Lev Szemjonovics Vigotszkij*, <http://rmpsz.ro/uploaded/tiny/files/magiszter/2011/nyar/17.pdf>, accessed 01.04. 2018.

Until 2012 the preparation of children for school was accomplished by the nurseries, but due to the fact that pre-primary education was not compulsory many children used to start school without any previous education⁸. The lack of preparatory made children's lives difficult and ended in many cases in failure and early school abandon. Therefore the aim of the preparatory class is to make children's integration into the school system easier, to enable them to become part of social life and to develop basic skills and competencies⁹.

In 2012-13 there were 8534 preparatory classes in 4450 educational institutions including 128218 children into the educational system. This was only 59% of the children aged 6. So, 41% may have stayed at kindergarden or according to the parents' decision might have been enrolled into the 1st grade. 11% of the children in preparatory classes belong to schools where education is organised in simultaneous classes, which according to the headteachers of these institutions has made this type of education very difficult. Upon implementing the preparatory grade, ensuring the physical space necessary to perform the activities specific to the preparatory grade within the school was a real challenge for the headteachers. Most of them indicated the difficulty of finding adequate school spaces. In the rural environment, some preparatory grades perform their activity in kindergarden premises. In many rural schools the school buses transport pupils which creates other serious problems.¹⁰

The Hungarian teachers from Romania have met serious difficulties in finding teacher training courses for themselves. The existing trainings were unprofessional with extreme demands, lacking the practical methods, not giving enough help for the teachers being enrolled in these. They didn't find them satisfying in preparing them for the new concept and expectancies.¹¹

Developing competences in the preparatory class

From 2012 in the Romanian educational system there have been implemented a series of reforms in order to meet these requirements. In this paper we try to present the peculiarities of the preparatory class and its curricula. One of the most important elements of the reform is the change of the structure of the educational system itself, by introducing the preparatory

⁸ K. Mandel, "A romániai magyar pedagógusok felkészítése az iskolaelőkészítő 2012-es reformjára," in Pusztai G.- Morvai L.(eds.). *Pálya-modell–Igények és lehetőségek a pedagógus-továbbképzés változó rendszerében*, Nagyvárad-Budapest, Partium Könyvkiadó-Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2015, p. 49-69.

⁹ C. Langa, *Effects of implementing the preparatory grade in Romania on school organization*, www.sciencedirect.com, accessed 06.12.2017.

¹⁰ ISE, *Implementarea clasei pregătitoare în sistemul educațional românesc în anul școlar 2012-2013*, 2013., from http://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Studiu_CP_clasapregatitoare.pdf, accessed 12. 06. 2017.

¹¹ K.Mandel, "A romániai magyar pedagógusok felkészítése az iskolaelőkészítő 2012-es reformjára," p. 49-69.

class in primary-education system enlarging the compulsory education to 11 years. From the school year 2012/13 the 6 years old children became pupils of the educational system. Every 6 years old child till 31st August must attend school. The educational institutions have to announce the parents about all their rights regarding choosing school for their children as well as about the procedure of the enrollment. The schools also present the different methodology which is used in this preparatory school year.¹²

Recently the development of key competencies have become of utmost importance in the European educational system. In March 2000 the European Council in Lisbon has established new strategies for the EU. According to this the main aim of the EU is to establish better workplaces, to create stronger social cohesion enabling in this way the sustainable development.¹³ The European Council in Lisbon asked the states to create the procedure of the Life Long Learning together with the new basic competences to be learned as well as their framework. These competences should include Information Technology, Communication Technology, the Culture of technology, foreign languages, entrepreneurship.¹⁴

Most of the European countries have achieved great success with integrating the key competencies into their National Curriculum. All over Europe the 8 basic competences have been put in centre of attention. This happened in Romania in 2011 as well.¹⁵ The curriculum of the preparatory grade also focuses on the development of competences. The integrated activities help the children step from kindergarten into the school system easily.

The Curriculum in the preparatory school for minorities

The curriculum includes different cultural fields, subjects that belong to them, and the compulsory minimum and maximum number of lessons.¹⁶ In the Romanian National Curriculum there are seven fields, which develop the key competencies: Languages and communication, Maths and Sciences, Human Studies, Sports and Gymnastics, Technological Studies, Career.¹⁷ The Curriculum also includes, besides the mandatory ones, some optional lessons, which can be integrated into the basics or it can also be

¹² OM nr. 3064/ 19.01.2012.

¹³ V. Molan, "Cadrul competențelor cheie în învățământul românesc", in *Raport de cercetare Modalități de dezvoltare a competențelor cheie în învățământul primar*, 2012 Downloaded 10.30.2016 from <http://www.icos-edu.ro/download/raport-de-cercetare-ICOS.pdf>

¹⁴ EACEA/Eurydice, *Dezvoltarea competențelor cheie în școlile din Europa: Provocări și Oportunități pentru Politică*. Raport Eurydice. Luxemburg: Oficiul pentru Publicații al Uniunii Europene, 2012.

¹⁵ A. Suduc, M. Bîzoi, G. Gorghiu, "Sustainable Development", in *Romania in Pre-School and Primary Education*, 2013, www.sciencedirect.com, accessed 11.18. 2017.

¹⁶ R. Fóris Ferenczi, *A tervezéstől az értékelésig. Tanterv- és értékelésmélet*, Kolozsvár, Ábel Kiadó, 2008.

¹⁷ M. Manolescu, D. Potolea, (2006): *Teoria și metodologia curriculumului*, accesed 04.01. 2018.

transdisciplinary. These optional activities can be offered by the school or by teachers. When they choose one of them the child's interests as well as other criteria have to be taken into account, like the financial and human possibilities of the educational institution as well as the local communities' needs.¹⁸ At present there is one such optional lesson on the primary level. Most of the teachers in minority schools do not include any of these lessons due to the already overloaded timetable¹⁹ (In the preparatory grade the Romanian children attend 19 lessons/week, max. 20, while on the same level the Hungarian children have got minimum 20 up to 22, maximum 23 lessons/week.).

The development of Key competences in the preparatory

The integrated form of education means the relationship among all the different subjects. It links the learning process to the everyday life. In the preparatory class there are 30-35 minute playful, involving integrated activities with a 10-15 minute free play.

Just like in the European Council's and European Parliament's proposal in the Romanian Educational Legislation, the mother tongue related competences create the basis of the development. In the education of minorities besides the above mentioned there is also a huge emphasis on the development of both a foreign language and the Romanian language competencies.

In the centre of the skills and competences to be developed as regarding the language competences the speaking and reading comprehension skills stand. This creates the basis of the preparatory curriculum, which focuses on the children's already gained language experiences and tries to enforce and enlarge these, preparing the pupils for the writing skills as well.²⁰

The acquisition of Maths and Sciences can be made possible for the young learners with the help of integrated subjects highlighting the experience based knowledge. Plenty of games and interactive methods help the children gain as much experience as possible.

In the preparatory stage the musical education is highly important as well. It allows them to be open, creative, it also develops their good taste. This age group is characterized by constant body movement which is helpful for the musical education. This branch of the curriculum focuses on plenty of competences like socializing, self-control, self-confidence developing as well as creativity enhancing. The flexibility of the preparatory class enables the

¹⁸ E. Kádár, *A magyar nyelv tantárgy tartalma és oktatás a romániai oktatás szabályozási keretben*, Kolozsvár, 2016, accessed 04.27. 2017.

¹⁹ L. Péter, "Reform és visszhangok," *A közoktatási reform fogadtatása romániai magyar pedagógusok körében*, Kolozsvár, Kolozsvári Egyetemi Kiadó, 2012.

²⁰ K. Bacskai, *Iskolák a társadalom peremén*, Szeged, Belvedere Meridionale, 2015.

teacher to fulfil his/her creativity, to adjust the methods to the level of the class as well as to the personality of each and every child.

The challenges and possibilities of the preparatory class

The introduction of primary class into the Romanian school system has provoked remarkable development. The purpose of the study is the investigation of the impact of implementing the preparatory grade in the primary education system regarding the teachers from Kovaszna County. We would also like to reveal whether the teachers of preparatory class have helped the children overcome the gap between the kindergarten and school. We have also made investigation on the effects of the continuous training of the teachers who teach preparatory grades, can early school abandon be overcome, which are the advantages and disadvantages of the preparatory class.

The hypothesis: It is supposed that the introduction of preparatory class was a success according to the majority of the teachers. Till 2012 the preparation of children for school was accomplished by the nurseries, but due to the fact that pre-primary education was not compulsory many children used to start school without any previous education. We also supposed that the lack of preparatory made children's lives difficult and ended in many cases in failure and early school abandon. Therefore the aim of the preparatory class is to make children's integration into the school system easier, to enable them become part of social life and to develop basic skills and competencies.

The Hungarian teachers from Romania have met serious difficulties in finding teacher training courses for themselves. The existing trainings were unprofessional with extreme demands, lacking the practical methods, not giving enough help for the teachers being enrolled in these. They did not find them satisfying in preparing them for the new concept and expectancies. We believe that the teachers' opinion about the above-mentioned teacher training courses has also changed and that the recent adjusted trainings fulfill the teachers' demands. These findings regarding the demand for better-qualified teachers compel policymakers, researchers, and educators to respond to the issue of teacher deficiencies by organizing professional development (PD) programs. As a result, the importance of these PD programs for improving teacher preparedness, in addition to their potential for impacting student achievement, has become accepted worldwide.²¹

Methodology

During the research we used on-line questionnaires among the teachers from Kovaszna county. The period of the research was January – February 2018, the end of the questionery was at the end of February. In

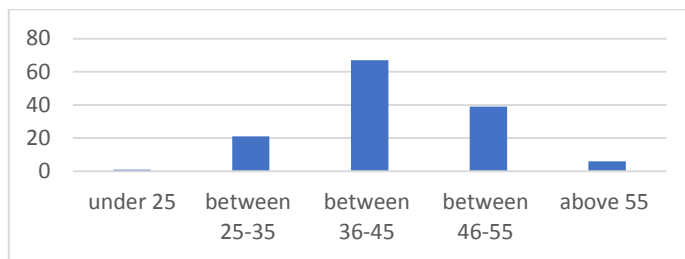
²¹ A.D. Manea, "Current Trends in Lifelong Learning for Preschool and Primary Education Teachers", in vol. *Rethinking Social Action. Core Values*, Bologna, Medimond, 2016, p. 751-757.

Kovaszna county 134 Hungarian teachers answered the questions. There were teachers from rural and urban areas as well. We have also examined these teachers' education examining the results from the point of view of residence and school place as well. The research has highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of the introduction of preparatory class, as well as the teachers' opinion about training courses, methods, realias.

Results

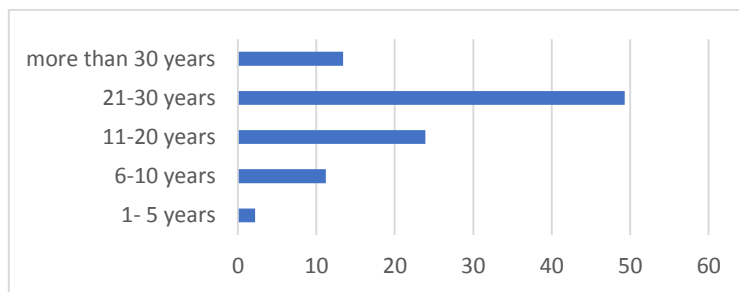
Demographic characteristics: From the 134 Hungarian teachers questioned 96 % was women and 4 % was men. Regarding their age, the least representatives were the young generation, only 1 % was under 25, while the 25- 35 age group appears in 16 %. 50 % of the analysed teachers were between 36 and 45, 29 % were between 46- 55 and only 4% were above 55. 77,6% of the asked teachers teach in normal classes while 22,4% have got simultaneous classes.

Figure 4. The teachers 'age



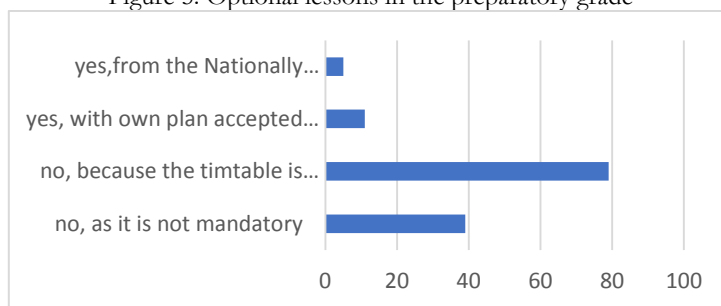
According to the residence of the analysed teachers 37% live in the centre of the county, 29% in town, 23% in the countryside, and 11% in village. It can also be observed that 58% of these teachers live in the place where they work, while 34% commute trying to spend less than 30 minutes with travelling to. Only 8 % of the questioned teachers travel further than 30 minutes to the working place. According to the years spent teaching it can be seen that 49% have been teaching for 21-30 years, 24% for 11-20 years, 14% for more than 30 years. There are very few beginners, and only 11 % have been practising teaching between 6-10 years. The age of the teachers together with the years spent teaching strongly influence their attitude to certain training courses as to the effectiveness of their work²⁰.

Figure 5. Years spent teaching in the education system



As regarding the teachers' studies, most of them have attended long or short run university, 16 % short run, 53,7 % long run university, 6 % owning Masters degree and only 23,9 % possess havenot got further education than baccalaureat. According to the gained teacher degrees, 72,4% have got first degree, 17,2% 2nd degree, 9,7% possess only the finalization exam, while 0,7% donot possess even this exam. It can be concluded that teachers in their active period of teaching put a real emphasis on their training and life long learning. 59% of the teachers in preparatory classes do not include the optional class in the timetable because children are already overloaded. 29,1% of them don't choose anything as it is not mandatory. 8,2% use their own optional subject, while 3,7% use one accepted by the Ministry of Education.

Figure 5. Optional lessons in the preparatory grade



These results show the evidence that most Hungarian teachers do not include any optional lesson in the already crowded timetable. This can be seen in the opinions of the interviewed teachers.

„There are too many mandatory lessons for children of this age, there should be a larger number of optional lessons. This way we could more easily respond to the local needs.”

„The less compulsory lesson number would be better, in this way the optional ones could be more easily included in the timetable.”

The introduction of the preparatory class was measured on the five degree Likert-scale. (Number 1-does not agree at all, a 2-mostly does not agree, a 3-neutral, a 4-mostly agrees, 5-completely agrees). The results show

that from those inquired most agree that the introduction of the preparatory class is beneficial for the children's integration into the school system. The highest average was (4.70) for the statement that „the introduction of the preparatory class is beneficial for the children's integration into the school system, 4.62 average value for „the preparatory class makes the teacher's later job easier”, 4.61 average value for the statement that the „30-35 minute long activities coincide with these children's peculiar needs”, 4.55 average value for „the integrated activities are important” statement.

Table 1. Different attitudes towards the preparatory class

Statements	Average value
The introduction of the preparatory class is beneficial for the children's integration	4.70
The preparatory class makes the teacher's later job easier	4.62
The 30-35 minutes long activities coincide with these children's peculiar needs.	4.61
The integrated activities are important	4.55
The preparatory class is a good opportunity for the development of children with certain needs and problems	4.26
The preparatory class lowers school failure	4.18

The answers to the „wh” questions prove the average values.

„The introduction of preparatory class is important in itself but I find it of utmost importance especially for the somehow disadvantaged children. The 1st class is far easier for us in this case, knowing our pupils' character, skills, competences.” „There is a whole school year both for the teacher and the pupils to get to know one another, to get used to the educational environment, the class, the rules. The skills of reading-writing can be prepared during a whole year instead of only six weeks.”

„There is a complete year instead of a six-week period to make the children get used to school. In the 1st grade we already know our pupils' skills, personality, everything is much easier. The beginning is smooth without any tension.”

There are only few of those who find completely welcoming the preparatory class to handle the necessities of the children with certain special needs like misbehaviour or speaking difficulties(4.26). And few consider that it lowers school failure (4.18). Half of the teachers asked find gaps in this field. They think that there is a lack of specialists in the field and that in large classes the teacher on her/his own cannot fulfil all the tasks with every child.

„In order to make the teaching process in the preparatory grade effective there shouldn't be more than 12 children in a class, and a teacher assistant would be needed as well.

„We meet more and more children with certain problems and the teacher is not enough in all these cases. Specialists in the field would be needed, who could treat and develop the children with behavioral problems.

„One of the main disadvantages of the preparatory class is the lack of a teacher assistant, taking into account that the children of this early age don't possess those basic skills like shoelacing, dressing up, eating properly. In the kindergarten there are three people in charge with all these. While in the preparatory the teacher on her/his own has to deal with everything.”

In simultaneous classes the organization of lessons creates the key problem.

„In a class like this I am forced to give more individual work which means that there is less time for playing.”

„The most difficult is, when the preparatory class is together with the 2nd, 3rd or even 4th grade.”

„In a simultaneous class there is less time for interactive physical activities and for speaking development as well.”

According to the teachers the end of year textual evaluation has a major role. We analysed these evaluations from the teachers', parents' and children's point of view as well. 41% of the teachers consider the textual evaluation to be a very useful information database, 44, 8% of them think that it is very important for the development of the children who need individual work. From the child's angle 62,7% of the teachers find it useful because the emphasis is on the development, 47% consider it important to reduce the early school abandonment. 46,3% of the teachers regard to the textual evaluation as a basic tool for the parents who can get a vivid picture of their child's level. 34,30% of the parents recognise and accept the planned activities which could help the children in their future development. We expect to increase the degree of direct and assumed involvement of educational partners (school - family - community) in the formation / promotion of desirable social models, individualities with respectable civic, intellectual and cultural integrity.²²

This lecture examines the teachers' attitude and opinion regarding the teacher training courses in this field, as we know that in the introductory phase they didn't consider them useful enough, more they found them fast paced and very theoretical⁸. Referring to the above mentioned the attitude of the teachers' has somehow changed in a positive direction. The results show that 50,70% of the inquired teachers got important directions, 40% find the theory and practice proportion balanced, while for 9% taking part in these trainings changed their way of thinking and attitude. Only 9% of the

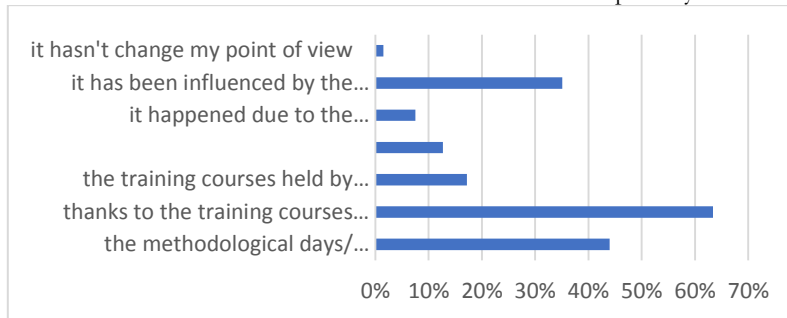
²² A.D. Manea, "Innovation in the Management of Educational Institutions", in *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, CCIX (2015), no. 3, p. 310-315.

questioned teachers consider that there was an overload of theory and very little practical methodology. 3,7% said that didn't get enough training which could have helped in the future work, while only 2,2 % didn't take part in any of these trainings.

We have also examined the facts which influence the attitude towards competency based education. The questioned teachers consider that the different training courses (63.40%), the methodological days and workshops (44%), the study of the bibliography (35.10%) helped the attitude change.

The trainers from abroad (17.20%), the change of experiences (12.70%) taking part in different conferences (7.50%) have also contributed to the change in attitude. Only 1.5% declared that there hasn't changed the teachers' attitude towards competency based education.

Figure 6. Factors which have influenced the attitude towards competency based education



In conclusion the questioned teachers consider the introduction of the preparatory class as beneficial and successful: 75,4% totally, 18,7% mostly, 4,5% neutral, and only 1,5% consider it as a failure.

Conclusion

The aim of this lecture was to present the circumstances of the introduction of the preparatory class and to examine the teachers' feedback on it. According to our analysis it is obvious that the introduction of the preparatory grade is considered by the vast majority of the teachers to be a success, only 1,5% of the teachers questioned think the opposite.

Our second hypothesis was, that the preparatory class helps children's integration into the school system and it also reduces school failure and early school abandon. This supposition was only partly proved according to the teachers. Most of the teachers consider that the preparatory class with its special teaching methods, flexible time management helps both the teachers' and children's further work. However, they don't completely agree with the reducing effect regarding school failure and school abandon. The lack of special developer teachers and psychologists makes the teachers' work hard. Moreover, the huge classes in the urban schools and the simultaneous classes in the rural schools highlight the drawbacks of this.

We can state that the teachers' attitude towards the teacher training courses in the domain has changed, and that they consider the newly introduced courses effective, practical and useful. This prediction proved to be right, as 85,1 % of the examined teachers have found these courses very useful and they also think that there was a balance between the theoretical and practical part.

In conclusion, taking everything into account, the introduction of the preparatory grade in the Romanian school system, according to the Hungarian teachers working in Kovaszna county, has led to a considerable improvement. The teachers consider it beneficial, it helps the children's integration into the school life, into the new community and it also prevents early school failure and school abandon.