

Czech Study of Home Preparation for School in the First Five Years of School Attendance

Lenka Šulová, Michala Škrábová¹

Introduction

Subject of this research project is to describe and assess a cooperation of parents, teachers and pupils during home preparation for school, and while doing their homework in first five years of school attendance. The project analyses influence of value orientations over pupil's auto-regulation and over parent's interaction with children. It observes dynamics of school preparation of a pupil and a participation of parents on this preparation and it analyses cognitive, affective and behavioral components of attitude to school preparation.

The project surveys used ways of school preparation in terms of family, perceived demandingness of home preparation and rate of participation from parents' and siblings' side, possibilities of free time control from child's side and its complex impact on family relationships. It observes a dissonance in attitude and behavior of children and parents, and its impact on school results.

Socialization of a child in early school age is being influenced by many factors. The key factor is obviously beginning of school attendance and of institutional school activity and another important factor is general socio-cultural context in which the child has grown up and in which it has been educated (Šulová, Morgensternová, 2007). Apart from qualita-

¹ Prof. PhDr. Lenka Šulová, CSc., Mgr. Michala Škrábová, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, Charles University in Prague. Next member of research team was PhDr. Monika Morgensternová, Ph.D., who passed away in September 2011.

tive methods (directed interview, group discussions with parents, pupils and teachers) a questionnaire by R. Deslandes was used (Deslandes, Bertrand, 2002, 2003).

In general, the project wants to improve a co-operation between family, school and social environment, and to anticipate social risks that can lead to deterioration of the child's results, its health condition and to detrimentally influence its mental development.

Elementary schools in the Czech Republic accept pupils who have reached 6 years of age by 1st September of the specific year. Children turning 6 between the beginning of the school year and the end of the calendar year can be accepted if they are sufficiently mature, physically and mentally, and if their parent applies for their acceptance.

Czech elementary school has two levels: the first stage now covers the first to the fifth grade (ISCED 1), and the second stage covers the sixth to the ninth grade (ISCED 2).

In the first stage, all pupils are usually taught by a general (non-specific) teacher. Classes are coeducational (<www.msmt.cz>).

Theoretical Approaches and Main Goals of the Project

The project surveys the ways of school preparation in terms of the family, perceived demandingness of home preparation and a rate of participation on side of parents and on siblings' side, possibilities of free time control from child's side and the complex impact on family relationships. It observes a dissonance in attitude and behavior of children and parents, and its impact on perceived school success.

We are particularly interested in what happens in first school years between the actors of socialization process – school, family and child. A regular activity where we can observe this co-operation on a daily basis is especially a preparation for school and homework. On the other hand, our experience makes us fully aware of meaning of starting at school – not only for child, but for other family members as well. In our society, there is an evident ambition of parents to have a child who is successful at school. With some parents, these ambitions are even manifested by anxiety and inadequate fears (delayed accession to school where the key reason is «for the child to succeed») or inadequate requirements on the child during pre-school age already (many courses and hobbies in order to «give the child an advantage over other children»).

Another stimulus that led us on to our research issue was the never-ending discussion about responsibility to children. Who in society guarantees a child's education? Who should sensitively react to changing social requirements – school or parents?

Stress on new technologies is felt in schools, but there is also an effort to keep the basic role of school not only as a provider of information, but also as an educational institution. The peer relationships are being modified at school, an institution that has been sensitively mirroring a social reality until now and constantly represents an important connection between individual and society. There are also changes happening in the teacher-pupil relationship, and changes in perception of a role of teachers in society. The status of a teacher in society takes on an interesting direction in our changing society.

Our goal was especially to observe the cooperation between the teacher, pupil and parents during the child's preparation for school and while doing homework. In our opinion, it is especially a preparation for school and its duties that shapes an important part of the social-emotional relationships between parent and child after the child starts to go to school. In some families these moments are connected with anxiety and fears, resulting in conflicts, and psycho-somatic problems. While in other families this actually improves the relationship between their members by strengthening the parents' authority and creating inter-generational continuity in cognitive aspects. Some families do not even know that preparation for school could happen in a family circle. The way a child does homework and a process of finding a solution of school questions, in first years of school attendance, shapes not only child's future habits while working and attitudes to performance of duties, but also his way of thinking and his desire to find out how things work in the world. If this process is not successful, it often represents a beginning of an inhibition of the child's natural curiosity, an approach to lack of interest, to averageness, low self-confidence and later it approaches to the loss of meaning of life.

It is important to say that the basic topic of preparation for school and homework is a discussed topic for a long time. One opinion states that preparation for school is an absolutely necessary part of school attendance (to strengthen newly acquired knowledge), while others argue that preparation for school exposes pupils to an unreasonable and undue strain in their free time. Can there be some balance of the points of view? Does it exist? Can we look at this topic through the eyes of the modern school that is trained to react to diverse opinions of parents and needs to absorb

dramatic social changes happening at all levels of society? Is it possible to use the optics of the modern family where each member is motivated by the development of their individuality? We can also see this through the eyes of positive development of the pupil, where **a quality of his daily life** must be respected. It is unpardonable to 'sacrifice' childhood and youth of our schoolchildren for the sake of their future life success or failure.

Is it really success in life, quality of life and feelings of meaningfulness related to our success at school or is it rather related to behavior mechanism, feeling mechanism and the models of solving problems that we carry from school to our lives?

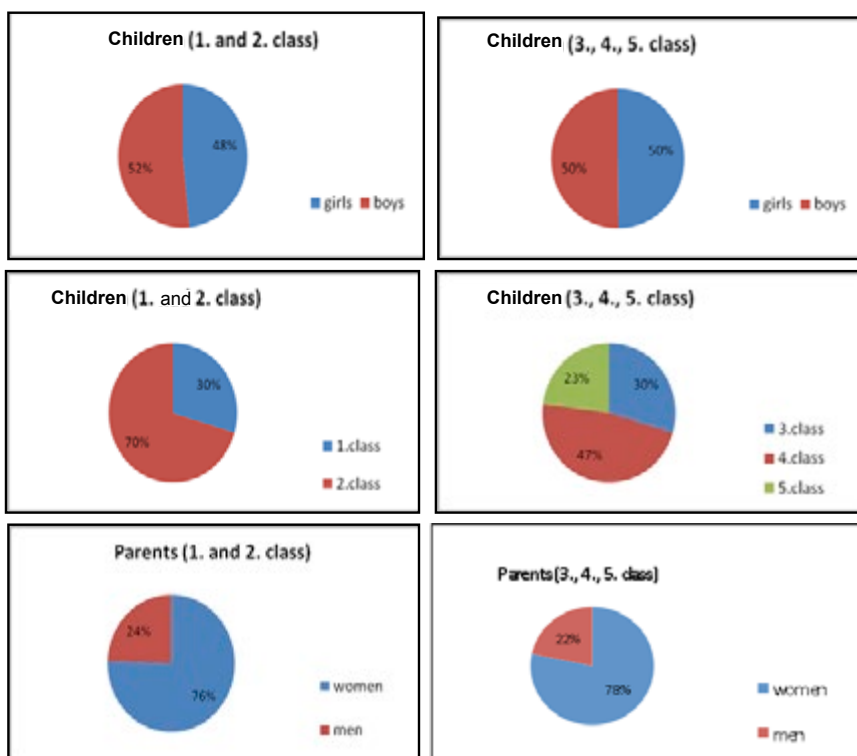
Methods

The study used standardized questionnaires which were designed by R. Deslandes. They are intended for parents, teachers and pupils in the first grade of primary school (Grades 1-5). The questionnaire has many modifications according to age and person (for teachers, parents, younger pupils and older pupils) and this questionnaire arises from HPI (Homework Process Inventory, Cooper et al., 1998) whose French modification was standardized in Canada and France. It also arises from the questionnaire Thinking about My Child's Homework or My Homework (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995; Walker et al., 2000) and from other methods (Deslandes, Bertrand, 2002, 2003).

Research sample and operationalization of used terms

- **Children – 1-2grade - younger children = YC**
(103 girls, 110 boys);
- **Children – 3-5grade - older children = OC**
(150 girls, 151 boys);
- **Parents**
(372 women, 111 men).
- **Attitude to homework – affective** (if a child likes homework or not...);
- **Attitude to homework – behavioral** (how does a child behave while doing homework, if he prepares a place to work if turns off the tv or not...);

- **Attitude to homework – cognitive** (if a child thinks that homework helps him to understand or learn something...);
- **Child's auto-regulation** (how strong is a child's will...);
- **Perceived success of a child** (how successful does a child perceive himself...);
- **Directive parent's attitude** (if a parent behaves in an authoritative way or not...).



Procedure

After each quantitative data collection, followed a collection of qualitative data (in groups consisting of about eight parents, eight children from each observed class and interviews with parents).

Results

Attitude to homework

H1: girls and boys do differ in the attitude to homework – affective (YC, OC).

Wilcoxon test (YC-W = 10352; $p = 0,002$, OC-W=20764; $p = 0,012$) revealed that girls and boys do differ in the attitude to homework – affective. Girls' attitude to homework – affective is always more positive.

H6: girls and boys do differ in the attitude to homework – behavioral (OC).

W test ($W = 20632$, $p = 0,003$) revealed that older girls and boys do differ in the attitude to homework – behavioral. Girl's attitude to homework – behavioral is more positive.

H7: there is a relationship between child's attitude to homework – affective and perceived success of child (YC, OC).

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between the child's attitude to homework – affective and perceived success of child (YC-Sp = 0,283, $p < 0,001$, OC – Sp = 0,491, $p < 0,001$). The stronger the child's attitude to homework – affective, the stronger is perceived success of child.

H9: there is a relationship between child's attitude to homework – cognitive and perceived success of child (YC, OC).

Spearman's correlation analysis did not reveal a significant correlation between younger child's attitude to homework – cognitive and perceived success of child (Sp = 0,127, $p = 0,064$). But it was revealed a positive correlation between older child's attitude to homework – cognitive and perceived success of child (Sp = 0,481, $p < 0,001$). The stronger the older child's attitude to homework – cognitive, the stronger is perceived success of child.

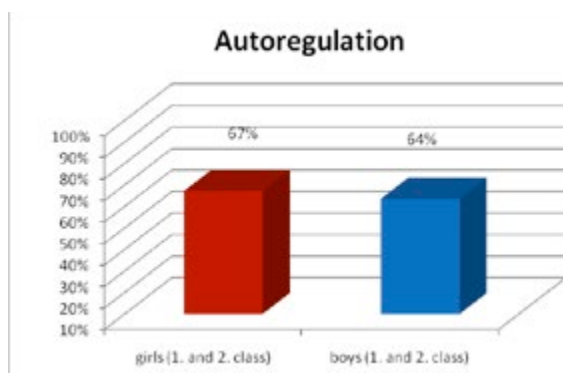
H12: there is a relationship between child's attitude to homework – behavioral and perceived success of child (OC).

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between child's attitude to homework – behavioral and perceived success of child (Sp = 0,618, $p < 0,001$). The stronger the child's attitude to homework – behavioral, the stronger is perceived success of child.

Child's auto-regulation

H14: girls and boys do differ in auto-regulation (YC).

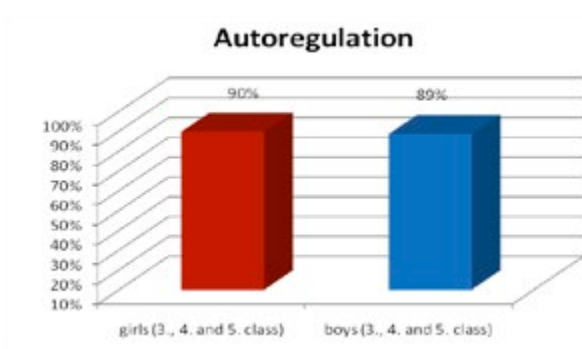
W test ($W = 10675$, $p = 0,036$) revealed that younger girls and boys do differ in auto-regulation. Girl's auto-regulation is stronger.



The chart “Auto-regulation” represents the auto-regulation of boys and girls – as a percentage of maximum auto-regulation.

H15: girls and boys do differ in auto-regulation (OC).

W test ($W = 22214,5$, $p = 0,383$) did not reveal significant differences between older girls and boys in the auto-regulation.

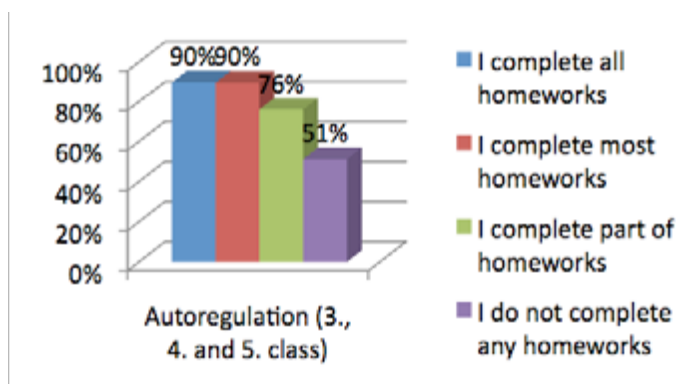


H16: there is a relationship between attitude to homework – affective and child's auto-regulation (YC).

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between child's attitude to homework – affective and child's auto-regulation (YC-Sp = 0,228, $p < 0,001$, OC-(Sp = 0,280, $p < 0,001$). The stronger the child's attitude to homework – affective, the stronger is child's auto-regulation.

H18: there is a relationship between child's auto-regulation and number of homework the child does in average (OC).

Kruskal-Wallis test revealed significant differences between children with high auto-regulation and children with low auto-regulation in the average amount of homework ($\chi = 9,492$, $p = 0,023$). The more homework the child does on average, the stronger auto-regulation the child has.

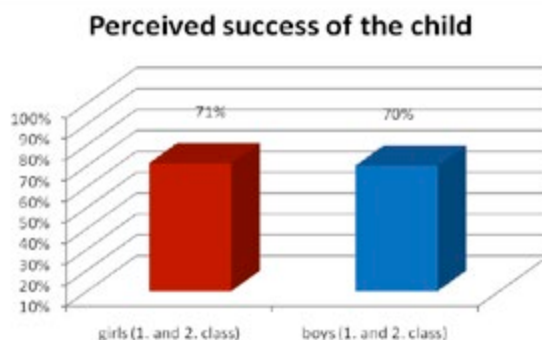


The chart represents the auto-regulation of children - as a percentage of maximum auto-regulation.

Perceived success of child

H19: girls and boys do differ in perceived success of child (YC).

W test test (YC-W = 11159,5, $p = 0,166$, OC-W = 21652,5, $p = 0,106$) did not reveal significant differences between younger girls and boys in perceived success of child.



The chart “Perceived success of child” represents perceived success of child of boys and girls - as a percentage of maximum perceived success of child.

Parent’s questionnaire: evaluation in the relation to their own child’s replies

Parents-younger children

H22: there is a relationship between the fact if the family is complete or not, and the child’s attitude to homework – affective.

Kruskal-Wallis test did not reveal significant differences between children with positive attitude to homework – affective, and children with negative attitude to homework – affective, based on the fact if the family is complete or not ($\chi = 3,757$, $p = 0,289$).

H25: there is a relationship between parent’s attitude to homework and perceived success of child.

Kruskal-Wallis test did not reveal significant differences between children with high perceived success and children with low perceived success in the parent’s attitude to homework ($\chi = 0,536$, $p = 0,765$).

H27: there is a relationship between perceived success of child (from parent’s perspective) and attitude to homework – affective.

Spearman’s correlation analysis did not reveal significant correlation between perceived success of child (from parent’s perspective) and attitude to homework – affective ($Sp = 0,095$, $p = 0,24$).

H28: There is a relationship between perceived success of child (from parent's perspective) and attitude to homework – behavioral.

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between perceived success of child (from parent's perspective) and attitude to homework – behavioral ($Sp = 0,214$, $p < 0,001$). The stronger the child's attitude to homework is – behavioral, the stronger perceived success of child is (from parent's perspective).

H30: There is a relationship between directive parent's attitude and attitude to homework – affective.

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between directive parent's attitude and attitude to homework – affective ($Sp = 0,172$, $p < 0,001$). The stronger the child's attitude to homework – affective, the stronger is directive parent's attitude.

H31: There is a relationship between directive parent's attitude and attitude to homework – behavioral.

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between directive parent's attitude and attitude to homework – behavioral ($Sp = 0,195$, $p < 0,001$). The stronger the child's attitude to homework is – behavioral, the stronger the directive parent's attitude is.

H32: There is a relationship between directive parent's attitude and attitude to homework – cognitive.

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between directive parent's attitude and attitude to homework – cognitive ($Sp = 0,178$, $p < 0,001$). The stronger the child's attitude to homework – cognitive, the stronger is directive parent's attitude.

Parents-older children

H33: There is a relationship between the fact, if the family is complete or not, and the child's attitude to homework – affective.

Kruskal-Wallis test did not reveal significant differences between children with positive attitude to homework – affective and children with negative attitudes to homework – affective, based on the fact if the family is complete or not ($\chi = 2,454$ $p = 0,484$).

H36: There is a relationship between parent's attitude to homework and perceived success of child.

Kruskal-Wallis test did not reveal significant differences between

children with high perceived success and children with low perceived success in the parent's attitude to homework ($\chi = 3,363$, $p = 0,339$).

H38: There is a relationship between perceived success of child (from parent's perspective) and attitude to homework – affective.

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between perceived success of child (from parent's perspective) and attitude to homework – affective ($S_p = 0,289$, $p < 0,001$). The stronger the child's attitude is to homework - affective, the stronger perceived success of child is (from parent's perspective).

H39: There is a relationship between perceived success of child (from parent's perspective) and attitude to homework – behavioral.

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between perceived success of child (from parent's perspective) and attitude to homework – behavioral ($S_p = 0,398$, $p < 0,001$). The stronger the child's attitude is to homework – behavioral, the stronger perceived success of child is (from parent's perspective).

H40: There is a relationship between perceived success of child (from parent's perspective) and attitude to homework – cognitive.

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between perceived success of child (from parent's perspective) and attitude to homework – cognitive ($S_p = 0,225$, $p < 0,001$). The stronger the child's attitude is to homework – cognitive, the stronger perceived success of child is (from parent's perspective).

H41: There is a relationship between directive parent's attitude and attitude to homework – affective.

Spearman's correlation analysis did not reveal significant correlation between directive parent's attitude and attitude to homework – affective ($S_p = -0,084$, $p = 0,273$).

H42: There is a relationship between directive parent's attitude and attitude to homework – behavioral.

Spearman's correlation analysis did not reveal significant correlation between directive parent's attitude and attitude to homework – behavioral ($S_p = -0,008$, $p = 0,913$).

Discussion

We try to systematically apply the most effective combination of observed categories (educational techniques, attitudes, home preparation) to the area of pedagogical and psychological praxis. An aspiration to influence the quality of life of our schoolchildren in a positive way, to influence their healthy psychological development, to intensify the cohesion of family relationships, to strengthen knowledge level and natural curiosity of pupils, to intensify their autonomy, self-confidence and the cooperation of school and family.

Summary

The most interesting findings are possible to summarize and simplify this way:

- Girls like homework more than boys (YC, OC).
- The more a child likes homework, the stronger is perceived success of child (YC, OC)².
- The more a child considers homework useful and has a good way to do homework, the stronger is perceived success of child (OC).
- Girl's auto-regulation is stronger (YC).
- The more a child likes homework, the stronger is child's auto-regulation (YC).
- The more homework the child does on average, the stronger auto-regulation the child has (OC).
- There is no difference if parents have positive attitude to homework or not, regarding child's attitude to homework (affective, cognitive, and behavioral) or perceived success of child and child's auto-regulation.
- The more a child likes homework, the stronger perceived success of child is (from parent's perspective) (OC).
- The more a child likes homework, the more a child considers homework useful and has a good way to do homework, the stronger is directive parent's attitude (YC).

² The statistical relationships of variables are not causal. E.g. the fact that child likes homework does not have to cause his perceived success or vice versa. Our result show only correlations of two variables.

References

- Cooper H, Lindsay J.J., Nye B., Greathouse S. (1998): Relationships between attitudes about homework, the amount of homework assigned and completed, and student achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90, pp. 70-83.
- Deslandes R., Bertrand R. (2002): Parent involvement in schooling at the secondary level: Examination of the motivations. Manuscript soumis pour fins de publication. *Journal of Educational Researcher*.
- Deslandes R., Bertrand R. (2003): Motivation des parents à participer au suivi scolaire de leur enfant au primaire. Manuscript soumis pour fins de publication. *Revue des sciences de l'éducation*.
- Hoover-Dempsey K.V., Sandler H.M. (1995): Parental involvement in children's education: Why does it make a difference?, *Teachers College Record*, 95, 5, pp. 310-331.
- Morgensternová M., Šulová L. (2007): *Interkulturní psychologie*. Praha: Karolinum.
- Šulová L., Zaouche-Gaudron Ch. (eds.) (2003): *Předškolní dítě a jeho svět – L'enfant dans l'age préscolaire et son monde*. Praha: Karolinum.
- Šulová L., Morgensternová M. (2007): Children's issues in the Czech Republic. In: Limage Leslie (ed), *Children's Issues in Europe*, Encyclopedia of Children's issues worldwide under general editorship of Irving Epstein. New Jersey: Greenwood Press.
- Walker J.M., Hoover-Dempsey K.V., Reed R.P., Jones K.P. (2000): Can you help me with my homework?, Paper presented at the symposium, *Parental involvement in homework: What do we know and how do we really know it?*, Seattle, WA, AERA, April 12.

Web sites

Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy České Republiky: <www.msmt.cz>.

