



## EMPOWERING PARENTAL READINESS FOR CHILD'S TRANSITION TO PRESCHOOL SETTINGS

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### Abstract:

Creating a climate of mutual respect and understanding, exchange of views and information, and parental participation in new environment activities are some factors contributing to developing a powerful trust relationship. A relationship allowing parents to feel self-confident, ready to manage their likely stress, and assured that their child will be in an environment s/he will be loved and taken care of, securing her/him the best possible way to a smooth transition to it. Our study attempts to evaluate parental readiness to support their child in her/his transition to the preschool environment and the impact of an innovative transition program on parental readiness. A qualitative research study through semi-structured open-ended interviews took place during the 2024-2025 school year, with participants being 50 preschooler parents from Greater Epirus. Participants were distributed to a control group (n=25) and experimental group (n=25), the latter participating in an intervention program named "Imagination (Phantasy) Express: A journey for the whole family". Based on our study results, it was found that a well-structured, innovative transition program may significantly empower parental readiness. Child socialization and parent experience are significant factors affecting parental readiness. Concerning parents, information, cooperation with preschool and parental anxiety management are very important factors to guarantee their child a smooth transition.

**Keywords:** parental readiness, preschool environment, transition, qualitative research

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## **1. Introduction**

In this study readiness is defined as all competencies and attitudes allowing a parent to respond to her/his child's needs in each of her/his development stage, through emotional support and encouragement (Akhter et al., 2012), so that the child has a smooth transition to her/his new environment and successfully respond to the new settings. Parents play a decisive role in their offspring's transition to new preschool settings, as they are the ones that care for, love, and support their offspring since birth. They are first to understand their child's anxiety when s/he faces challenges never met before in her/his life. Challenges that may be unthought of for them as well, as this may be their first time becoming parents.

Are parents ready to prepare their children for the upcoming changes?

Are they ready to guide and support their child?

The aforementioned questions constitute a challenge for parents and a respective opportunity to develop and support their relation with their child. A child's access to preschool settings may create joy, expectation or even anxiety to some parents, a fact that may be due to their emotion management or uncertainty to respond to new changes (Dockett et al., 2011).

## **2. Material and Methods**

### **2.1 Purpose of the exploratory study**

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine parental views on their children's preschool (daycare) transition so that limited related international literature can be enriched through new research findings. Our study focuses on the development of a modern smooth transition program from preschool contributing to parental invigoration to support their children in the transition process to modern preschool classes.

### **2.2 Study sample**

A qualitative research study sample was collected from 50 preschooler parents participants from Greater Epirus. Participants were distributed to a control group (n=25) and an experimental group (n=25). Data collection was materialized, thanks to active parental participation.

### **2.3 Research tool**

#### **2.3.1 Interview**

A careful planning of the above-stated interview format was the crucial factor contributing to a smooth discussion and qualitative data collection. There was a previous question enunciation aiming at facilitating communication and parental encouragement to freely express their thoughts. Interview time duration was taken into account to avoid fatigue and loss of interest. A direct face-to-face interview was considered appropriate to create a harmonious relationship between the researcher and respondent. A semi-structured, open-ended interview.

### 2.3.2 Intervention program

A modern, innovative, smooth transition named "Imagination (Phantasy) Express: A journey for the whole family" was implemented during the 2024-2025 school year. This intervention program emphasizes parental readiness relying on international smooth transition strategies. Parents of the experimental group before 2024-2025 school commencement had four 45 minute sessions with preschool teachers with the goal: a) Preschooler parental sensitization, information and active involvement on exploitation of a vast array of modern and innovative transition strategies, b) Cooperation of family and preschool environment, c) Delivery of personalized support through individual meetings or small groups and d) Provision of necessary knowledge to parents in order for them to support their child in her/his transition to preschool classes contemporaneously diminishing her/his stress and anxiety.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Parental control group

According to study results, 56% of parents in the control group stated they were ready to support their child in the preschool transition. However, a significant 28% express concerns about their competence to assist their child in adapting to the new environment. Furthermore, 16% of parents state they are indecisive as to their readiness (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Frequency of responses to the question: "Do you consider yourself ready to support your child's preschool transition?"

		Responses	
		N	Percent (%)
Parental Readiness <sup>a</sup>	Yes	14	56,0%
	Maybe	4	16,0%
	No	7	28,0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>25</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

The main factors leading parents to feel assured that they are able to assist their child in the transition process from family environment to preschool setting respectively is parent experience, child's attendance in the same preschool environment, communication between parent and child, parental character (personality), parental professional specialization, and family support. Parents state that their previous experience with their older children has equipped them with the necessary knowledge to feel ready to facilitate their child's transition to preschool.

In.4 (Interview 4), *"After many years and with so many children, we believe that we can support our child, even if s/he faces difficulty thanks to our experience. We now know what we have to do and how to deal with the issue."*

Additionally, previous child familiarization with preschool and preschool teachers facilitates transition.

In.17 *"I believe I am ready... S/h was well-adjusted in the previous preschool, therefore, I imagine, although it is a new environment, s/he will not face a major issue, and thus I can cope with it."*

The quality of communication of parents with their children, an open and sincere discussion between the two parties, appears to play a significant role in understanding children's concerns and needs.

In.13 *"... I have worked a lot of with them through the years, spent time..., a lot of discussions, I know that they trust me. In other words, I do not have a problem speaking with them on whatever comes up, whatever they are concerned with."*

There were also mentioned by particular parents such as child's sociability, parent personality, parent's professional specialization and family support. Table 2 presents the responses from parents in the control group regarding factors that would enhance their feelings of preparedness to support their children during the transition to preschool centers.

**Table 2:** Quantitative Findings on Factors Perceived to Enhance Parental Readiness for Supporting Preschool Transition (Total Sample)

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Fostering Parental Readiness <sup>a</sup>	Preschool Parent Education	2	4,1%	8,0%
	Preschool Parent Information	22	44,9%	88,0%
	Visual Materials from Preschool Centers	3	6,0%	12,0%
	Preschool Facilities	1	2,0%	4,0%
	Transition Strategies	5	10,0%	20,0%
	Strategies for Anxiety Reduction	3	6,0%	12,0%
	Preschool Teacher/Parent Collaboration	13	27,0%	52,0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>49</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>196,0%</b>
a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.				

Study result analysis confirms that preschool provision of information to parents constitutes their major necessity to prepare their child for the new school environment.

In.3 *"I would like to be informed about her adjustment, what to expect, what I have to do as a mom to help her..."*

In.6 *"Informing parents so that they can each one of them ask questions in a meeting. What they will face there, what are we to expect as far as reactions and what we can do to facilitate our child in this process."*

At the same time, several parents point out the importance of communication and cooperation between themselves and preschool teachers, considering that an open discussion significantly contributes to a child's successful transition. Several parents asked for handy (practical) advice both for their children and themselves in order to prepare their children for the transition to the new environment and manage their own anxiety for the upcoming changes.

In.18 *"(I want) Preschool to help me manage my first concerns so that I do not transfer them to my child... What I need to do at home regarding my child, how to talk to her/him, what to tell her/him about school to prepare her/him..."*

There have been parents who expressed their interest in being trained in the transition process by preschool bodies and placing special importance on preschool facilities regarding aesthetics and safety.

### 3.2 Experimental group

According to our study's results, 88% of parents in the experimental group stated they were ready to support their child during the preschool transition. However, 12% expressed concerns as to their capability to help their child's adjustment to the new environment (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Frequency of Responses to the Question: "Do you consider yourself ready to support your child's preschool transition?"

		Responses	
		N	Percent (%)
Parental Readiness <sup>a</sup>	Yes	22	88,0%
	No	3	12,0%
Total		25	100,0%

Parents (n=22) recognized specific factors granting them self-confidence to support their child's transition to preschool (table 4). The main factors are the child's sociability (36,4%) and parental experience (31,8%). There followed parental personality and expectations by 22.7%. Additionally, the child's school attendance in the same preschool (18,2%) and parental communication with their child (13.8%) seem to play a significant role in parental readiness. In total responses (n=28), family support was minimized to (3.6%) by parents. Parents recognized a series of factors empowering them to lead their children to the important step of their children's first familiarization with preschool settings, namely, they felt that her/his ability to socialize and interact with other children and adjust to new conditions would help them be more easily faced with preschool challenges.

**Table 4:** Quantitative Findings on Reasons for Parental Perceived Readiness to Support Preschool Transition (Total Sample)

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Readiness Factors <sup>a</sup>	Parental Experience	7	25,0%	31,8%
	Parent-Child Communication	3	10,7%	13,6%
	Familiar Preschool Environment	4	14,3%	18,2%
	Socially Competent/Independent/Adaptable Child	8	28,6%	36,4%
	Family Support	1	3,6%	4,5%
	Parental Personality/Expectations	5	17,8%	22,7%
<b>Total</b>		<b>28</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>127,2%</b>
a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.				

Question: "What do you think would help your readiness degree to support your child's preschool transition?"

Parental responses varied, indicating need and concern differentiation as to their children's transition. Parents faced with their child's preschool attendance challenge stated specific needs that would assist them to feel more ready and confident in this new process. Parents wanted more information from preschool teachers concerning their child's transition to preschool classes.

In.37 *"Information and communication between the two parties, that is parent and teacher is important... Parent has to know if her/his child cries, if s/he is happy, if s/he plays with other children... things that would help us relax and go to work without stress."*

In.48 *"It is important that there be information, in order for us to know what we have to do not to stress our child so that this whole process could move smoothly."*

Several parents recognized the importance of close cooperation with preschool teachers and are willing to be actively involved in the transition process. They felt the need to be a part of the preschool team.

In.46 *"I think cooperation will help me feel ready to support my child. It will give me the opportunity to understand my child's needs and in unison with the preschool teacher (lady) create a love and safe environment."*

Parents expressed an interest in getting practical (handy) advice that would assist them to prepare their child's preschool transition. This contained adjustment techniques and preschool (supervisory) material.

In.45 *"...Some tricks to prepare my child come to preschool happily."*

In.33 *"I would like (to get) some informative material that would help me prepare my child at home."*

For some parents, trust in a preschool teacher is their fundamental readiness support factor. When parents felt assured of preschool teacher competence and dedication, they were more relaxed and felt that they could better support their child.

In.29 *"Magical word is trust in preschool teachers. When I know that my child is in good hands, I feel more secure and can better support her/him in this phase."*

Few parents referred to a need for actions involving the whole family together with seminars providing them information and tools for parental stress management.

In.28 *"... (There have to be) some group games and activities so that all children and parents be involved without exclusion..."*

In.35 *"Possibly obligatory seminars for parents and caretakers before school commencement dealing with adjustment and stress management issues and perhaps some techniques concerning child behavior issues."*

#### **4. Discussion of Conclusions**

Transitions are a normal an indispensable part of our lives, constituting a part of family life and a child's development. Smooth transition is not always an easy case, and there is needed parental readiness, patience and courage. Parents have to be ready to feel their child's need, manage their own anxiety, grant their child a sense of security and

encourage her/him to express their feelings freely. To cope with new changes, parents need support and guidance. It is a definitive factor in parental preparation, preschool cooperation in the preschool context, open communication with preschool and kindergarten teachers and participation in activities and meetings organized by new preschool and kindergarten administration context (Anagnostopoulou, 2017; Salkellariou et al., 2021; Salkellariou et al., 2024).

Study results analysis indicated similarities and differences between responses of the parent control group and the experimental group, respectively concerning their readiness to support their children's preschool transition and factors that empower it. Undoubtedly, one remarkable finding of the study was the clear indication of the positive impact the "Imagination Express" innovative Smooth intervention Program had. The experimental group, having participated in this program, showed a significantly heightened degree of readiness and self-confidence in transition as compared to the control group. This pinpointed effectiveness of targeted interventions focusing on parental information, sensitization and active involvement, especially if they promote family cooperation with preschool teachers and deliver individual support. Despite the fact that both parental groups recognize the importance of experience and child's social skills, the experimental group appeared to strongly emphasize on child's characteristics such as sociability and parental personal experience as main readiness factors. The control group presented a wider range of factors, indicating a less focused or somehow unclear sense of readiness.

Furthermore, our study clearly pointed out the fundamental need of parents to be informed and receive communication by preschool. Regardless of the team, parents wanted to be informed on the transition process, likely reactions of their children, and the ways they could effectively help their children. Additionally, a need to cooperate and have an open discussion with preschool teachers emerged as equally important, strongly suggesting the value of a collective approach to the transition process. According to Anagnostopoulou (2017), parents need to be continuously and accurately informed as to preschool classes and their pedagogical program. They want information before and during their child's transition process to the preschool environment, and they also want participation in transition programs (Anagnostopoulou, 2017; McIntyre, 2007; McIntyre et al., 2014; Salkellariou & Anagnostopoulou, 2020).

The need for anxiety management is common to both groups, but the experimental group expresses it more directly and possibly asks for more specialized assistance through parental seminars. It is likely that parents felt the importance of their own management of feelings. They realized that their anxiety, concerns and insecurity were directly transferred to their child through verbal and nonverbal messages reflecting their internal stance (DeCaro & Worthman, 2011; Griebel, & Niesel, 2004).

As a result, there were observed differences in emphasizing and prioritizing these factors and needs. These differences may have shown diverse expectations and priorities between the two parental groups concerning their children's preschool transition. However, it is important to stress that the given study, due to its qualitative nature, emphasized understanding parental views and needs, offering rich information and

details. The use of semi-structured, open-ended interviews allowed parents to express their thoughts and feelings, providing a deep internal picture of their personal experiences.

While this study offered information on children's preschool transition, it is important for us to recognize some of it and suggest future qualitative research directions. The limited generalizability of qualitative findings, due to the small sample and focus on a specific geographical area (Epirus), stresses the need for further research on larger and more representative samples, possibly through quantitative method use, so that results could be verified and extended. Additionally, future studies could be focused on the long-term impact of the "Imagination Express" program on children's adjustment and parental readiness, as well as the effectiveness of diverse transition strategies regarding parent and children subgroups.

Finally, the findings of this study have important practical applications for various bodies involved. Namely, 1. Regarding school settings and preschool teachers, the given study stresses how critical it is to create and offer structured transition programs that include systematic information and support for parents, as well as opportunities for active cooperation. 2. Regarding parents, our study provides research evidence for the development and implementation of policies supporting children's preschool smooth transition, including empowering transition programs and preschool teacher training in modern transition strategies.

In conclusion, the given research study attempts to contribute to understanding parental views regarding preschool transition, indicating parental needs and expectations and emphasizing on the importance of targeted interventions to increase parental readiness. These findings may serve as a valuable guide for further improving transition practices and supporting families during this important period in their children's lives.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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