

METHODICAL PREPARATION OF PARENTS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract: The paper reveals the major causes of low performance of primary school children, reviews the challenges encountered by students and their parents when they jointly embark on the path of learning. Parents often make complaints regarding school in general and a teacher in particular when their child is underperforming. Though often the adults are not capable of helping a child to revise the studied material, or explaining the topic again at home. One of the ways to deal with this situation is the methodical lecture course for parents aimed to strengthen their basic methodical skills to render adequate assistance to their children.

Keywords: learning challenges, absolute performance, qualitative performance, student's learning achievements, methodical preparation of parents, methodical lecture course.

1 Introduction

After putting on a school uniform and entering the classroom, a primary school child does not become a student straightaway. The adaptation to a system of new school relationships is a gradual process that takes considerable time. Surprisingly, the problems may arise even for those children who are already quite "educated" at the time of enrollment to school: able to read, write, solve math problems, perform academic assignments, and often have already completed the first-grade program. The adults tend to believe that such educational level facilitates child's adaptation to school, but practice often suggests the opposite. Such children are tired of learning at the kindergarten or in the family, their motivation to learn how to read or write has drained by this time and does not spur any action. Now their covert goal is to hide behind their knowledge, and take some rest. Going to school becomes void of the excitement of new discoveries and anticipation of something fascinating, a desire to hide out at home appears, first hardly perceivable but growing stronger with time (suddenly starts complaining on stomach aches, nausea, dizziness). At the same time, a teacher aware of their higher abilities compared to other children gives them more tasks or make tasks harder, which often causes certain difficulties for them and entails their unwillingness to overcome such difficulties. Certainly, there are children who respond positively to the challenge offered by a teacher to cope with home assignments that are non-standard, larger and more complicated than home assignments for other classmates. But most often, the young generation of today perceives such enthusiasm of a teacher as an attempted infringement upon their rights and freedoms. The parents have no other choice as to handle the causes of future failures of their children without any support.

In her interview to the information and analytical portal KURSOBR.RU G. S. Kovaleva (2019), Head of the Center for Educational Quality Assessment "Institute for Educational Development Strategy of the Russian Academy of Education" Federal State-Funded Research Institution, Candidate of Science in Pedagogics, National Coordinator of International Studies TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA, Honorary Member of the European Association for Educational Quality Assessment, pointed to the ambiguity of Russian education. While the level of mathematical and science education of our eight-graders is higher than the international average, the analogous trend is hardly observed in the primary school education.

Frankly speaking, a certain portion of primary school children fail to absorb the primary school program even at a basic level. Unfortunately, challenges related to learning are awaiting primary schoolchildren not only in the first year of study. We all know those children who are labeled as failing for the entire length of education. One might, of course, blame the program, textbooks, and school, but teachers see the underlying cause in the parents not paying sufficient attention to their children. This is the opinion frequently expressed by representatives of administration and teaching staff of an educational facility.

If to approach this problem from a different angle, from the perspective of parents, their unwillingness to handle the school problems of a child is often a result of their inability to offer adequate help. Before explaining the structure of a complex sentence or how to calculate the area of a polygon, each parent should recall the initial course of Russian language and mathematics or become a teacher for at least a tiniest bit. It is not a secret that not all present-day parents were exemplary students in their school days. Our research is prompted by the search for possible solutions to the indicated problem.

2 Literature Review

When discussing the challenges in the beginning of educational process at school, it is important to identify the difficulties faced by children who have just stepped through the doors of school (Barcaeva & Ryabova, 2017). Identification of difficulties is necessary not for idle reporting, but for providing necessary help to a child (Afrikaner, 2018; Aleksandrova & Neyasova, 2016). The development regularities of first-graders in the beginning of school studies should be taken into account to facilitate further adaptation and improve their performance (Kardanova et al., 2018; Barcaeva & Ryabova, 2019). The psychological roots of difficulties in educational process is high anxiety of primary schoolchildren and their low self-esteem (Chanchaeva et al., 2019; Neyasova et al., 2016). But psychological atmosphere at school depends largely on psychological atmosphere in the family, their parents, their attitude to the learning process in general (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2018; Yashkova et al., 2019; Falileev et al., 2018). Even the positive role of consulting teachers specializing in personal psychological problems and academic performance is recognized (Karayanni, 1985). Great emphasis in the methodical literature is placed on the pedagogical support of primary schoolchildren, and the factors affecting the results get revealed (Radachinskaya, 2020).

However, for a teacher alone it is difficult to deal with such a pile of problems, that's why a teacher is forced to appeal to parents for help, who themselves sometimes refer to the legal consulting services for resolving disagreements arising between school and family (Goldman et al., 2020). Regardless of the interaction outcomes, the social experience should be conveyed to the young generation (Shukshina et al., 2014). The involvement of parents in the learning process by the teaching community is seen as a rather complicated issue which suggests close cooperation between family and school (Jeziarski & Wall, 2019). Constant search for different ways of such cooperation is still of high relevance and utmost importance.

3 Research Methodological Framework

The research purpose: explore the impact of methodical preparation of parents on the performance of primary school children. The research objectives: provide theoretical underpinning for the difficulties encountered by primary schoolchildren in the learning process; by way of experiment validate the effectiveness of help provided by parents to their children in the learning process after receiving methodical preparation.

The research employed both theoretical methods, with priority given to the analysis of scientific literature, systematization of material on the problem of research, and empirical methods, in

particular, a pedagogical experiment for achieving research goals.

The experiment was held in the academic year 2018-2019. The experimental base of research included 208 primary school students (grades 1-4) of municipal educational institutions in Saransk (Republic of Mordovia, Russia): MEU Lyceum 43, MAPSEI Progymnasium 119, MEU Secondary General Education School 27, MEU Secondary General Education School with In-Depth Study of Certain Subjects 39. In the experimental research the absolute performance and the qualitative performance were compared, as well as the learning achievements of primary schoolchildren.

4 Results and Discussion

In one classroom and in one class, it is rather difficult to see only high-performing or only low-performing students. In any team of children we most often observe the whole range of knowledge levels. We will try to look deep into the reasons of failures, because successful children according to the teachers have the same set of qualities – perseverance, industriousness, good memory, attentiveness, diligence. But each underperforming child has a particular cause of failure.

4.1 Causes of Underperformance

Among the causes of underperformance, the first cause we would like to identify is the child's health. If a child is often suffering from different illnesses, it takes much energy to maintain the vital functions. The body becomes defensive: it needs to supply oxygen to the internal organs, stabilize breathing, blood circulation, regulate heart rhythm, rather than waste energy on memorizing rules and tables. As a result, constant absences due to illness have a rather strong negative impact on the learning process.

The second cause is an adverse psychological atmosphere at school and/or at home. First, let's examine the school setting that determines the psychological atmosphere outside a child's home. The first factor is classmates. If a student fears to become an object of ridicule of those who are in the same classroom, if a student is concerned about finding herself/himself in an uncomfortable situation rather than receiving help and support, then it becomes worthless to expect high performance. The child becomes reserved, and channels all the internal energy and emotions to cope with psychological adversity, rather than to gain new knowledge. The improvement of non-harmonious relations with classmates sometimes turns out to be enough to achieve better outcomes in educational process and make stay within the walls of the school more comfortable.

A possible negativity from a teacher may become an even greater shock for a schoolchild. Animosity or indifference of a teacher, true or seeming, may generally turn a student away from receiving knowledge in any form. In this case, parental involvement is crucial, mainly for finding out the reasons of such attitude (if it really takes place) or to dispel the myth born in the child's head. The release of psycho-emotional stress is mandatory.

Negative atmosphere at home also has a negative impact. Home for any person, and for the little one much more so, should be a fortress, behind the walls of which one can hide all the lacks: lack of confidence, lack of fortune, lack of sociability, lack of capacity, lack of knowledge. In the benevolence of home, a child gradually overcomes all school problems. Two important worlds - school and home - are closely linked on a subtle psychological level. It is one of the challenges for teachers and parents to strengthen this link rather than destroy.

The third cause of underperformance may be the extent and intensity of school workload. The question of adequacy and mandatory nature of the content of primary school program was not covered by our study, so we will take it as a given. A child brings home a whole bag of homework, but not all adults are able to rationally plan the work. At the same time, we do place

such requirements on a child who is just beginning this arduous journey to education. It is a very rare occasion that a primary schoolchild is able to independently organize the reasonable planning by time and volume of the material offered for homework. In this case, the help of parents is an objective necessity.

Another cause we would like to highlight is the child's individual characteristics. We would like to focus on only two extreme cases – slow and hyperactive children. Slow children experience higher stress when their speed of reading is checked, when formulating an answer to a question, when performing tasks of the type "Who is faster?", not to mention the lessons of physical education. Stressful situations lead to negative results in any case.

It is quite difficult for a hyperactive child to sit through the lesson without distractions. Such a child needs to be in motion all the time, to switch between different activities, to change position of the body, to change the setting, which cannot always be provided by the educational process. This is a reason of low attention which leads to the poor performance.

4.2 Methodical Preparation of Parents

Proceeding from the stance of teachers on the need for parental assistance in the educational process, we would like to consider the possible ways to provide it. Often parents, unaware of it, are guided by the statement of Ferdinand Porsche, the founder of Porsche: "If you want to do something well, do it yourself." Indeed, it is easier to do it yourself than to explain to a child the material they do not understand. Making it easier for themselves today, parents are more of a hindrance than help to their children tomorrow: the incomprehensible material entails a whole lot of unsatisfactory scores and, more sadly, unabsorbed material in the absence of fertile soil on which the new knowledge could take root.

Other parents are trying to put the onus of responsibility for the whole process of learning on a child. But if even an adult knows little on how to approach the problem, is it worth expecting something extraordinary of a little person? Parents start throwing phrases "Were you daydreaming during the lesson?", "Didn't your teacher explain this to you?", "Sit and think!"

Why is it easier for parents to do so? The answer is obvious – they just can't duplicate the function of a teacher for their child, because they can't carry it out properly. On the other hand, they don't want to look ridiculous and try to take on this role that is incomprehensible to them.

In order to make the role of a teacher clear to most parents, so that they could provide qualified assistance to their children who have not grasped the material during the lesson, a methodical lecture course for held for the adults in some classes during the academic year. In each year of study at primary school (grades 1-4), two classes took part in the experimental work: an experimental class (EC) and a control class (CC). In the experimental classes, teachers held special parent-teacher meetings twice a month to explain the Russian language and mathematics content that was in the teaching plan for the next two weeks. Special emphasis teachers placed on the intricacies of each concept under consideration with account of children age (specifics of the class) and the discipline (specifics of the subject).

Of course, not all parents were enthusiastic about the methodical lecture course. Many negative comments were received: "You want to put everything on our shoulders", "Then what is the role of a teacher at school?", "If I wanted to become a teacher, I would enter a pedagogical university", etc. It was agreed that parents could attend the lectures upon their own discretion; teachers did not insist on the presence of parents. Overall, 116 parents attended the lectures.

The lecture course was arranged as follows. Three days before the upcoming meeting, the teacher sent to the WhatsApp group a

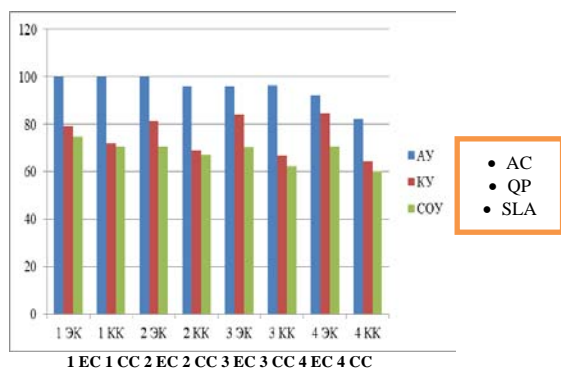
list of topics on Russian language and mathematics to be revised during the next lecture. During the lecture, the teacher explained the language and mathematics content to the parents, the same as at the lesson for students. The motivational and game elements used in the lessons with junior schoolchildren were omitted, and the acquired knowledge was not checked. However, the peculiarities of each specific topic were always highlighted, along with the difficulties experienced by children, the common mistakes of students, the methods to avoid or minimize the errors. At first, parents were quite reserved, but after a while, the number of questions asked to the teacher increased, and, most importantly, parents began to offer their solutions to the difficulties arising in the learning process. The composition of parents who attended the lectures changed over time, but gradually a certain core of listeners was formed.

At the end of the school year, in the experimental and control classes in all schools that took part in the experiment, tests in Russian language and mathematics were held. Absolute Performance (AP), Qualitative Performance (QP), and Student's Learning Achievements (SLA) were compared across children of the same year of study.

The following formulas were used for calculation: 1) AP = (number of "fives" + number of "fours" + number of "threes") x 100% : Total number of students; 2) QP = (number of "fives" + number of "fours") x 100% : Total number of students; 3) SLA = (number of "fives" x 100 + number of "fours" x 64 + number of "threes" x 36 + number of "twos" x 16 + number of "failed" x 7) : Total number of students.

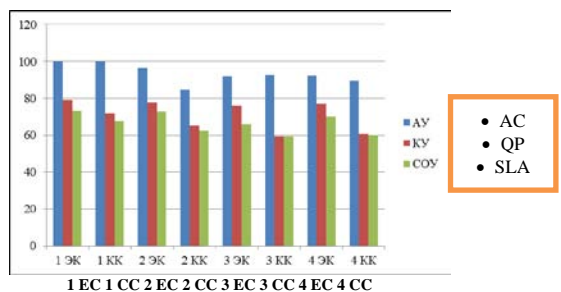
The results of tests in Russian are presented in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1 Results of Russian Language Tests



Results of tests in Mathematics are presented in Diagram 2.

Diagram 2 Results of Mathematics Tests



No sensational results were yielded by this experimental research, but the experimental classes demonstrated better results in the quality of obtained knowledge. Most importantly, parents understood how difficult and meticulous the daily work of a teacher is. The adults who attended the methodical lecture course shared their experience of communicating with their children, pointed out that sometimes it is enough just to slightly push a child in the right direction, indicate a minor flaw to him/her, revise a part of the rule or algorithm, and the further work

becomes much smoother and more productive. All you need to know is in what direction to proceed, and what to accentuate.

5 Conclusion

Thus, analysis of scientific literature, systematization of material concerning the improvement of the performance of primary schoolchildren and processing of the data obtained experimentally led us to the following conclusions.

The school has to tackle a complex and vital task of organizing the educational process. No matter how well the school classes are equipped, no matter what modern technologies are used, no matter how the teacher training is improved, a child cannot thrive without parental support. Due to their psychological profile, some children need quite a great deal of time to fully understand the studied material, one lesson is not enough for them, and they need multiple revisions and repetitions. In order for parents to be able to provide the required assistance, they themselves need to complete at least a minimal pedagogical course. Parents will get the support from teachers who have the capability stemming from their pedagogical competence to outline the main directions of work, to highlight the nuances of each topic under study, and to place emphasis appropriately.

In no case do we attempt to put the onus responsibility for the educational process on parents. The teacher at school is and will play the central role in the educational process in the future. It is simply a matter of creating a comfortable psychological environment in the family, where the parent is not a censor, but a kind helper and a skillful mentor.

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