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TRANSITION OF CHILDREN FROM A KINDERGARTEN TO PRIMARY SCHOOL COMPARISON OF CONDITIONS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC, THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND AND THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Abstract: The aim of the comparative study was to describe and compare the organizational conditions of transition of children from a kindergarten to a primary school in the field of school aptitude assessment, enrolment of children in a primary school, handling of deferred school attendance and education of children with deferred school attendance in the Czech Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic. The comparative study was based on a qualitative content analysis of legislative and curriculum documents, official documents of ministries of education and research publications. The selection of these countries is based on their geographical and historical proximity, similar development of educational systems and at the same time diverse pedagogical approaches in the process of early education. The organisation of the transition of children from a kindergarten to primary school is very similar in the countries studied. This is also due to the common European orientation in inclusive education and comparable economic and political contexts. Differences exist in the age of children with a postponement of compulsory schooling and in the forms of education of these children in a kindergarten and primary school. The process of diagnosing school aptitude is legislated in Poland, while in the Czech Republic and Slovakia it is left to the responsible approach of a kindergarten teachers. On the basis of the pedagogical diagnosis, they can advise the legal representatives on the assessment of the child's school aptitude in the relevant counselling centers. This enables the legal representative to obtain more information about a child's school competence in order to make the best possible decision in the child's best interests. The comparative study is the result of the KEGA project No. 001UMB-4/2025.

Keywords: school eligibility, deferment of school attendance, enrolment in primary school

**PRZEJŚCIE DZIECI Z PRZEDSZKOŁA DO SZKOŁY
PODSTAWOWEJ PORÓWNANIE WARUNKÓW
W REPUBLICIE CZESKIEJ, RZECZYPOSPOLITEJ POLSKIEJ
I REPUBLICE SŁOWACKIEJ**

Streszczenie (abstrakt): Celem badania porównawczego było opisanie i porównanie warunków organizacyjnych przejścia dzieci z przedszkola do szkoły podstawowej w zakresie oceny gotowości szkolnej, przyjmowania dzieci do szkoły podstawowej, postępowania w przypadku odroczenia obowiązku szkolnego i edukacji dzieci z odroczonym obowiązkiem szkolnym w Republice Czeskiej, Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i Republice Słowackiej. Badanie porównawcze zostało oparte na jakościowej analizie treści dokumentów legislacyjnych i programowych, oficjalnych dokumentów ministerstw edukacji oraz publikacji badawczych. Wybór tych krajów jest uwarunkowany ich geograficzną i historyczną bliskością, podobnym rozwojem systemów edukacyjnych, a jednocześnie różnymi podejściami pedagogicznymi w procesie wczesnej edukacji. Organizacja przejścia dzieci z przedszkola do szkoły podstawowej jest bardzo podobna w badanych krajach. Wynika to również ze wspólnej europejskiej orientacji na edukację włączającą oraz porównywalnych kontekstów gospodarczych i politycznych. Różnice występują w wieku dzieci z odroczonym obowiązkiem szkolnym oraz w formach kształcenia tych dzieci w przedszkolu i szkole podstawowej. Proces diagnozowania predyspozycji szkolnych jest w Polsce uregulowany prawnie, podczas gdy w Czechach i na Słowacji jest on pozostawiony głównie odpowiedzialnemu podejściu nauczycieli przedszkolnych. Na podstawie diagnozy pedagogicznej mogą oni doradzać przedstawicielom prawnym w zakresie oceny zdolności szkolnych dziecka w odpowiednich poradniach. Umożliwia to uzyskanie większej ilości informacji na temat kompetencji szkolnych dziecka w celu podjęcia najlepszej możliwej decyzji w najlepszym jego interesie. Badanie porównawcze jest wynikiem projektu KEGA nr 001UMB-4/2025.

Słowa kluczowe: gotowość szkolna, odroczenie obowiązku szkolnego, zapisy do szkoły podstawowej

1. Analysis of the organizational conditions for the transition of children from a kindergarten to a primary school

An important milestone in the life of a child is the transition from a kindergarten to primary school. The child's competence to cope with the teaching in the first year of primary school is a key requirement. The level of school competence is influenced by the child's individual developmental predispositions, upbringing and education in the family, a kindergarten and other institutions and environments. The transition of children from a kindergarten to primary school in the countries studied is determined by legislation and school documents. The organizational conditions of this process in the field of school aptitude assessment, enrolment of children in primary schools, dealing with deferred schooling and education of children with deferred schooling are elaborated according to the legislation and documents in the education sector. In Slovak conditions, the issue has been addressed for a long time by Slezáková (2012) & Borbélyová (2023), in the Czech Republic by Jucovičová & Žáčková (2014), Kutálková (2014), Budíková, Kuncová & Krušinová (2004) and in Poland, school eligibility has been addressed by Wilgocka-Okoń (2010), Waloszek (2014) and currently Gózdź (2024).

Assessing children's school readiness

In the Czech Republic, the assessment of children's school competence is based on whether the child has the competences defined in the Framework Curriculum for Pre-School Education (2024). These are the competences necessary for a successful start in primary

education. These are assessed by teachers in the process of pedagogical diagnosis and by the pedagogical-psychological counselling centers (Act No. 561/2004, Section 27) in the period before children are enrolled in primary schools.

In Poland, the aim of pre-school education is to promote the comprehensive development of the child. As a result of this support, the child reaches the maturity to enter the first stage of education (Collection of Laws 2017, No. 356). Information on this maturity is drawn up based on documentation from continuous pedagogical observation (MEiN-I/82). In the year before the child enters primary school, the teacher conducts a school readiness diagnosis twice. The first at the beginning of the school year, usually by the end of October, and the second summative one usually by the end of April.

In the Slovak Republic, one of the aims of education and training in a kindergarten is "to develop the dimensions of school readiness in the child so that he/she can easily adapt to subsequent primary education (State Educational Programme for Pre-Primary Education in Kindergartens, 2022, p. 4). School readiness is assessed by teachers in a kindergartens and school maturity is assessed by experts in counselling and prevention institutions (Act No. 245/2008, Section 130), especially in the period before the child enters primary school, at the request of the legal representative.

Enrolment of children in a primary school

In the Czech Republic, enrolment in the first year of primary school is governed by the Education Act (No. 561/2004). According to Section 36, children who reach the age of six by 31 August of the relevant calendar year enter primary education. Children who reach the age of six between 1 September and 31 December may also be enrolled if their legal guardian so requests and the child undergo a professional assessment, usually carried out by a school counselling center or pediatrician. Enrolment in the first year of primary school takes place between 1 and 30 April each year, with the specific date of enrolment being determined by agreement between the head of the primary school and its founder. Under the Education Act primary schools have designated catchment areas. "The municipality shall ensure the conditions for the fulfilment of compulsory school attendance by a child with a place of permanent residence in its administrative district, usually by establishing a primary school with a catchment area for each part of the municipality. A child who has his/her permanent residence in this catchment area has a priority right to admission" (§ 36).

In Poland, the enrolment of children in primary school is regulated by the Education Act (2023, § 900). A child is subject to compulsory school attendance from the beginning of the school year in the calendar year in which he or she reaches the age of seven, unless he or she has previously been enrolled in school as a six-year-old (Article 35, (2). At the parents' request, a child who will reach the age of six in a given calendar year may be enrolled in primary school if he or she has completed pre-school education in the school year preceding the start of school or has a positive opinion from the pedagogical-psychological counselling centre on the possibility of starting school in a primary school (Journal of Laws of 2024, art. 35, para. 3). The latter has a duty to provide a place in

a primary school for a child resident in its district. Legal guardians may apply for their child's admission to a primary school outside the district of residence; however, such admission is conditional upon the availability of free places at the selected school. The enrolment process typically takes place in the spring of the year preceding the start of compulsory education, usually in March or April.

In the Slovak Republic, registration is carried out in accordance with Act No. 245/2008 (§ 60). A child's compulsory school attendance begins in the school year following the day on which the child reaches the age of six and attains school eligibility. If the legal guardian so requests, exceptionally, a younger child may be admitted, but he or she must submit a statement of approval from the counselling and prevention center and the general practitioner for children. The legal guardian is obliged to register his/her child for compulsory education in the primary school in the school district in which he/she resides. The legal representative may choose an elementary school outside the district if it has capacity. The place and time of enrolment shall be determined by the municipality or the founder of the school by general binding regulation. Enrolment is organised from 1 to 30 April.

Organisation of enrolment

In the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, the course of enrolment is determined by the founders of primary schools in accordance with the Education Act. Enrolment is usually carried out in the form of a personal meeting between the child, the legal guardian and representatives of the primary school, who record the personal data of the child and the identification data of the legal guardian. This process may include various activities to check the child's readiness to enter primary education, for example by interviewing the child, assessing his/her communication skills, graphomotor skills or other abilities. It also consists of teachers getting to know the prospective first year pupils. Enrolment also takes place in cases where the legal guardians request a one-year postponement of the child's schooling. However, the result is a decision to postpone compulsory schooling. More and more schools are introducing electronic enrolment. Legal guardians can fill in the necessary information in advance and book a specific date for a physical meeting at the school. However, the legal guardian still must come to the school with their child in person to verify documents and, if necessary, assess the child's school eligibility.

In the Republic of Poland, the process of enrolling children in primary school is regulated by the Education Act (2023, § 900). Application deadlines are set annually by the school's governing body (usually the municipal or city authority) and the admissions timetable must be announced by the end of January of the relevant school year. In most cases, Polish municipalities use electronic enrolment systems that allow for the identification of a child because of a PESEL number. The enrolment process usually consists of confirming the legal representative's interest in the child's attendance at the catchment school. In doing so, they submit an affidavit of the child's place of residence.

Documentation for enrolment

In both the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, legal guardians present the child's birth certificate and proof of identity of the legal guardian at the time of enrolment. In the case of an application for deferment of school attendance, they provide expert opinions from the relevant counselling center. Schools may also request information regarding the child's special educational needs and health condition.

In Poland, enrolment requires the child's PESEL number, personal data, a declaration of place of residence and, where appropriate, documents confirming that certain criteria are met (multiple births, disabilities). The school is not entitled to request information from parents about the child's school readiness.

Deferment of school attendance

In the Czech Republic, the process of postponing school attendance is regulated by the Education Act (No. 561/2004). A legal representative can apply for a postponement of school attendance. The request is submitted to the director of the primary school at the time of the child's enrolment in compulsory school. It must be accompanied by a recommendation from the school counselling center, a pediatrician or a clinical psychologist. The primary school principal decides on the deferral on the basis of these documents. Deferment of school attendance may be granted for a maximum of one school year. In exceptional cases, a second deferral may be granted for children with special educational needs.

In Poland, it is possible to postpone the start of compulsory schooling until the end of the school year in which the child reaches the age of 9. The decision to defer is taken by the head of the public primary school of the child's place of residence based on a request from the parents. The application shall be made in the year in which the child reaches the age of 7, with the possibility of a repeat in the year in which the child reaches the age of 8, no later than 31 August. The application shall be accompanied by a decision on the need for special education and a report from the educational-psychological counselling center justifying the need for deferral.

In the Slovak Republic, if a child has not attained school competence after the age of six, the head of the primary school in the child's district of residence decides on the continuation of compulsory pre-primary education in a kindergarten or on another, legal form of education in a primary school. The decision shall be made based on the written consent of the counselling and prevention center and the general practitioner for children. The child's legal representative must agree. If the child has not attained school eligibility after continuing compulsory pre-primary education, he or she will start compulsory schooling at the latest at the age of seven (Education Act 245/2008, § 28a).

Education of children with deferred compulsory school attendance

In the Czech Republic, it is possible to continue education in a kindergarten or in a preparatory class of a primary school (Act No. 561/2004, § 47). In the preparatory class, the child is educated according to an individual educational programme to prepare him/her

for entry into the first grade. Children in the preparatory class are entitled to an individual approach that considers their specific needs and developmental level. A child who continues in pre-school education continues to be educated according to the school curriculum developed in accordance with the Framework Curriculum for Pre-School Education (2024). A child with special needs in a kindergarten is entitled to support measures carried out by teachers and professional staff and education according to an individual education programme. Children with deferred schooling then continue their education in the first year of primary school.

In Poland, a child whose compulsory schooling has been postponed continues to attend pre-school education for one year in a kindergarten, pre-school class or other form of pre-school education. The education of children whose compulsory schooling has been deferred is aimed at supporting the child's individual development and preparing him/her for school. Education is adapted to the child's abilities and includes an individual approach and differentiated organisation of teaching. In a kindergarten, the child is to be supported by the integrated work of teachers and professionals. The primary form of support is provided by the teacher. He does not need to have a professional qualification but should be prepared to carry out activities for the child's development in everyday educational activities (Dz. U. of 2017, item 1591). Children with a decision on special educational needs are provided with professional support such as re-education, therapy and assistance from psychologists and special educators according to an individual education plan. Educational activities take place in conditions that support the child's all-round development and in cooperation with the family. The aim is to achieve school maturity and to remove obstacles to adaptation to the school environment (Collection of Laws 2024, Article 32 (3) and (5)).

In the Slovak Republic, children with postponed schooling continue to receive compulsory pre-primary education in a kindergarten (Act No. 245/2008, § 28). In a kindergarten, they continue to be educated according to the school curriculum developed according to the national curriculum (2022). A child with special needs in a kindergarten is entitled to support measures carried out by teachers and professional staff and to education according to an individual education programme. The methodological material *Achieving school competence* (2023) helps in working with them. On the recommendation of the advisory center and with the consent of the legal representative, children with impaired communication skills and mild developmental disorders, as well as children with intellectual talent, may enter the introductory year of primary school. These are children who have attained the physical age of six years on 1 September and are not continuing to fulfill their compulsory pre-primary education. With the consent of the founder, the primary school may establish an adaptation class. It is intended for children who do not have sufficient knowledge of the language of instruction of the school and for whom the guidance center has recommended a modification of the aims, methods, forms or approach of education. The introductory year and the adaptation class are not considered to be the first year of compulsory schooling. The child then continues in the first year of primary school (§ 29).

2. Comparison of organizational conditions of transition of children from a kindergarten to primary school

In the countries surveyed, no child can be exempted from compulsory schooling. If a child has a professionally assessed reason for not being able to attend classes regularly, he or she may be placed in individual education. All children of the legal age must be enrolled in compulsory education in primary school.

Assessing children's readiness for school

In the countries surveyed, this is an assessment of a child's competencies that are necessary for a successful start in primary education. School competence is assessed in two interrelated areas. School maturity is assessed by expert staff in guidance centers and by clinical staff. It is usually recommended by a kindergarten teachers or decided by the guardians themselves. School readiness is assessed by the kindergarten teaching staff in cooperation with the legal guardians on the basis of an ongoing pedagogical diagnosis. In Poland, they focus separately on the initial and exit assessment of school readiness in the last year of the child's attendance at a kindergarten. Conducting the diagnosis twice allows for a comparison of the child's results several months apart. During these assessments, teachers, in cooperation with the guardians, implement measures to support the child in areas that require it.

Differences in the assessment of school maturity and readiness can be observed in the setting of educational goals in different countries. In the Czech and Slovak Republics, the assessment of school readiness depends on the assessment of the levels of competences defined in the national curricula for pre-primary education for a smooth transition of the child from a kindergarten to primary school. In Poland, the aim of pre-primary education is to promote the comprehensive development of the child to achieve school competence. A common feature in the countries studied is that the assessment of children's readiness for school serves primarily to help legal representatives make the right decisions about their child's future educational path.

Enrolment of children in a primary school

In the countries surveyed, primary school enrolment takes place in April. Children are enrolled in primary schools in their district of residence. They have the right to be admitted to this school *ex officio*. All these children must complete compulsory pre-primary education in a kindergarten. In the Czech and Slovak Republics, six-year-olds are enrolled, in Poland seven-year-olds. Exceptionally, younger children may be enrolled, based on a request from the legal guardian and an assessment of their school aptitude by the relevant counselling center. They also need a recommendation from a pediatrician. The decision to admit a child is made by the school principal in accordance with the law and the generally binding regulations of the founder.

Deferment of school attendance

In the countries surveyed, it is possible to postpone the start of compulsory schooling for a child. In the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic up to the age of seven, in Poland up to the age of nine. Deferment can only take place at the request of the legal guardian. The decision may be based on the results of pedagogical diagnosis in the kindergarten and professional diagnosis in school counselling centers. The kindergarten teachers may recommend professional diagnostics on the basis of their own diagnostics. This process helps the legal guardian to decide on the child's future educational path. If he or she decides to postpone the start of school, the child must undergo the diagnostic process at the school counselling center. On the recommendation of the center, the child can then continue with an appropriate form of education to help him or her achieve school eligibility.

In all three countries, the decision to postpone schooling is taken by the head of the primary school based on a request from the child's legal guardians. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the application must be accompanied by a recommendation from a counselling center and a child doctor or clinical psychologist. Without these recommendations, the school principal cannot grant a deferral. A deferral is possible for a maximum of one school year, and in exceptional cases, a second deferral may be granted for children with special educational needs. In Poland, parents also apply to the headmaster in the year the child turns seven, or again in the eighth year. The application is accompanied by a report from a counselling center and a decision on the need for special education. Deferment is possible in Poland until the end of the school year in which the child reaches the age of nine. In all three countries, a child with a postponement of compulsory education is legally entitled to free pre-school education.

Education of children with deferred compulsory school attendance

In the countries surveyed, there is an individual approach and a focus on the development of the child's personality. The Czech and Slovak systems emphasise pedagogical support and the adaptation of education to the needs of the child. In Poland, in addition to this pedagogical approach, there is a stronger emphasis on professional support. Here, children have the opportunity to benefit from re-education, therapeutic or psychological services. However, efforts to build support teams in kindergartens exist in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia, children with a postponement of compulsory schooling can continue their education in kindergartens. The principle of inclusive education is also common. No separate classes are set up for these children. They are mainly in the classes of children in compulsory pre-primary education. They can also be in an age-heterogeneous class, if the kindergarten is so organized. There are also separate forms of education for these children in primary schools. In the Czech Republic these are preparatory classes, in Slovakia an introductory year and an adaptation class. They are set up according to demand and the capacity of the primary school. It is decided by the headmaster and the founder. Together, these countries are subject to the rule that

completion of special forms in primary schools does not count towards compulsory school attendance. Children then enter the first year of primary school.

Summary

The aim of the comparative study was to describe and compare the organizational conditions of transition of children from a kindergarten to primary school in the field of school aptitude assessment, enrolment of children in primary school, handling of deferred school attendance and education of children with deferred school attendance in the Czech Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic. The comparative study was based on a qualitative content analysis of legislative and curriculum documents, official documents of ministries of education and research publications. The selection of these countries is conditioned by their geographical and historical proximity, similar development of educational systems and at the same time diverse pedagogical approaches in the process of early education.

It was confirmed that they also have similar approaches to this issue. This is also due to the influence of a common European direction in inclusive education and comparable economic and political contexts. The countries studied are based on similar objectives, i.e. to ensure that the child achieves school competence at the end of compulsory pre-primary education. They also have compulsory enrolment of children in primary school organised in April. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, legal guardians enroll six-year-olds, while in Poland the age limit is postponed. As a rule, a child enters primary school at the age of seven. Exceptionally, the countries under review allow early school entry for younger children on the basis of a professional assessment of school aptitude. In all cases, emphasis is placed on prior completion of compulsory pre-primary education.

The possibility of deferring schooling is enshrined in the legislative documents of the countries surveyed. Similarly, they stress the key role of guidance facilities. The decision to postpone a child's schooling may be taken by the head of the primary school in the child's district of residence on the basis of a recommendation from the relevant counselling centre. The common goal is to ensure that these children have access to individualized and professionally supported education. While in the Czech and Slovak Republics support is mainly focused on pedagogical adaptation of education, in Poland the possibility of using therapeutic, re-education and psychological services is also emphasised. In this country (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 984), a kindergarten – public and non-public – is obliged to employ professionals such as: pedagogues, special educators, psychologists, speech therapists or educational therapists to support the kindergarten teachers in the development of those areas that have decided to postpone the child's schooling. This comparison shows that, despite cultural and legislative differences, there is a consensus among the countries studied on the importance of good quality diagnosis of school competence, the involvement of multidisciplinary professionals and the provision of targeted support in the period before school entry. The differences relate mainly to the age of entry and the possibilities for a flexible approach to the individual needs of the child.

The results of the comparative analysis suggest several suggestions for further research. They may enrich the academic debate and contribute to a deeper understanding of the issue of school deferment. Particularly relevant is the examination of the impact of deferment on the child's educational path, social inclusion and future career. Further research could focus on the effectiveness of different intervention strategies and provide new insights into the search for a balance between the protection of the individual needs of the child and the systemic demands of education. At a societal and economic level, this issue can be seen as an important tool for targeting the quality of schooling diagnosis and the adequate setting of educational transitions between kindergarten and primary school. Research in this area can contribute to the formulation of recommendations leading to increased school readiness, reduced school failure and more efficient use of public resources. This comparison thus offers important starting points for strategic decision-making, setting support measures in pre-primary and primary education and promoting equal access to education for all children regardless of their developmental pace or social background.

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