

THE OPINIONS OF THE TEACHERS ABOUT THE CHANGES IN THE  
PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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**Abstract:** The paper presents a research about the reform changes which were carried out continuously in the primary education the Republic of Macedonia since 2007, when the nine year-long primary education was introduced. Changes are inevitable, however, if they are not well planned and are not the result of a systematic study and public debates, then they are imposed and they decrease the quality of education.

Hence, the goal of our research was to study, analyze and determine the advantages and disadvantages of the introduction of the concept of nine year-long primary education by analyzing the opinions of the teachers.

The sample is random and covers 180 teachers from first to fifth grade from 15 schools in different municipalities in the capital, Skopje, as well as the city of Strumica. The research covered schools located in the city and the rural environment in the municipality of Strumica. The statistical package SPSS-17.0 was used to process the data.

Our research proved that there is a statistically significant difference in the opinions of teachers about the concept changes in the nine year-long primary education, in which the disadvantages were predominant.

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**Keywords:** reform, education, quality, advantages, disadvantages

## 1. BACKGROUND

The nine year-long education was used in the Republic of Macedonia, since the introduction in 1958 until 2007. The increase of the duration of the primary education from 8 to 9 years was the result of the experience in many European countries, where the children begin the mandatory education with 5, i.e. 6 years of age. On the other hand, there are also highly developed countries in Europe, such as Sweden, where the students start school at the age of 7, but can also start at the age of 6 upon a demand by the parents. (Попова-Коскарова, 2011: 125).

Considering the small number of children enrolled in the preschool institutions in the Republic of Macedonia before the start of school, especially in the rural and the undeveloped areas, a conclusion was made that this conditions has negative effects upon the children as early as first grade because of the unpreparedness to join the instruction, thus hindering their further progress in the primary education. For these reasons, the old concept of starting first grade at the age of seven was replaced with a concept that determined that the children, who by the end of the calendar year will turn 6, are to join first grade. To be more specific, with the new concept changes, the children in the Republic of Macedonia can start first grade with 5 years and 8 months. (Попова-Коскарова, 2011: 115).

In 2007/2008, first grade was called grade null, and from the following school year it was called grade one.

## **2. CONCEPT CHANGES**

The introduction of the nine year-long education resulted in significant changes in the curricula and syllabi. The curriculum in the nine year-long primary education includes mandatory, elective and facultative school subjects. The concept changes resulted in the introduction of English as a mandatory subject with fund of two lessons per week in grade one. The number of lessons for the subject Physical Education was increased, and a new syllabus for the subject life skills that is carried out in elementary education was introduced. Computer work, as an elective school subject, was introduced in grade five. (Концепција за деветгодишното основно образование, 2007).

In 2010/2011, specific changes in the concept structure of the nine year-long education, primarily in the curriculum and syllabus were introduced. According to the curricula, from 2010/2011 until 2014/2015, the students from grade III, grade IV, and grade V could elect the school subject computer work. The introduction of the school subject science was another novelty. (Наставен план и програми за деветгодишното основно образование, 2010:12)

In 2014, new textbooks according to the syllabus Cambridge International Examination Center were brought into use. There were changes in the lessons of the school subject mathematics, which since 2007/2008 has a greater lesson fund. Namely, the school subject mathematics in the curricula for 2007/2008 and 2010/2011 has a fund of 4 lessons per week for the students in grades I-V. This fact is a result of the changes in the primary education, i.e. the introduction of the adapted mathematics and science syllabi from the Cambridge International Examination Center. As a result of the changes in the school year 2014/2015, the number of the mathematics lessons increased. In the school year 2014/2015, the number of

lessons for the students in grades I-III increased for one lesson per week, i.e. instead of 4 lessons per week, the students now have 5 lessons per week.

The remedial instruction also became mandatory with one lesson per week. The lesson fund has significantly become burdened.

With the changes of the curriculum in 2014/2015, the school subject nature in grade IV was removed. The school subject science was introduced for the students in grades I-III and grade V. On the other hand, the school subject society is studied once per week for the students in grades I-III, and twice per week in grades IV and V.

The mandatory nine year-long primary education caused dynamic changes in the curricula, which indicate significant increase of the school subjects and the number of lessons for the students. As a matter of fact, the burden of the students has been increasing continuously starting 2007/2008. However, in the concept it is stressed that the syllabi must be unburdened from too much factography, secondary content, and that the instructional objectives are organized and systematized for the emotional, social, cognitive, psychomotor and moral development of the students. The research that we carried out will show the extent to which this has been realized.

### **3. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH**

**Subject of our research:** The advantages and disadvantages of the elementary education in the nine year-long primary education.

**Objective of the research:** To study, analyze and determine the advantages and disadvantages of the elementary education with the introduction with the concept of the nine year-long primary education.

**Main hypothesis:** We assume that there is statistically significant difference in the opinions of teachers in terms of the concept changes in the nine year-long primary education, the disadvantages being predominant.

#### **Techniques and instruments of measurement:**

A survey has been used as a technique in the research. A **survey paper** with 13 close-ended and open-ended questions was given to the elementary school teachers, which provided the data for this research.

**The sample** is random and consists of 180 teachers from grades I-V from 15 schools in different municipalities in the capital Skopje and the city of Strumica. We covered schools both in the urban and rural areas located in the municipality of Strumica. The Statistical

package SPSS-17.0 was used to process the data.

### 1) Which problems do the children in grade I face?

		Answers	
		N	%
Problems of the children in grade I	They have too many lessons for their age	121	28,6%
	They cannot stay focused during a 40 minutes lesson	111	26,2%
	They cannot dress and undress on their own	70	16,5%
	They lack games	88	20,8%
	Other	33	7,8%
<b>Total</b>		423	100,0%

The data from the research show that 28.6% of the teachers share an opinion that the children have too many lessons for their age; 26% think that they cannot stay focused during a 40 minutes lesson; 20.8% of the teachers share an opinion that the children lack games, and 15.5% stressed that many of the children cannot dress and undress on their own. Also, 7.8% of the teachers think that there are other issues characteristics for grade one. Our assumption about the other issues is that they mostly refer to the lack of adequate material conditions (inadequate desks and chairs for the children in grade I, because there are schools where children from grade I to grade V learn together, especially in the combined classes). From the data, we can conclude that the teachers have become aware about many issues which the children from grade one have in the concept of the nine year-long primary education

*The crossing with the personal data (work experience, city-village) and the chi-square test showed that there was no statistically important relation among the teachers in terms of the issues which the children in grade one face, ( $p > 0,05$ ), which means that our hypothesis has been confirmed.*

### 2) Do you think that the students in grades I-V are now more burdened than before

		Frequency	Percent
	Yes	151	82,1
	Yes, but only in some grades	25	13,6
	No	7	3,8
	Total	183	99,5
No answer		1	,5
<b>Total</b>		184	100,0

Our conclusion is that the burdening is noticeable from the first grade, and it is present in the next ones. This means that instead of a decrease, we have an opposite effect. The new concept of primary education led to even greater burdening of the students, and thus the teachers. This is another segment which needs more attention by the educational authorities. The crossing of the personal data (city-village and work experience) showed that there was no statistically important difference between the respondents in terms of the question about the burdening of the students now and in the past (in the eight year-long primary education) and the chi-square test, ( $p > 0.05$ ).

### 3. Are the syllabi in the nine year-long education too voluminous?

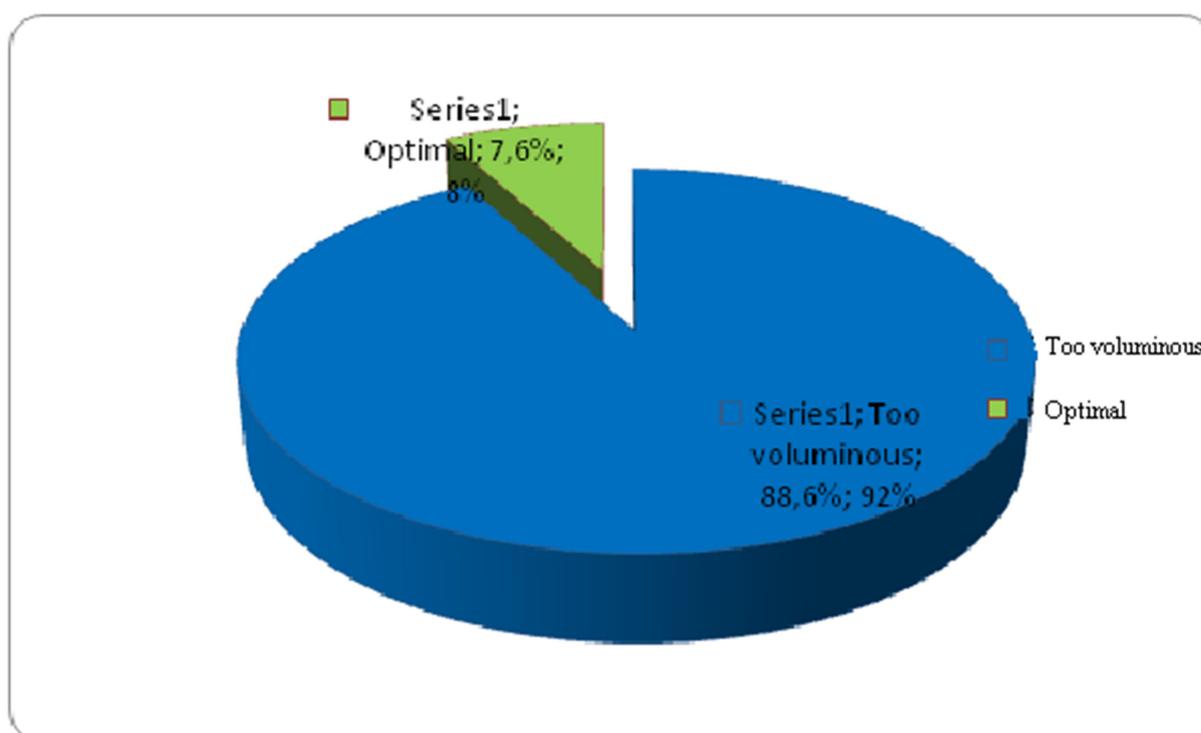


Fig.1

According to the data, 163 teachers or 92% share the opinion that the syllabi are too voluminous and that they include content that is not necessary, whereas only 14 teachers or 8% consider that they are optimal and that they do not include content that is not necessary. The data clearly show a phenomenon that has existed both in the eight and the nine year-long education, namely, the too voluminous syllabi, which definitely need to be reduced and unburdened from unnecessary content.

*A chi-square test was made and no statistically important difference was found between the municipality and the work experience in terms of the opinion of the teachers and whether*

*the syllabi are too voluminous or optimal,  $X^2 (1, N=177) = 0,03, p = 0,86$ .*

#### 4. Are you satisfied with the textbooks that you use?

		Frequency	Percent
	Yes, completely	10	5,4
	Partially	114	62,0
	No	38	20,7
	Not at all	22	12,0
	<b>Total</b>	184	100,0

The data in the research highlight the need for the textbooks to be revised as soon as possible and unburdened from the inadequate content, i.e. the need for new textbooks is imminent.

*A chi-square test was made and no statistically important relation was found between the work experience of the respondents and their opinion about the textbooks used in instruction,  $X^2 (9, N=178) = 5,78, p = 0,76$ .*

*A chi-square test was made and a statistically important relation was found between the municipality of the respondents and their opinion about the textbooks used in the instruction  $X^2 (3, N=184) = 7,97, p < 0,05$ .*

The teachers from Skopje demonstrated slightly greater displeasure than their colleagues from Strumica in terms of the textbooks.

*Coefficient of contingency = 0.2 (strength of the relation > medium)*

***This means that our hypothesis is partially confirmed.***

#### 5. What the textbooks usually lack?

This is the usual answer to the question related to what the textbooks usually lack: From the answers we can see that most of the teachers, i.e. 41.5% think that the textbooks are filled with inadequate content for the age of the children, which results in the children not understanding the content and learn it by heart. 30.6% of the respondents answered that the textbooks have too little text and a lot of illustrations. 22.8% of the respondents stressed that there are grammatical and other orthographical mistakes. 5% of the respondents opted for other, meaning that the teachers have notices other shortcomings of the textbooks.

#### 6. Which are the greatest disadvantages of the nine year-long primary education in

**your opinion?**

The respondents had an opportunity to give more than one answer to this question. According to the graph and tables, the greatest disadvantages of the nine year-long education are the increased administrative engagement of the teaching staff. This was stressed by 27.3% of the teachers. 17.40% of the teachers mentioned that there are issues from material-technical nature, i.e. inadequate conditions for realization of the educational process. Almost the same percentage of the teachers (17%) have an opinion that the descriptive assessment provides distorted image of the accomplishments of the students. Another disadvantage pointed out by 16% of the teachers is the inadequate training of the teachers for work with children with special needs. 12.5% of the teachers mentioned the lack of textbooks, and the non-existence of textbooks (for example music education) as a disadvantage of the nine year-long education was emphasized also by 12.5% of the teachers, while 3.2% of the teachers chose “other”.

**CONCLUSION**

Our research showed light to several issues that the children in first grade in the concept of the nine year-long education face, which were noticed by the teachers.

- It is more than obvious that there are great issues in the concept of the nine year-long education, which overburden the children from the youngest age. The Ministry of Education needs to correct this, first by decreasing the lesson fund and by re-introducing the games as dominant activities. The observation that many of the children cannot dress and undress on their own is indicative of frequent physical immaturity when starting first grade. Bearing in mind the fact that many of the children cry or attach to the teacher as if she was their mother is indicative of emotional immaturity as well.
- The neglect of the games is the result of the too voluminous content which the children learn in the first grade. This content represses the games, which were supposed to be dominant with the new concept. Unfortunately, this did not happen.
- To conclude, it is a general opinion that there are many issues, which the children face together with the teachers in first grade. This emphasizes the need for serious treatment in order for them to be overcome.

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