

*The 28<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference  
“Educational Research and School Practice”*

**THE STATE  
PROBLEMS  
AND NEEDS  
OF THE MODERN  
EDUCATION  
COMMUNITY**

**BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Editors**

Jelena STEVANOVIĆ

Dragana GUNDOGAN

Branislav RANĐELOVIĆ



Российский университет  
дружбы народов



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28<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference  
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# **The State, Problems, and Needs of the Modern Education Community**

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## **BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS**

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# REFORM OF THE FIRST TRIAD IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA FROM THE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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## Introduction

The transition to nine-year primary education in the Republika Srpska was a major pedagogical challenge imposed by the previous state of schools. The grand changes compared to the previous education system included different conditions, equipment, didactic tools, work methods, and toward children. Triads represent a unity, which continuously affects children's development through various forms of systematic learning. The transition to the new elementary school system required significantly different conditions and work organization starting from the first grade. In the first triad, the planning and implementation of teaching content are now based on different principles. Teachers need to plan activities that are mostly play-based, monitor children's motivation, activities, and school achievements, and foster developmental changes, with a healthy dose of self-criticism and a desire to further progress and improve (Spasojević, 2006). As teachers are the bearers of innovation in the teaching practice (Vujačić, Đević & Stanišić, 2017), it is important to examine their assessments of the success and quality of the implemented reform in the first triad of elementary school.

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## **Method**

According to our knowledge, in recent years, there has been no relevant research on this topic in our country. Related studies in the region have focused on teachers' perceptions of the implemented educational reforms, which included changes in teacher autonomy, working methods, and conditions and cooperation with parents and the local community. Their results have revealed the dissatisfaction of teachers with the implemented educational reforms, the decision-making process, and the competence of educational policymakers, both in Serbia (Pantić & Čekić-Marković, 2012) and in Croatia (Kovač *et al.*, 2014). Research goal is to obtain and analyze teachers' assessments of the implemented reform of the first triad in primary schools in the Republic of Srpska. We sought to identify differences in teachers' assessments of the program of the first triad, prerequisites for successful work in the first grade, and methods of work in the first grade. We hypothesized that there would be no differences in examinees' evaluations depending on work experience in teaching (up to 5, up to 10, up to 20, over 20 years) and the environment in which the school was located (rural, suburban, urban). We employed a survey questionnaire with scales designed by Spasojević (2006). The questionnaire showed satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's alpha coefficient range: 0.739-0.806). The sample comprised 150 teachers who worked with students in the first triad of primary school during the academic year of 2016/2017. For data processing, we used basic descriptive statistics, Pearson's chi-square test, and one-factor analysis of variance ANOVA.

## **Research Results**

The first research task was to determine differences in teachers' assessments of the first triad program in elementary schools. Respondents were offered answers: 1. Everything is well regulated, nothing needs to be changed; 2. The first grade is defined well, while the second and third-grade programs should be coordinated and modernized; 3. Everything needs to be changed. The results showed that the respondents did not differ in their assessments of the first triad program based on work experience in classroom teaching ( $\chi^2=11.56$ ;  $df=9$ ;  $p=0.23$ ), nor based on the environment in which the school was located ( $\chi^2=10.64$ ;  $df=6$ ;  $p=0.10$ ). Based on the descriptive indicators, 44% of

respondents deemed that the first grade was well defined, while second- and third-grade programs required coordination and modernization. A total of 39% of respondents deemed that everything should be redone and only 17% of teachers stated that nothing should be changed.

The second task was to identify differences in teachers' assessments of the prerequisites for successful work in the first grade. Respondents were offered different prerequisites, such as significantly different school conditions and equipment, constant support from others. On a five-point scale, they assessed the importance of each prerequisite for successful work. The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference in teachers' evaluations depending on the first variable ( $F=0.64$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p=0.58$ ) and the second variable ( $F=1.56$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.21$ ). Descriptive statistics showed that teachers did not sufficiently understand the significance of the proposed prerequisites for successful work in the first grade.

The third task referred to differences in teachers' assessments of working methods in the first grade of primary school. On a five-point scale, they assessed how often they used different working methods in the first grade. The provided working methods included: In micro-planning, I start from the observed abilities of children; When choosing game activities, I make sure that the activities are exploratory, encourage discovery, independence, and critical thinking, and so forth. The results revealed that there were no statistically significant differences in teachers' assessments of the working methods in the first grade depending on the first variable ( $F=1.50$ ;  $df=3$ ;  $p=0.21$ ) and the second variable ( $F=1.02$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.36$ ). Based on descriptive indicators, we can conclude that teachers were not sufficiently informed about different working methods in the first grade and that different categories of teachers had the same dilemmas and doubts.

## Discussion

Teachers should be involved in the new reform of the first triad, so that important decisions would not be made by people who are not actively involved in the school practice, as indicated by the results of related research (Pantić & Čekić-Marković, 2012; Kovač *et al.*, 2014).

Misunderstanding the meaning and essence of certain novelties is not uncommon in the teaching population, as confirmed by other research (Pantić & Čekić-Marković, 2012). Uniform evaluations of teachers about the ways of working in the first grade signal that the teaching process is exclusively realized in the classroom, without using any of the learning potentials of the environment such as going to parks, museums, libraries. Other studies have also found that teachers insufficiently use learning potentials outside the classroom (Sever *et al.*, 2017).

## **Conclusions and Implications Regarding Education Policies and Practices**

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In practice, the program of the first triad has not been functioning as originally conceived. Hence, it is necessary to form a team of experts and provide the resources necessary for its change. Answers to some of the teachers' questions and dilemmas about work in the first triad can be found in newer strategies for working at younger school age and holistic programs that contribute to the development of a „favorable attitude towards learning and school among students”. (Spasojević, Samardžić & Travar, 2017: 310). It is necessary to adopt a different approach to preparing teachers for the future profession at universities and provide additional training to first-grade teachers.

**Keywords:** educational reform, assessments, holistic programs, teachers.

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