

<p>SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN NORTH MACEDONIA, ITS CHANGES AND OBSTACLES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS AS AN ESSENTIAL FACTOR FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING OF FIRST-GRADE PUPILS</p> <p>AN ANALYSIS OF THE TEACHING MATERIAL OF THE FIRST GRADE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF NORTH MACEDONIA</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">Education</p> <p>Keywords: Coronavirus, teaching material, academic learning, primary school, pupils, forumZFD, Germany-Bavaria zone, North Macedonia, etc.</p>
---	---	--

<p>Jeta (Hani) Alla</p>	<p>Faculty of Philology. Department of English Language and Literature. University of Tetova - Tetova, North Macedonia.</p>
--------------------------------	--

<p style="text-align: center;">Abstract</p> <p>It is the Coronavirus that makes the teaching process and teaching materials more complex. First-grade pupils of primary schools in North Macedonia face many teaching materials that are not adequate for their age. This research emphasizes the problematic and non-properly designed teaching material that children of the first-grade schools in North Macedonia use for their development (academic learning), keeping in mind the not regulated system of Kindergartens and other factors that influence the teaching process. Even though children of this grade and different primary school grades have books designed following the “Cambridge schooling system”, my recommendations are still for a softer–teaching material. That is a process of teaching “new things” step by step (having a logical flow of transmitting new information). Whereas taking as a sample German books would be a perfect match for our education system, especially for our children/pupils.</p>
--

Introduction

We are in the global world swirl caused by the Coronavirus. Almost all schools face difficulties that this pandemic situation has caused, and the ministries of education worldwide make efforts to adapt to this unusual condition. The education system of North Macedonia also faces this situation, which in the recent decade has made many changes. An essential part of this educational system is teachers/ professors and pupils/students (which result from all the obstacles or those that experience mostly the decisions that the ministry of education makes). My experience in the system of education, firstly as an excellent student from the first grade till university level (whereas I belonged to the eight year teaching system of primary school education in North Macedonia), being participant of many educational seminars connected to education, being a student of English Faculty and Literature (future teacher of English language), working with children (for already twenty years) as a dancing teacher, being part of a team in country level (representatives from ministry of education, municipalities, UNICEF, ForumZFD German organization-which I represented, and some other prominent NGOs of North Macedonia) for a study visit in Northern Ireland from where we had to take examples how do their system of education functions, and recently being a mother of a child that had to be a pupil at first grade in North Macedonia and next year a first grade pupil in Germany-Bavaria zone, I have figured out many discrepancies that are within the system of education of North Macedonia and this is why I stand for changes, concretely for changes in teaching materials of primary schools. This research treats the teaching material for the first grade of teaching in primary schools of North Macedonia.

Due to the limited time, we elaborated only the teaching material of math, which was made possible through the comparative method analyses. We gave good recommendations which for the children of this age will be a better opportunity for effective learning, keeping in mind both learning goals: the academic knowledge and the social-emotional learning (Evertson and Weinstein, 2006) which make complete a class lesson.

1. Changes in primary school teaching system - an essential factor for effective learning in the first grade

There have always been present attempts for changes in the system of education of North Macedonia. Many factors have been caused, such as country aspirations for EU membership, interethnic conflicts, and adaption to modern life where technology takes a good portion in our daily life. North Macedonia, after its independence from Former Yugoslavia, inherited a traditional way of teaching. There was a “pre-first grade” class where children only played with toys and heard fairy tales. Even though this was something beautiful for children, I remember that there was only one “pre-first class” for the entire school, where children didn’t have, first of all, enough chairs. It was not common in 1900 because the migration of families was not so common). Primary schools consisted of eight generations, and approximately every age had four parallels with about thirty pupils in each class. After the eighth class, pupils had to have a teaching examination as a “must” for secondary school enrollment. The secondary school consisted of four generations (first-year students, second-year students, third-year students and fourth-year students). But, I will remain in the system of teaching in primary school. It had passed a decade from when North Macedonia adopted the nine-year approach of primary school. This transformation made the “pre-first grade” a “first grade”. It means that now children don’t play and don’t tell fairy tales, but they are put directly in the teaching process. When a child starts the first grade, it is six years old and not seven years old as it used to be (for which I stand for). In this level of child development, intellectual development differs from child to child. In North Macedonia, it lacks kindergartens (where children can learn some basic things), and children are not obligated to attend to these premises. But, priority has those children who have their parents at formal work or register the child from its birth to find a free place, even though this is a question mark since there is a high level of demand. In Struga, a city in the southwest of North Macedonia, there are two kindergartens where a class consists of 30 children (approximately) and has to take care of two educators. It means that an educator has to take care of 15 children. Suppose we compare this situation with Sweden (Malmo), where an educator has to watch out for four or five children. In that case, we can have a clear picture of the quality of the relationship educator-child-parent. In mind this fact, we can assume the quality level, especially the small premises that the kindergarten has. Talking about Kindergartens is an issue itself, but it is evident that it affects the first-grade learning process. Children who have a pre-first grade education are prepared at a certain level, while others are a question mark.

Nevertheless, when the first-grade teacher takes her/his pupils in the class, she has some students with a certain level of knowledge from the very beginning. An essential factor for the teaching class's quality, especially for the first grade, directly impacts the self-confidence and positioning in “class society”. Due to the demographic movements, the movement from villages cities increases, increasing the number of pupils in a class in the urban areas. For example, in the Struga area, a first-grade level has five pupils, whereas two first grade classes have up to 30 pupils. It makes it more challenging for class management and having a practical teaching class.

2. Analysis of the working book in math for the first-grade pupils in North Macedonia compared to the workbook that pupils in the Germany-Bavaria zone teach math

In the academic year 2019/2020 in North Macedonia, first-grade pupils had to learn subjects as Native language, math, English language, drawing, physical education, music, natural sciences and social sciences. As a sample for analysis is taken the working book in Math, part 1, for the primary school's first grade. Compared to the workbook book in Math, children of the first-grade teacher in Germany – Bavaria zone. The following picture on the left is the first page of the working book in North Macedonia, while the picture on the right is the first page of the workbook of math in the Germany-Bavaria zone.



Picture number 1.

The first page of the math Workbook in North Macedonia (left) and Germany-Bavaria zone (right)

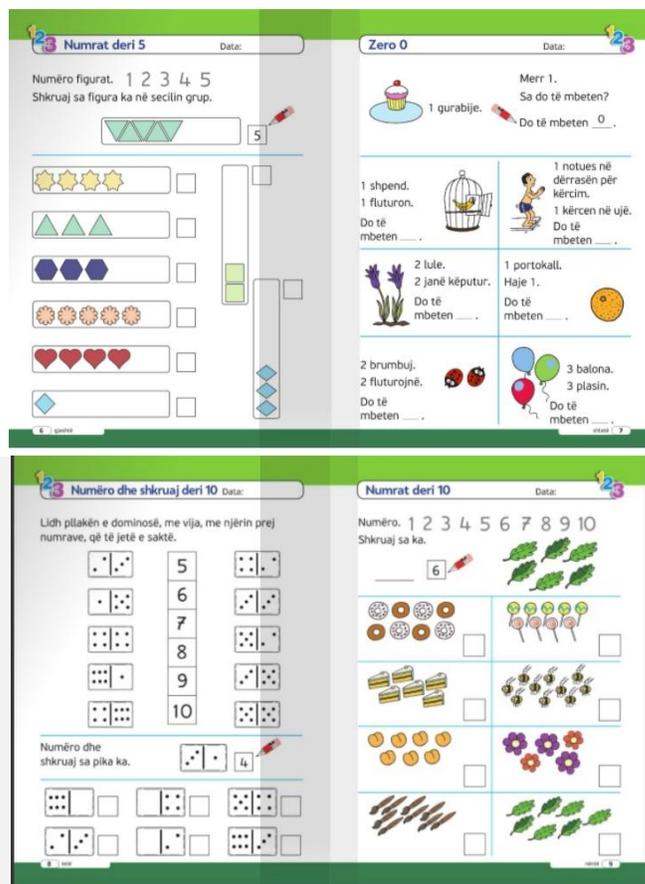
The first page has to write down numbers to twenty in small size from the very beginning. First of all, it is not eye-catching, entertaining, engaging, and secondly, the child has the right to teach the numbers. So, he or she has to know them how much do they count, what are they? This happens to the workbook of math in Germany, Bavaria zone, where through some examples of shown fingers, the child has to connect with the written numbers. This example brings closer the child to numbers. So they have the fingers and only have to count (which is the most frequent way

of calculating in math that children choose). The second exercise is numbering with dots. This is something easy and entertaining for children. The third exercise now has to write down by himself/herself the dots following the written number. So, firstly the child is introduced to numbers, and it is imposed firstly learning through memorizing as a figure (giving space later on for motoric skills of writing the numbers). The fourth exercise is illustrated with fruit, where a duck carries a range of fruits. Children have only to count them and express the numbers through dots. The pictures below are shown how to look at the following pages of the math working book in Germany-Bavaria. This means that in a week, they teach only these numbers.



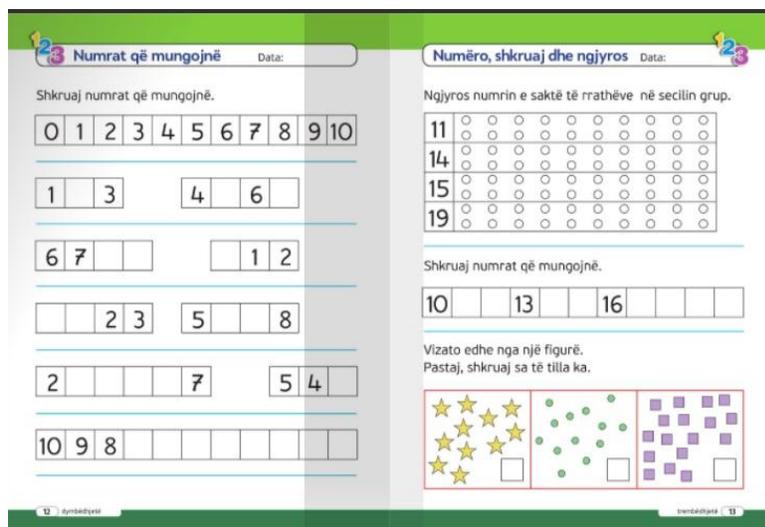
Picture nr.2: Learning numbers separately, page 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the math working book in Germany-Bavaria

Exercises are designed in a way that the child will gradually gain motoric skills of writing down numbers from bigger size to small size. Firstly they start by writing down (many times) the number in a big size. Many other numbers of different size are expressed creatively, which for children seem exciting and straightforward to write down the number one. As shown in picture number three, there are presented many aspects of “what number one is” in the second exercise of this page. Connected to this, I can say that Germany has an education system where all children go to Kindergarten. But still, they learn step by step numbers, which is following the psychology of child education. Now we can look to the following pages of the math working book that the children of the first-grade exercise in North Macedonia.



Picture nr.3: Page 2, 3, 4 and 5 of math working book in North Macedonia

As we can see on page nr.2, there is the opposite from the German working book. Children are obliged to write down the number of the figure presented. This would be difficult and demotivated for children who haven't gained yet motor skills, which is approximately more significant than those with these skills. On the next page, there are represented exercises with logical background (practice with a minus) for which the child must seek the parent's help. This causes the loss of independence of the child in solving the activities and feeling confused. On the next page, the child learns the numbers until 10, while children in Germany are still number 3.



Picture nr.4: Page 6 of math WB in North Macedonia

Receiving so much information for a short period, and jumping from one topic to another, doesn't make children braver, but it confuses them and, for most of them, might cause a lack of self-confidence. As we can see in *picture nr.4* children, have to deal with numbers till 19. It would be perfect if children had only math to learn, but they have 6 other subjects that have to be treated in this grade. Abstracting the detail of the education system in Germany and considering only how children gradually take lessons in math, it comes out that for the first month, children in Germany have prepared only in writing and recognizing numbers from 1 till 10. In meanwhile, children in Macedonia have to deal with numbers till 100.

3. Qualitative Analysis of Collected Data

As I mentioned in the introduction, this issue consists of my own experience first as a pupil and understanding with my child, which was part of both teaching systems: North Macedonia and Germany-Bavaria zone. Through direct observation and active participation in this learning process, I noticed these obstacles that my child faced when she was a first-grade pupil in North Macedonia. There are conducted 30 verbal interviews of parents which children were in the first grade in our country. All of them were with the opinion that “this is too much” for their child. There was an initiative for claiming this issue, but there was a lack of support from school representatives.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Creativity and self-confidence are values that children start to develop from an early age and carry them for the entire life. Thus, teaching material has to be much more interesting for children of this age, not complicated. Teaching material has to be designed in a way that will enforce the independent work of the child. Ministry of Education needs to change the teaching material that children of the first-grade use for their academic learning. In conformity to this, there

is a need for improving the Kindergarten system, ensuring a place for every child, creating space for equally prepared for the first grade in primary school.

References

- Atalay, D. (2018). The management of information in education management by using share point programme, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Development Research*, Baku, Azerbaijan. Volume 2, Number 1, 24-38
- Çevik, Y., & Spahiu, I. (2012). “An Assessment of Teacher Training in English Preparatory Programs: A Sustainable Solution”. *Anglisticum*, I, 3-4: 44-50
- Çevik, Y., & Spahiu, I. (2013). “The Use of Short Story in TEFL: An Integrated and Communicative Sample Study”, *ANGLISTICUM*, V:II, Nr.1, 57-65
- Evertson, C. M., & Weinstein, C. S. (Eds.). (2006). *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Morrison, K. (2020). Nelson International Mathematics, Workbook 1a (2nd edition), perkthim ne shqip nga Abdulla Buklla, Matematika 1 , shkurt 2020
- Rodríguez, M., Varela, J., & Iseni, A. (2013). Virtual learning in higher education. *Anglisticum Journal*, 2(4), 262-278
- Spahiu, I., & Spahiu, E. (2016). THE BENEFITS OF NEW TECHNOLOGY AND THEIR IMPACT IN LANGUAGE TEACHING, *International Journal of Knowledge*, Bulgaria. Pg 355
- Talka, E., & Iseni, A. (2016). Challenges of Change in Compulsory Educational System. *ANGLISTICUM. Journal of the Association-Institute for English Language and American Studies*, 2(3), 65-72
- Vilma Tafani, Arburim Iseni, & Besa Iseni. (2020). The Incorporation of Teaching Culture with Technology Enhances Learning English as a FL
2nd International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference 2019. Tetovo. North Macedonia.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3596497>
- Welt der Zahl 1, Mathematisches Unterrichtswerk für die Grundschule, Bayern, Arbeitsheft 1, 2020
- Welt der Zahl 1, Mathematisches Unterrichtswerk für die Grundschule, Bayern, 2017
- Yassine, S. (2017). Multimodal Design of EFL Textbooks: A Social Semiotic Multimodal Approach. *ANGLISTICUM. Journal of the Association-Institute for English Language and American Studies*, 3(12), 84-90
- Zubov, D., SHIKOSKA, U. R., ZHARIKOV, E., & Iseni, A. (2015). SCIENCE AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: ONE SUBJECTIVE POINT OF VIEW ABOUT FOREIGN TEACHERS. *ANGLISTICUM. Journal of the Association-Institute for English Language and American Studies*, 1(2), 31-36

Websites: www.bmbf.de; www.mon.gov.mk