

# Beginner Teacher and Early Education

## **Keywords**

*Beginner teacher, early education, preschool curriculum, kindergarten curriculum*

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## **Abstract**

*The changes in the level of preschool education that took place in 2019 were received differently by the teachers. Those who are in the beginning in this field are the most affected by this event because they do not yet have the stability offered by the experience. This research focuses on the attitude of beginning teachers, trying to identify the factors that could induce behavioural variations. Through quantitative actions interwoven with qualitative ones, we will try to draw objective conclusions.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Recently, some important changes have been made in the field of early education in Romania. Teachers have their own opinions about these changes. It is interesting to find out what the opinions of beginner teachers are. Those with long experience in education tend to have more confidence in their abilities and skills and their

practices are more balanced and stable. Since they have already formed an objective overview of the general situation, the services they provide do not support a rapid and dramatic change, forced by the change of rules. Rather, they reformulate and reshape their relaxed practices, adjusting any new rules over sufficient time. And this whole process is happening without visible failures. But what about new teachers entering the system? It is expected that their reaction will be different and they will be destabilized by every novelty that has appeared regarding the rules of the educational process. Forming a proper attitude and a positive mentality has been an important goal of the initial and continuous training initiatives started in the last decades (Păun, Iucu, 2002, p. 44).

## **2. Early education in Romania**

### **Categories of activities**

In Romania Early education has two main levels: pre-pre school and pre-school level. The first level is addressed to children between 0 and 3 years old, and the second level is addressed to children between 3 and 6-7 years old. Each level is divided into sub-levels (Ministry of National Education, 2019).

Three types of activities are used at this level. Of the first type are personal development activities. The second type includes free-choice games and activities. The third type includes activities in experimental fields.

Routines (Figure 1), activities specific to the first type, focus on the most important events of the day: the arrival of the children, the morning meeting, breakfast, personal hygiene moments, lunch, the afternoon sleep and relaxation period, the snacks and the departure of the children (Tătaru, Glava, Chiş, 2014, p.25).

The morning meeting is an important moment of the routines that aim to introduce the child into the atmosphere of the group and gain interest in the day's activities. It has a specific structure

that can include: discussions about the road to kindergarten, conversations about the weather, nature calendar, identification of absences, date, season and year, sports elements, theme of the day, presentation of interest centres and development of desirable behaviours through songs, stories and other methods specific to working with children.

To create a smooth transition between activities, various activities with a specific, repeatable structure are used, which allow children to prepare more easily for the next activity and to enter a rhythm previously predicted. For this, songs, short lyrics, games or moving songs are used. Such activities have long been part of the "underground" area of kindergarten practices. The changes made in 2008 give them legitimacy by offering them a well-deserved place alongside the other types of activities (Munteanu, Munteanu, 2009, p. 22).

The games and activities chosen by the child occupy an important place in the children's daily schedule. These are part of the second important type of kindergarten activities. Depending on the kindergarten program, there maybe two or three rounds of this kind.

At this level, the main focus of children and educators is on the centres of interest. Participation in these centres is done either individually or in work teams, and all tasks are integrated into the theme of the week or day.

The centres of interest are: Library, Science, Construction, Role Play, Arts and Sand and water (Tătaru, Glava, Chiş, 2014, p.8). The Library Centre tries to motivate the child to try activities in the field of verbal communication, to stimulate his interest in print, to help him develop his ability to express his own inner experiences in different ways or to develop his correct writing skills.

The purpose of the Arts Centre activities is to develop artistic expression skills using drawing, music, painting, using children's

imagination and creativity. One of the accompanying effects is the development of work capacity for longer periods.

The Role Play Centre involves providing space, material and ideas for experimenting with adult life through play, reminiscent of beloved activities or practicing desirable behaviours. The preschooler imagines himself in various situations and acts according to the social norms learned, suggested and practiced.

The activities of the Construction Centre offer children the opportunity to develop their skills in which small muscles are involved. Here they have the right space to work together as a team and to use their imagination and creativity in creating new objects from different materials.

At the Science Centre, the activity is focused on familiarizing the child with the simplest investigative actions and on developing scientific curiosity. The child is introduced to the world of experiments, in the world of nature and of information about the cosmos. At this level, the use of numbers is understood as a tool for organizing and understanding the surrounding world.

The most exciting and attractive activities are proposed at the Sand and Water Centre. Contact with sand and water develops in children self-control, calms irritated nerves, provides peace and develops creativity. Due to the specificity of the materials from this centre, the children's experience a higher level of freedom, which helps them to use all their energies in the proposed activities.

## **Annual themes**

The contents taught in the third big category of activities carried out in kindergarten, the activities on experiential domains, are described in the form of six annual themes (Glava, Pocol, Tătaru, 2009, p.17). The first annual theme, "Who are / are we?", explores the human nature, human body, the community in which the child lives and its nature, as well as the rights and responsibilities of children and adults.

The second theme, "When / how and why does it happen?", focuses on the environment, near or far, on the phenomena in nature and on the cause-effect relationship. Children are taught to understand the effects of direct human actions on the environment.

"How is / was and will be here on earth?" is the third annual theme that aims to focus on history from a personal, local and global perspective, accompanied by elements of geography, ecology, and local culture.

A special perspective on reality is introduced by the theme "Who and how do you plan / organize an activity?", analysing the world of human trades and activities and their impact on the environment. Ever since kindergarten, the education of children in the entrepreneurial spirit is taken into account.

"With what and how do we express what we feel?" Proposes a foray into exploring ways of expressing one's ideas, emotions, plans and beliefs through plastic words or images. It also proposes a first investigation of the national and international artistic heritage.

Personal development, discovering one's abilities, building healthy self-esteem are addressed within the annual theme "What and how do I want to be?".

All these annual themes are used through integrated teaching of the following fields: Language and Communication, Sciences, Human and Society, Aesthetic and Creative, Psychomotor. Figure 2 summarizes all the activities in the kindergarten.

### **Recent changes**

The first major reform was in 2008, when several significant changes were made (Munteanu, Munteanu, 2009, p. 21):

- The categories of activities have lost their importance, being replaced by activities integrated into curricular areas, called experiential fields;

- The finalities begin to correlate with the development areas (the completion of the correlations is completed in 2019).
- The delimitation appears by types of activities;
- The role of the parent increases in importance;
- Systematic observation of each child is encouraged;
- The tendency to individualize teaching is encouraged.

Several changes have taken place in the current curriculum.

Pantazi (2019) selected a list of them:

- Reducing the number of hours allocated to experiential activities and increasing the number of hours for free-choice games and activities;
- Specific activities have been added for the level 0-3 years;
- Optional activities become part of the teacher's didactic norm for pre-school education;
- The child progress tracking sheets have been revised.

The Ministry of Education offers several arguments regarding recent changes (Ministry of Education, 2019):

- Correlation with the recommendations in the documents promoted at European level;
- The correlation with the changes initiated in the pre-university education level of the last decade;
- Correlation with the law;
- The systematic approach of early education and the introduction of activities for the level 0-3 years.

## **2. Methodology**

### **Objectives**

The main purpose of this research is to analyse the attitude that the beginning teachers have regarding the changes in early

education. Two general objectives have been elaborated for this research:

- Observing the relationship between various quantitative variables and teachers' attitude towards the proposed changes;
- Analysis of the changes that have penetrated the practice of beginner teachers.

#### **Hypotheses of quantitative research:**

- The age of the teacher influences their attitude towards the changes that have taken place.
- The level of the experience influences the attitude of the teacher regarding the changes in preschool education.
- The level of education influences the attitude of the teacher regarding the changes in preschool education.
- The working environment influences the teacher's attitude towards the proposed changes.

#### **Hypotheses of the qualitative research:**

- Teachers are aware of the changes introduced in the new curriculum and have been trained on them.
- Parents are interested in the changes that have taken place.
- Teachers have proposals regarding future revisions of the curriculum.

#### **Variables**

The variables of quantitative research are the following:

- the age of teachers
- the level of experience
- level of education
- work environment

- type of school

### **Methods and Tools**

The main method used was that of the investigation by interview. During the interview, numerical data were also collected to provide a quantitative perspective of reality, along with the qualitative perspective conferred by its use.

### **Population**

Eleven beginning teachers were interviewed who completed or are in the process of completing their initial training at Adventus University. Persons who worked for less than four years (Figure 3) in education were chosen, without any teaching degree. The ages of the subjects ranged from 21 to 29 years (Figure 4), works in both state and private education (Figure 5), both in rural and urban areas (Figure 6). Some of them have long-term jobs (Figure 7), and some of them have only a medium education (Figure 8).

## **3. Results**

### **Awareness of the changes that have taken place**

Most teachers were aware of at least one of the changes that took place in educational practice. Only one teacher could list any items. Another teacher mistakenly reproduced the conversations between the teachers on the subject in question. Three teachers provided far too general information, which may induce the idea that they did not know the event in question well enough. The other teachers mentioned the increase of the time duration for the activities on centres and personal development activities, in parallel with the reduction of the planned time for the experimental areas.

Others have also mentioned changes in planning and that the optional disciplines must be taught by the educators. There were

also mentioned the introduction of the daily story and the obligation of the moments of movement every day.

The educators did not panic and negative emotions about the changes in the curriculum and they do not think that they could negatively affect the normal conduct of the activities.

### **Find out the news**

Teachers reported several ways in which they became aware of the news in the field of early education. Most of them learned from the director of the institution or the annual counselling meetings. Some have been documented on the internet or they have learned from colleagues or inspectors during the checks. Only one teacher reported that he was not announced in any way about this news.

### **Personal opinion**

In general, the opinions expressed are positive, the teachers are enthusiastic about the changes that have taken place:

- „They make our work easier“;
- „They are welcome because they give priority to the development of children's personality“;
- „These changes are beneficial“;
- „These changes help the teacher“;
- „I agree with them“;
- „I do not find it difficult to integrate them into practice“;
- „is a step forward in the modernization of education“;
- „I do not know anyone dissatisfied with them“.

The teachers consider that the changes are well-founded and they are waiting for another proposal. There were also some disagreements regarding the short time for teaching activities. Some people agree with this practice, others consider that the time allocated to the activity time is very short.

## **Parents' opinion**

Parents' opinions regarding the novelties in primary education are different. In the rural area, they were not informed, they are not interested and they do not know the implications that appear. In private urban institutions, parents are concerned that the shortening of the time allocated to teaching activities affects the preparation of children for school.

## **Suggestions for future improvements**

The teachers not only appreciate the new accents involved in the current curriculum but even suggest some things that could improve the pedagogical practice in the kindergarten. Thus, they recall the following topics:

- retraining of senior teachers;
- prohibition of teaching for retired teachers;
- improving the material supply;
- reducing the number of documents that need to be completed;
- freedom of movement for teachers;
- reducing the number of children in the classroom;
- the abolition of methodical commissions;
- reducing bureaucracy;
- reducing the time devoted to completing school situations.

## **The influence of age on practice**

Figure 9 presents the opinion regarding the integration of the changes in practice, according to the age groups of the subjects. The opinion regarding the integration of the changes in the practice is represented by the average of the scores from 1 to 100 offered by each subject.

Subjects between the ages of 20 and 40 offer scores between 60 and 70. The surprise comes from subjects over 50 who offer much lower scores (M=30).

### **The influence of experience on the practice**

Figure 10 shows the opinion on the integration of changes in practices, according to the experience of individuals. The opinion regarding the integration of the changes in the practice is represented by the average of the scores from 1 to 100 offered by each subject.

Those with minimum experience (M=70) are the most optimistic regarding the level of integration of changes in practice, compared to the others (M=65/50/62).

### **The influence of the level of education**

Figure 11 shows the differences between the group of subjects with higher education and that of the subjects with average studies regarding the average of the percentages of integration of changes in practice.

It is noted that the level of education does not visibly influence the opinion of the subjects regarding the level of integration in practice of the proposed changes. The averages obtained do not show significant differences. Subjects with higher education (M=60) show similar averages to subjects with higher education (M=63).

### **The influence of the school environment**

Figure 12 illustrates how the rural and urban environment influence the teachers' opinion regarding the level of integration in practice of changes in the preschool curriculum.

The teachers in the rural education show more optimism (M=70) by offering higher scores than the teachers in the urban education (M=56).

## **The influence of the type of school**

Figure 13 shows the influence that the type of school has on the opinion regarding the level of integration of the proposed changes in practice. Teachers in private education show lower grades (M=56) compared to teachers in state education (M=65).

## **4. Discussions and Conclusions**

Beginning teachers have a clear opinion about the changes in the curriculum for early education. For the most part, they know the important issues either because they have been announced or because they have been documented through the Internet.

Beginner teachers can provide suggestions for improving quality in education and to evaluate the level of implementation of changes in practice.

There were identified some variables that had the potential to influence the evaluation regarding the level of integration in practice: age, experience, level of education, school environment and type of school.

Only the level of education does not have a noticeable influence on the teachers' opinion regarding the level of integration in practice.

It is observed that older subjects are less inclined to give positive feedback. They have probably lost hope about the chances of the education system for reform. Next to this quantitative result, we can place the suggestions offered by one of the interview subjects, the re-training of the old teachers and the stopping of the teachers reaching the retirement age to profess. This result should also be verified in other research, to be sure whether the conclusions are maintained.

About the optimistic assessments offered by teachers with minimal experience, it can be said that situations can also be explained by the fact that the subjects do not have a thorough

knowledge of all aspects of teaching, and the general impression can be slightly distorted because of this fact. As they gain experience, they discover more details that they didn't know before, and they change their minds. That is why teachers with only a few extra years of experience offer more objective assessments.

A similar situation can be observed in the case of rural subjects. Their assessment is better than their peers in the urban area. It seems that teachers in the urban environment tend to be more severe, displaying a much less relaxed attitude regarding the level of integration of the proposed changes in practice.

The tendency is also found in the case of the distinction between teachers from private institutions and those from state institutions. Private teachers have an attitude similar to those in urban areas. It is recommended to continue research in this area to see if the trends are maintained.

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## Tables, figures and appendices

Figure 1

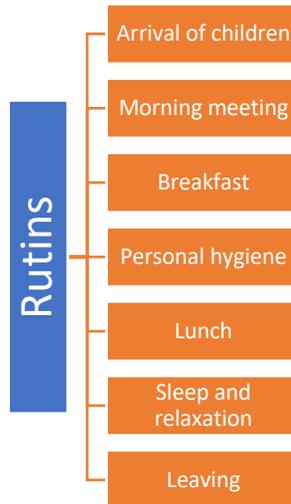


Figure 2

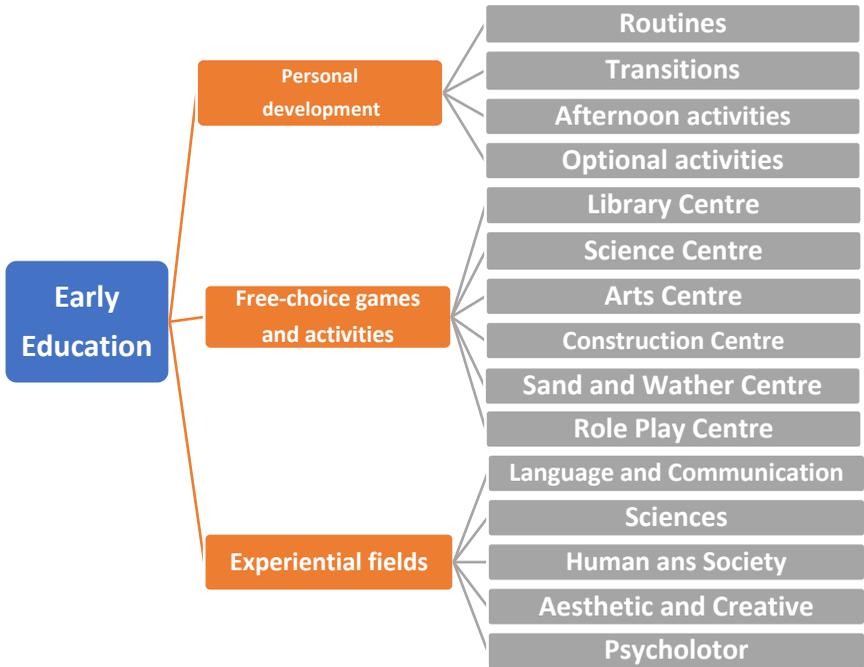


Figure 3

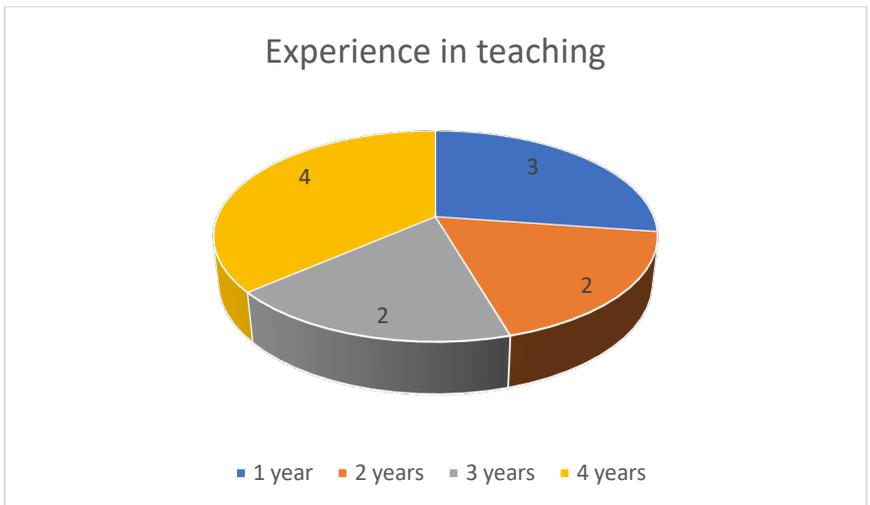


Figure 4

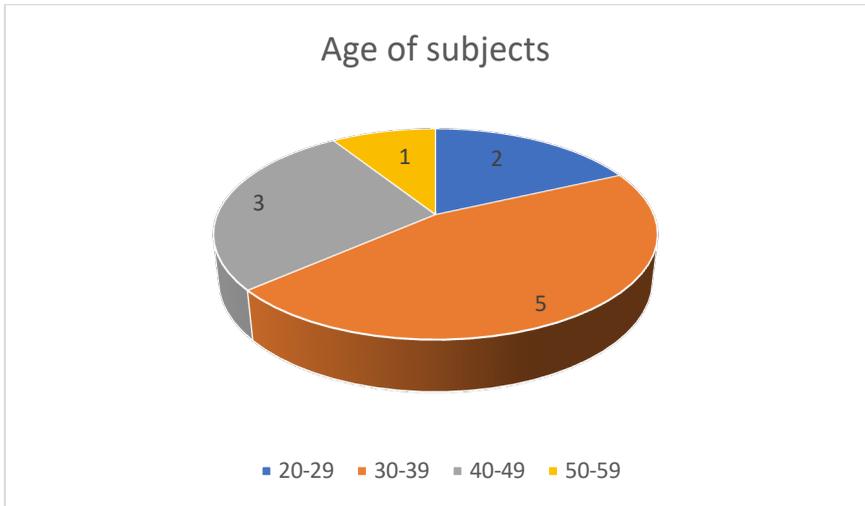


Figure 5

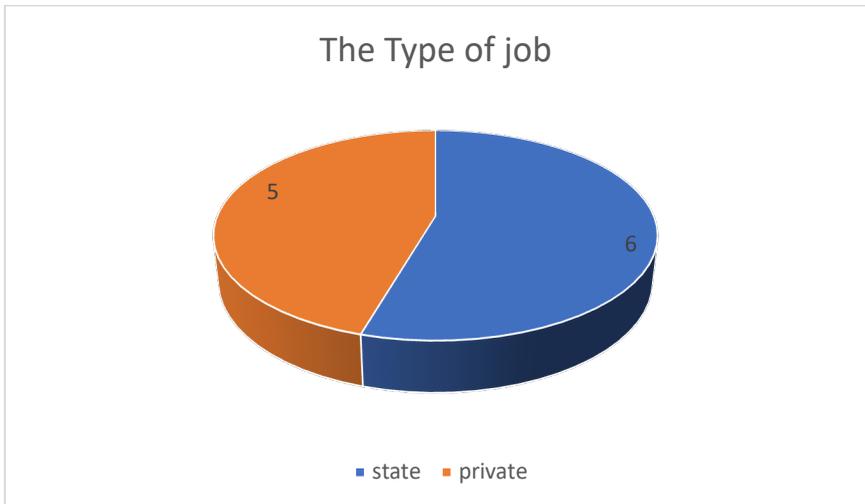


Figure 6

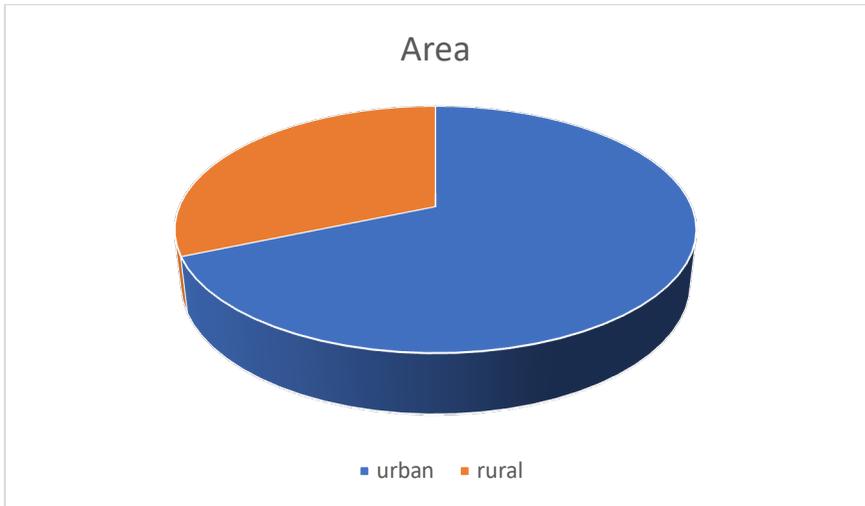


Figure 7

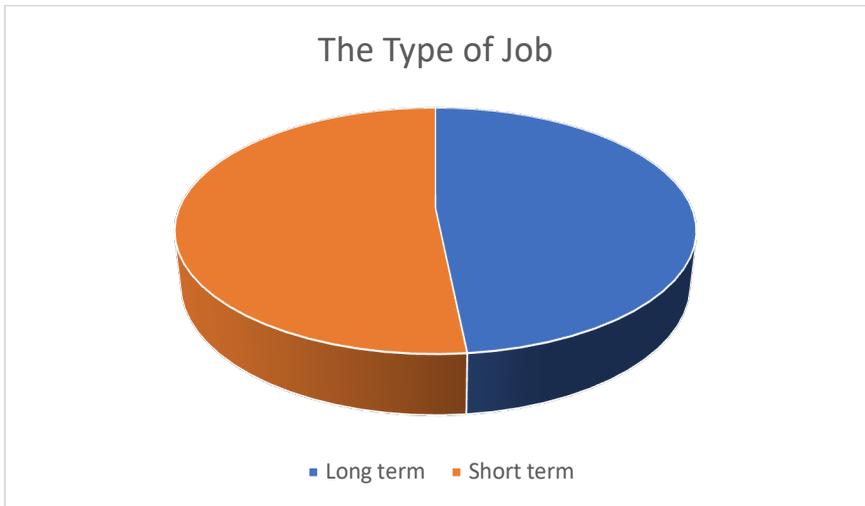


Figure 8

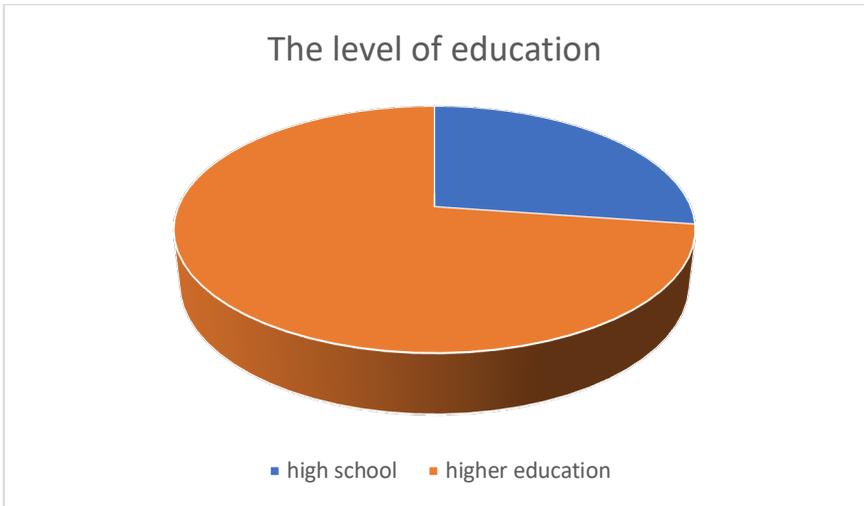


Figure 9

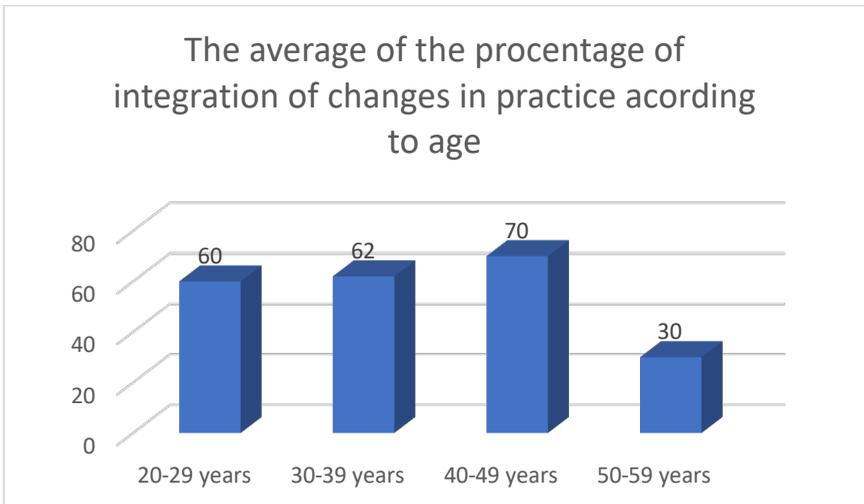


Figure 10

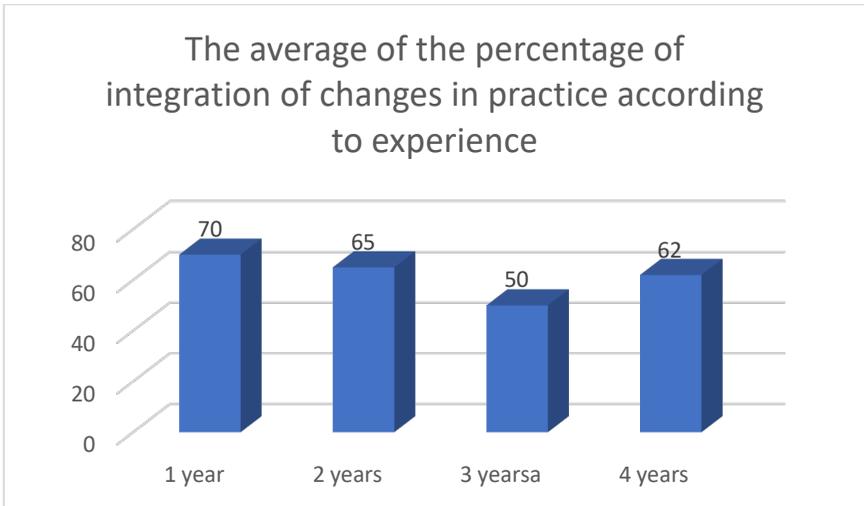


Figure 11

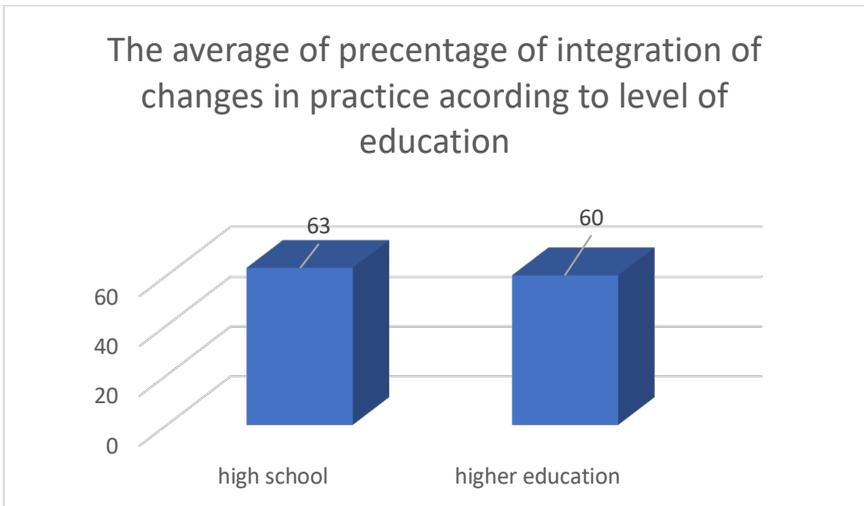


Figure 12

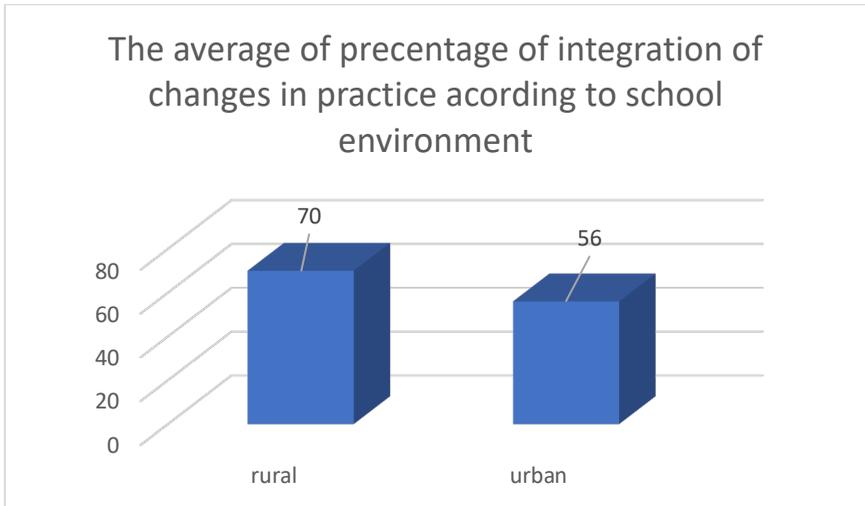


Figure 13

