



ПРЕДУЧИЛИЩНА ПЕДАГОГИКА

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE QUALITY
OF KINDERGARTENS ACCORDING TO A STUDY IN HUNGARY

Krisztina Kovács¹

Abstract: *This article presents the results of a study of child satisfaction with kindergarten in Hungary. The study was carried out among children between 5 and 6 years old with the aim of examining how preschool children thought about their own kindergarten, how they experienced daily life there, and how they imagined the good kindergarten. We conducted a semi-structured interview based on predetermined questions. Then, we performed a quantitative and qualitative analysis. The results showed that the children interviewed were generally satisfied with the education provided at their own kindergarten and with the environment surrounding them, as well as with the pedagogical activities. The children's acceptance attitude towards kindergarten was mostly determined by the physical environment, the activities taking place in it, and the social environment which affected their general well-being. The results of the study further refined the knowledge quality indicators of the relationship between children aged 5–6 years and kindergarten.*

Keywords: *preschool children; perspectives; satisfaction; attitudes; kindergarten; interview; Hungary.*

INTRODUCTION

Research on early childhood education has developed significantly in recent years (Stamm & Edelmann, 2013). Studies among preschool children are not new, but they are not widespread in Hungary. Among the reasons for this is the belief that early childhood research poses challenges to researchers due to its methodological peculiarities. The typical competency limits of the age group seriously limit the test procedures that can be chosen. After all, a research methodology must be developed, taking into account the age characteristics of the population under investigation, during which the researcher has to face many difficulties (Mukherij & Albon, 2015; Böddi, 2019).

After reviewing the literature, we can see that, in the last decade and a half, studies conducted in early childhood have increasingly become the focus of research interest. Attitudes and satisfaction studies form one direction of early childhood research, which this empirical study is connected with. Alt-

¹ **Krisztina Kovács** – PhD, Associate Professor at the University of Szeged Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education, Institute of Applied Pedagogy.

though they are present in such research in Hungary, the study of preschool children's satisfaction with and attitude towards kindergarten is a less considered topic. Györgyi Vargáné Szabó (2000) conducted an examination of the satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and expectations of kindergarten children with the aim of finding out what they liked and disliked in kindergarten. She wanted to reveal whether they had positive or negative feelings in terms of kindergarten activities. She developed a qualitative test method, the usability of which was checked during a preliminary test. The study consisted of two parts: in the first part, satisfaction and dissatisfaction with preschool activities were measured using the oral communication method; the second part, closely related to the first one, was based on the open-story method. As part of the story, the children included in the study could express their wishes and desires about what they would like to do in kindergarten, what tools and toys they would still need. Based on the author's experience, this method effectively measured the satisfaction level of preschool children and provided analyzable data about their expectations and wishes. The scholar concluded that the development of a positive attitude in preschool children could be achieved with appropriate environmental education. Golyán Szilvia (2019) dealt with the longitudinal investigation of the predictive power of satisfaction in early childhood, choosing an integrated qualitative and quantitative research method. Examining the transition between kindergarten and school, she searched for an answer to the question of which factors and regulatory elements of the comprehensive system of early childhood education could facilitate the child's transition from kindergarten to school. During her study of preschool children, she used the method developed by Györgyi Szabó Vargáné (2000), which she supplemented with the discursive interview method. She also revised the data sheets to summarize and evaluate the results of the study and the recording tools.

Research shows that 5–6-years-old children do not yet have a developed concept of quality. However, they can determine what they like and dislike. They have desires and needs which they can express (Titze & Lehmkuhl, 2010). It is a general feature of their age that their emotional development is characterized by the fact that their behaviour in response to their environment is controlled by emotions (Hegyi, 2008). These children can already express their emotions in an appropriate way, and they are able to form a subjective opinion and judge something based on their experiences and feelings. They are curious, interested, and motivated to explore the environment, which is well reflected in their activities, behaviour, and attitude towards people and things (Delfos, 2011; Weltzien, 2012).

Over the last decade, early childhood education and care have become an important topic of educational discussion. The view has become more and more acceptable that early childhood is particularly effective for further learning, and that preschool interventions are therefore increasingly based on “educational quality” or on “pedagogical quality” (Stamm & Edelman, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this empirical study was to explore the satisfaction and attitude of kindergarten children in a large city. A total of 35 preschool children participated in it. We strived to include as many 5–6-year-old children with a healthy development in the chosen kindergarten as possible in the study, so that the results were representative of the institution. At the time of the investigation, the kindergarten's statistical staff included 45 people in the age group under investigation. When choosing the group, it was important that the children interviewed had the social, emotional, intellectual, physical, and speech development necessary to interpret and answer the questions.

We conducted a semi-structured interview based on predetermined questions. With a discursive interview, we initiated a short conversation based on predeveloped criteria. The data collection consisted of three parts: (1) a short introductory, motivational part; (2) main part; and (3) a concluding, closing part. Considering the number of participants, we conducted individual interviews. We supplemented the interview method with that of structured observation. Our observation criteria were focused on the following issues: (1) how the child behaved during the familiarization process; (2) what emotional reactions he/she showed during data collection; and (3) how communicative he/she was when answering open questions. We recorded our observations in minutes. To reveal the satisfaction and attitude of the children interviewed about kindergarten, we performed a quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The measuring instrument developed for the interview was based on a set of questions developed for German research, the questions of which were adapted to the characteristics of Hungarian preschool education and the kindergarten participating in the study. German research was conducted within the framework of a project in 2014. During the project, the Pedagogy and Early Childhood Development Competence Centre of the Evangelical College of Nuremberg conducted a survey of 52 young children's notion of kindergarten in 13 kindergartens, for which an age-specific data collection method and tool was developed in several stages (Sommer-Himmel, Titze & Imhof, 2016). The adopted measuring instrument included seven content units, which also showed its logical structure: Part A: Free play; Part B: Morning discussion; Part C: Joint activities; Part D: The yard as a playground; Part E: Social relations; Part F: General well-being – atmosphere; Part G: Criteria for a good kindergarten.

The measurement results primarily provided data that could be interpreted locally in relation to the kindergarten participating in the study. However, the size of the sample allows one to establish trends and to reveal views and connections with respect to the kindergarten under investigation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Emotions play an important and distinguished role in everyday pedagogical practice. They decisively influence all manifestations and actions of young children. Consequently, during the interview, we were interested to know if the children related to their kindergarten with positive or negative emotions. The results showed that, according to their own admission, the majority of the examined children loved their kindergarten, felt good and enjoyed going there. The kindergarten satisfaction index for young children was 80%. In order to explore the background variables, we asked the interviewed preschoolers to tell us why they liked or disliked going to kindergarten. For them, it was mostly personal motives (experiences, friends, the personality of the teacher) and the activities that took place that made going to kindergarten attractive. The opinions clearly reflected the indicators of the personal development of 5–6-year-old children, which have become more and more important for children in middle and large groups through social development, community and the establishment of personal relationships. These children increasingly demanded versatile activities that provide a wide space for versatile knowledge of the environment surrounding them. During kindergarten activities, they could satisfy their natural desire for knowledge and their need for exercise.

The sum of the responses showed that the children's relationship with the kindergarten depended on several factors: personality traits (e.g. how friendly or extroverted someone is); individual interests (e.g. whether the child finds the toy he/she likes the most in kindergarten); the customs brought from home (e.g. Do the customs expected at home match the customs system of the kindergarten?). The attitude of young children towards kindergarten is significantly influenced by the degree to which their basic needs (e.g. physiological, safety, and social ones) are met during kindergarten education. If they are properly met, the child will feel good there. And the child's attitudinal obstacle can make it difficult for him/her to go to kindergarten.

According to the Hungarian national basic programme, common kindergarten activities are of particular importance for the socialization of young children. Therefore, it is desirable to organize preschool life in a way that helps the development of young children's moral qualities (e.g. compassion, helpfulness, altruism, attentiveness) and will (e.g. independence, self-discipline, perseverance, sense of duty, sense of rules), as well as habits and the establishment of a norm system. During the interview, we measured the children's satisfaction with the joint kindergarten activities initiated by kindergarten teachers. The high satisfaction rate (68%) showed that the majority of children liked these activities. According to the answers, they mostly preferred to draw, paint, model, and sew. In this context, creation provides them with the greatest experience.

In the case of a negative answer (no one at all/rarely), we asked the sampled preschoolers to tell us why they were reluctant to participate in certain preschool activities. The children's comments indicated that their opinions were influenced by their individual experiences and emotions. Behind the negative attitude, we found emotional factors, the characteristic of which is that when marking the answer, the children emotionally identified with a specific task. They were associated with an unpleasant experience during or after the session or with an action in which they were reluctant to cooperate. They did not evaluate the kindergarten activities together with the teacher as a whole. On the basis of their answers,

we can conclude that, in addition to the emotion, the dislike for certain actions can also arise from habits brought from home that are contrary to kindergarten (e.g. at home you are not expected to put the toys away or to share them with anyone). A more precise exploration of the background factors behind the negative indicators requires further investigation.

According to the national basic programme, when designing the physical environment, the kindergarten must take into account that children have equipment that satisfies their need for play. This equipment is an essential part of preschool children's games. Different forms of this activity require materials that help children's imagination unfold, as well as suitable tools and play equipment. Consequently, during the investigation, we looked for an answer to the question of how satisfied the children were with the play equipment in the kindergarten group room. The data analysis allowed us to conclude that the children interviewed were generally satisfied with the toys in the group room. In this regard, four out of 35 children (11%) were dissatisfied. The negative attitude towards games was mainly due to emotional reasons. This perception of games does not express dissatisfaction with the gaming tools as a whole, but rather reflects unpleasant emotions associated with individual gaming activities. The children justified their decision from their own point of view and on the basis of their individual needs. Based on the characteristics of the participants' age, self-centred thinking is manifested in the explanations, according to which the responding children perceived reality and formed opinions from a single point of view – their own.

Finally, the interview ended with an unfinished (open-ended) sentence that was closely related to the previous question. In our last question, we asked the children to finish the following sentence: "I will tell you a sentence, finish it as you think! What I really like about my kindergarten is that..." From the end of the sentence, we can infer the most important needs, demands and desires of the children. Based on the answers given by them, we can conclude that their accepting attitude towards their own kindergarten was mostly determined by the physical environment, the activities taking place there, and the social environment, which all affect their general well-being. It can be seen that the kindergarten's pedagogical activity system, physical and personal environment ensure the most appropriate conditions for the development and education of preschool children. During preschool education, priority should be given to the organization of an environment that evokes pleasant emotions. It should be kept in mind that the environment in which the child feels comfortable promotes personal development and the expansion of social relationships. On the other hand, negative emotions hinder the child's development.

The results obtained can be interpreted in view of the basic abilities and level of development of the age group examined. During the investigation, it was established that the sampled preschool children had expectations regarding their own kindergarten, and that by combining elements of reality and imagination, they had specific ideas about the "criteria" of a good kindergarten. All in all, the children interviewed were satisfied with the education provided at their kindergarten, with the environment surrounding them, and with the pedagogical activities there. Your attitude, which influences your ideas about a good kindergarten, is dominated by your positive emotions. The results of the investigation provide a good opportunity to reflect on the educational work in the kindergarten under investigation.

CONCLUSION

The major result of the investigation is that it further refined the knowledge about the quality indicators of the relationship of 5–6-year-old children with kindergarten. After analyzing the results and comparing them with the literature, we may conclude that the criteria for children's satisfaction and attitude towards kindergarten can all be pedagogical contents, material and personal environmental factors that satisfy the needs of young children and even bring them joy. Children's satisfaction with and attitude towards kindergarten are mostly determined by their previous experiences, needs, and inner world. Important features of their idea of a good kindergarten are magical thinking and childlike realism. Self-centredness and emotion can be considered an integral part of your thinking about kindergarten.

NOTES

ⁱ The kindergarten represents the first level of the public education system in Hungary. Kindergartens for children between the age of three and compulsory school entry belong to the preschool sector of the public education system. This is regulated by the nationwide Education Act No. CXC/2011. Since 2015, kindergarten attendance in Hungary has been mandatory from the age of three with at least four hours until the age of six – a maximum of seven.

ⁱⁱ The guidelines for raising children are governed by Government Decree 363/2012. (XII. 17.) on the state basic programme for kindergarten education, on the basis of which kindergartens can develop their own detailed educational programmes in accordance with this.

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