

Edu World 2016
7th International Conference

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION – PARENTS’ PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

Early childhood is the most important period from a child’s life, as it is marked by crucial moments for its success at school and in life. Adult’s intervention during this period is fundamental. Early education targets the time interval between birth – because the child starts learning and develop since birth–and the age of 6/7 - the age of school start. Early education is done both in the family as well as within the specialized services, as day-care or kindergarten. For most of the teachers (kindergarten teacher – child carers) who took part in this study, early education of the early preschool age children was a challenge, but, after the adjusting period of the children they noticed clear progresses of their behaviour, sometimes even in short intervals of time (1-2 weeks).

The subject suggested for research is comprised within the early education field, in the meaning of specialized intervention within the small child’s education. **The education before preschool period is very important for the early development of the child.**

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Keywords: Early childhood; preschool education; parent’s perceptions.

1. Introduction

Early education is comprised of the total of individual done and social existent or organized experiences, of which the child benefits in its toddler period, aiming at protecting, growing and developing the human being by gifting it with abilities and physical, psychic, cultural achievements which could offer him identity and self-dignity. It is the basis of both physic and psychic as well as complex social, spiritual and cultural development. What children learn in their first years of life stands

for more than half of what they will learn in their entire life (Official Documents of MECTS, 2008, 2015). Early education refers strictly at the toddlers' learning moments, in a Romanian concept. This concept, in a broad sense, means the child's early development, involves learning, care and protection. Early education is done as informal education (in the family, in neighbouring and community relations, by mass-media), and as non-formal education (in sports clubs, clubs for the children, activities from non-governmental organizations).

In Romanian pedagogy early education is a relatively new concept. In a traditional way, the child's between 0 and 6/7 years old pedagogical matter, was considered as preschool education. The current educational policy involves a specific section regarding early education of the toddler. From a practical point of view, the focus in the field of early education within the current educational policy is stressed upon preschool and early preschool education (Travis & Cooper, 1996; Ionescu, 2010; Clipa, 2015).

The aim of the strategy in the field of child's early education is giving to every child the right to an education and full development in order to give him the ability to reach its full potential in accordance to the European and international standards.

The focus on early education and preschool years is important because this is the period when the children are rapidly growing and if the development process is neglected in this stage, it is more difficult and expensive to compensate these losses later (Gramaticu, 2011; Badea, 2014; Clipa & Boghean, 2015). It is well known and obvious the fact that the choices done now and the actions taken by the parents and society in early childhood have a very strong and long lasting influence on the child's individual progress and on the nations progress, in a broader sense (Clipa, Mihalache, Serdenciuc, 2016).

An efficient teaching program is a program which targets at taking into accounts the child from his first moments of existence and which involves all the educational agents contributing at its growth and development.

2. Methodology of Research

The concept of early education refers, thus, to two dimensions the beginning of the educational concerns from small ages and the family and community's involvement in the toddler and pre-schooler child's education.

The research aims proving the way in which early intervention in early preschool children is beneficial for their development and for the parents to understand the concrete methods of doing early education.

The research objectives target those concrete aspects, actionable which the teacher has to do in order to confirm or deny the aimed hypothesis.

In order to guide the research activity we established and formulated the following **objectives of the pedagogic research**:

- The research of the way children of early preschool age adjusts to kindergarten activities;
- Investigating the extent to which early education contributes to the development of early pre-schoolers and pre-schoolers sociability and emotionality;
- Identifying children's behavioural, socio-emotional difficulties by observing their behaviour during kindergarten program;

- Identifying, registering and analysing the obstacles and specific errors in early pre-schoolers groups;
- Analysing the teaching strategies used in early pre-schoolers education, from the studied mater perspective.

The study tried approaching the matter of the extent to which early influence in ante-preschool children education is beneficial for their development and for the families they belong to, targeting especially the social, relational, adjustment component of very small children at kindergarten schedule, when interacting with other adults other than the enlarged family members (parents, brothers, grandparents, uncles) as well as in establishing relationships with same age children.

The **hypothesis** represents, in pedagogical research, an enunciation which could be true or false, it is probable, potential, which is to be verified as a result of the study. The hypothesis comprises both the question and the probable answer, the last one being expressed just in a conceptual plan, leaving it to the study to assert with respect to its validity and transform it into a component of a logic-explicative theoretic structure.

In formulating the *research hypothesis* we assumed that the early pre-schoolers education programs have beneficial effects on the children education and development as well as on parents' education.

The research sample- 10 kindergartens from Botosani County, from which 4 with early pre-schoolers groups: 16 kindergarten teachers, 180 early pre-schoolers and preschool children and 142 parents.

Research variables:

- Parents' subjectivity in filling in the questionnaires, even if they are anonymous
- Observing children in their natural environment - their daily activity can be disturbed by the presence of a stranger, in this case being necessary to read the kindergarten teacher notes

Instruments/ Methods:

- Observing the early preschool and preschool children behaviour; observing and analysing the kindergarten teacher
 - Documents study: taking notes about children development, observations of the kindergarten teacher, analysis of the children activity products (portfolios),
 - Designing and implementing questionnaires,
 - Statistical data interpretation.

The experimental research was done aiming at proving the way in which early intervention in early preschool children education is good for their evolution and for their parents to understand the actual methods to be used for early education.

The research was done in 10 kindergartens with extended and normal schedules form Botosaniregion and comprised the following steps:

- *Activities attendance* within the daily schedule to the 10 selected groups (4 early preschool children, 2 middle preschool and 4 upper preschool groups),
- *Discussions* with the kindergarten teachers, medical and care staffroom kindergartens,
- *The analysis* of the school documents: monthly, annual and semester planning, in compliance with the early education Curricula requirements, the selection of age adequate contents,

- *Observing* the behaviour of the teachers and the children in kindergarten activities: the efficient combination of the activities planning forms, the use of adequate learning means for certain age particularities, intellectual development level and of the contents, the interest centres from the classrooms are arranged so as to facilitate children's access to the materials and stimulate their participation in activities; if the kindergarten teachers are creative in the teaching process, manage time correctly and follow the daily planning, relating very well to the children and their parents to reach the objectives, are interested to create a motivational and attractive educational environment for the early preschool children development,

- *Notes* of the kindergarten teacher: constant writing into the groups' observations notebook, with clear remarks resulted from direct observation of the teacher and discussions with the family,

- *Questionnaire application to the parents*: there were given questionnaires to 142 parents which have children in the early preschool group (2-3 years old), as well as in middle and upper preschool groups but which attended kindergarten since two years old.

As a result of the direct observations, the analysis of the above mentioned documents, the discussions with all the persons involved in preschool children education the following conclusions were drawn:

- From the total of 180 children observed and analysed from the 10 groups, 152 of them adjusted to the kindergarten program when they were two years old with no major problems, in one month (in the first kindergarten year); 21 of them had adjustment problems with the schedule and in relations to other adults than their parents; 5 had communication problems in the first 6 months, having great difficulties in adjusting to the schedule and 3 children could not integrate at the age of two and the parents had to withdraw them and come back the next year, at the age of three,

- The 16 kindergarten teachers prove to have skills for teaching early preschool children, both by specific training courses attendance, as well as by proving, in their teaching the competences achieved from training courses attendance. The kindergarten teacher projects and develops specific activities for the group level, they observe, interfere, help the children in their social, emotional, intellectual and practical development; they concentrate the whole teaching process on the formative part, on the children direct contact with the reality around them, on the development of each child potential depending on its own possibilities.

The observation is extremely important in child oriented education, being the basis of the preschool child assessment and consists in the attentive and systematic observation of the child behaviour (without any intervention from the kindergarten teacher), aiming at noticing its characteristic aspects.

The observation object is the children activity, the products of the activity resulted according to the programs requests for the preschool education system.

In order to know a child it is necessary a lot of time but also certain competences from the kindergarten teacher who has to:

- make objective observations;
- Correctly use the necessary instruments for information registration;
- give a pertinent interpretation to the observations.

The information that the kindergarten teacher has to obtain about the child refers to:

-the way it interacts with the objects (how it handles them, if he invents new ways of using them, if he plays with the materials from all the Centres, if he uses a variety of materials or chooses only some of them);

-the way the child interacts with the others (kindergarten teacher, children, other adults): verbal/non-verbal communication way, self-control ability, communication initiative, ability to express emotions and understand other children/adults emotions;

-the relations within the social preschool children group (if the child plays with the others, what roles does it prefer, if he initiates games, with which children it prefers to play).

As a result of the questionnaire applied to the plot of selected subjects, namely 142, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. What is the reason for which you chose this kindergarten?

Table 1. Reason for choosing the kindergarten

ANSWER OPTIONS	ANSWER NUMBERS	PERCENTAGE VALUE
a)Very good kindergarten	102	71%
b) Proximity to home	34	23%
c) Other reasons	6	6%

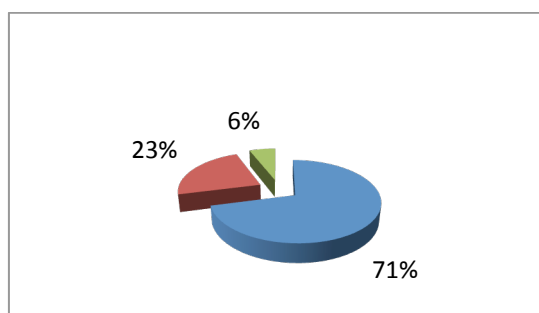


Fig.1 Percent for reasons for choosing the kindergarten

1. Are you satisfied with the teaching quality that your child gets at kindergarten?

Table 2. Satisfied about the kindergarten quality

ANSWER OPTIONS	ANSWER NUMBERS	PERCENTAGE
Unsatisfied	0	0%
Relatively satisfied	31	22%
Very satisfied	109	76%
Abstention	2	2%

The majority of the parents (76%) are declared very satisfied about the quality of the teaching methods for early education. In other article the teaching activity is perceived by the teacher from

kindergarten as one of the most stressful occupations, leading to the presumption that the preschool teacher occupation is as stressful, as the study results confirm (Clipa&Boghean, 2015).

For the questions: Are you supported by the kindergarten’s staff in educating your children? – Parents give answer in this way:

Table 3. Satisfied about the kindergarten staff in education

ANSWER OPTIONS	ANSWER NUMBERS	PERCENTAGE
Yes	142	100%
No	0	0%

For the next question about efficiency of the communication between parents and teachers, they give many positive answers (97% are very satisfied).

Table 4. Perceptions about the kindergarten communication with parents

ANSWER OPTIONS	ANSWER NUMBERS	PERCENTAGE
Yes	138	97%
No	0	0%
It can be improved	4	3%

For the following question about solve the different problem a big percent of this sample (87%) give a positive answers.

Table 5. Solve the problems in kindergarten

ANSWER OPTIONS	ANSWER NUMBERS	PERCENTAGE
Yes	124	87%
Occasional	15	10%
No	3	3%

Parents want to register the children in kindergarten at the different ages. The most of the parents bring the children at two years old in educational institution. The numbers are in a follow table:

Table 6. How old was your child when you registered it to kindergarten?

ANSWER OPTIONS	ANSWER NUMBERS	PERCENTAGE
Two years old	132	92%
Two years and six months	8	5%
Almost three years old	2	3%

Parents consider adapt of the children for the kindergarten schedule with some difficulties. Most of the parents choose partially adapt to this and 17% consider this very good.

Table 7. How old was your child when you registered it to kindergarten?

ANSWER OPTIONS	ANSWER NUMBERS	PERCENTAGE
Yes	14	9%
Partially	106	74%
No	22	17%

Parents consider very useful for children development to attend the early preschool group. All parents from the sample are agreeing to this:

Table 8. Useful the attending the early preschool group

ANSWER OPTIONS	ANSWER NUMBERS	PERCENTAGE
Yes	142	100%
No	0	0%

3. Conclusions

Early childhood is the most important period from a child’s life, since it is influenced by crucial moments for his later success, at school and in life. The adult’s intervention on the child during this period is fundamental. Early education targets the period of time comprised between births- because the child starts developing and learning since birth until the age of 6 or 7 – the age it attends school. This education is done within both family and specialized services, as well as in day-care or kindergarten (Vrasmas, 2002; Ionescu, 2010).

The results of the research proved that early integration of the children in early preschool kindergarten groups has a stimulating effect on the development of their abilities to relate, communicate, assimilate; it is a necessity for the family – which does not cover socially speaking, the period comprised between 2 and 3 years old, since the mother starts working again till the child attends youngsters group, in accordance with the National Education Law.

For most of the teachers (kindergarten teacher – child carers)who took part in this study, early education of the early preschool age children was a challenge, but, after the adjusting period of the children they noticed clear progresses of their behaviour, sometimes even in short intervals of time (1-2 weeks).

An early stimulation is very important for the child development, even if we think or notice that the little one cannot finish the tasks he received or understand the game rules. As the time passes he will grow up and will be able to finish the skills exercises. Focusing on early education is normal, as it is known that children development is rapid in this age stage, and the exploitation of the potential the child has creates the premises for his following achievements.

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