

ERD 2019

Education, Reflection, Development, Seventh Edition

QUALITY EDUCATION IN KINDERGARTEN-THE PREMISE FOR SUCCES IN SCHOOL

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Abstract

Quality in education means complex principles and practices which run through the entire educational environment, in all its components, oriented towards achieving better results against the set standards, the ultimate scope being the satisfaction of the beneficiaries of education. However, quality standards do not guarantee a quality education. This paper tries to highlight factors that lead to a quality education. The Romanian education system has experienced recently quantitative but especially qualitative changes. In this context, the preschool education has the task of properly preparing the preschool children for integration in school and society. A quality education must have as a final goal the overall development of the children by using adequate and diversified teaching - learning- evaluation strategies and by establishing real connections between the areas of child development. In such vision, the preschool education has the role of contributing through designed and executed activities to the development of preschool children’s personality. The teacher has the task of designing the educational interventions according to the necessities and interests of the child, the preschool education being a first stage in the activities of the child who is in continuous development and transformation. The preparation, organization and execution of instructive-educative activities in Kindergarten has to work towards the development of capacities and behaviours in children that are meant to insure success in school and the development of their personalities according to the requirements of the social environment.

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Keywords: Early childhood, quality-education, school readiness, wellbeing.

1. Introduction

Research has shown that the early years of life, the ending phase of schooling, are the most formative of children's lives, the years in which the foundations of developing future cognitive, social and emotional skills are good. That is why a quality education in this period of maximum flexibility and openness is not only a desideratum but also an obligation of all the actors involved in this approach: families, educational institutions, local and national communities, thus forming a basis essential for lifelong learning, social integration, and integration into society.

Children's preparation, schooling and care for children are currently the subject of heated debate both for early education specialists and for the specialists in parenting. In view of recent studies showing the impact of preschool education on the future development of children (Bruce, 2005), it is warranted to build a solid educational base from this age for shaping a harmonious personality of the future adult. The dynamics of the current society make it necessary to create educational situations that respond to the present needs of children's competencies, and teachers have the responsibility to be up-to-date with the news in the educational field and to implement them at group or individual level. There has been a long discussion about the balance between gaming activities and academic content in pre-school education, the share of scientific information transmitted and free play time, as Russell (2011) surprises.

The importance of early education, the major benefits it has to the subsequent development of children, has led, since 2000, to a change of conception and to the education of children in Romania. In this sense, the principles of the Educational Program "Organizing pre-primary education" were promoted, as promoted by Dolto (2011) in the When the Child, which dealt mainly with problems related to child development, applying psychoanalytic methods of diagnosis and treatment in the disorders psycho-affective and behavior of preadolescents.

Preschool education (3-6 years), as established by the National Education Law no. 1/2011, these are organized in three types of kindergartens: normal, prolonged and weekly program. There is also a set of minimum quality standards that they have to meet to have the right to work, these general benchmarks apply to all pre-university, state or private education units. The minimum quality standards will aim and will ensure through their fulfillment: physical development, socio-emotional development, language development, communication and written-reading prerequisites, prerequisites for cognitive development and learning abilities and attitudes in children aged 3- 6 years. Most educational establishments meet these minimum quality standards but achieving indicators and reporting to standards also leaves room for subjective interpretations taking into account the complexity and diversity of the national pre-school education system.

2. Literature Review

Over time, the perception of early education has changed a lot. For example, as Repko-Erwin (2017) found between 2001 and 2016, the expectations of reading and writing skills changed greatly, reaching the requirements of acquiring reading skills until the kindergarten was completed. On a global level, according to the 2012 UNICEF Report, it is stipulated that schooling is a viable strategy that can close the learning gap and improve access to education for all groups, especially vulnerable and

disadvantaged (United Nations Children's Fund, 2012). Of course, school preparation requires adopting policies and standards for early education, increasing investment in modernizing and equipping pre-school education, expanding the provision of educational opportunities beyond the formal services offered at this time. School preparation has been assimilated with positive social and behavioral skills in adulthood, and with improved academic outcomes in primary and secondary schools. Active parenting in child education and other activities, apart from those offered by kindergarten educational programs, contribute to the holistic development of the child (Bassok, Finch, Lee, Reardon, & Waldfogel, 2016).

The definition of school preparation can only be made taking into account that all three factors involved (child, family, school) are subject to social, cultural and historical influences (Rogoff, 2003). At the individual level, research shows that training for school is related to learning, school completion, skills development, and the acquisition of academic skills and non-academic success.

As a significant change in pre-school education in Romania, it should be noted the moment when the starting age of schooling was lowered from 7 to 6 years. Early childhood education has been and is a UNICEF priority, with a key role to play in achieving the third-millennium development goal of ensuring that all children (girls and boys) complete their primary education cycle.

The European vision on quality education comes as a complement to previous initiatives aimed at accessing early education of as many children as possible and increasing the number of places in the early education system. The development directions envisaged for providing quality education at the pre-school age are: providing the highest quality learning experiences to both children and their families, highly trained teachers, tailor-made curriculum, monitoring and evaluation of programs, governance and funding.

2.1. Quality education between standards and reality

Starting from the definition offered by ARACIP (2007) regarding quality in education as a complex of principles and practices that cross the entire educational environment, in its entirety, being oriented both towards achieving superior results, in relation to standards and to meet the needs and expectations of the beneficiaries of education, we will make an analysis to show that the fulfilment of the quality standards does not guarantee the quality of education. This work attempts to highlight the factors that condition and generate a quality education.

Recently, Romanian education has undergone changes in both quantitative and, above all, qualitative, pre-primary education, and has been tasked to prepare the pre-school child for its integration into school and society. Quality education must have as a mandatory educational purpose the global development of the child through the appropriate and diversified use of the teaching-learning-evaluation strategies and the establishment of real links between the areas of child development as stipulated in the Curriculum for Preschool Education (*Curriculum pentru educația timpurie a copiilor de la 3 la 6/7 ani*, 2008).

Pre-school education in Romania respects the principles of adapting the school to the needs of the students (Bogaert, Delmarle, & Preda, 2012) by accommodating a variety of developmental levels and peculiarities in a stimulating educational environment centered on valorizing the children's availability and needs. The teacher has a broader view of the level of development of each child and, as concluded in

the "Skills Training in the Kindergarten" (Bogaert et al., 2012), it is "able to advance in the development of its skills" and understanding. The Kindergarten manages to harmonize between the essence of formal education and what is defining for informal education. Kindergarten is formal as an institutional structure but informal as a style (spontaneous, familiar, flexible, personalized).

In this vision, pre-primary education has the role of contributing through the activities designed and developed to the formation and development of the personality of pre-school children. The teacher has the task to establish educational interventions in accordance with the needs and interests of the child, early education presenting itself as a first stage in defining the development of the child, in a continuous transformation.

The preparation, organization and development of educational activities in the kindergarten should aim at the formation of cognitive and behavioural capacities meant to ensure the success of children at the school entrance and the development of personality according to the requirements of contemporary society.

2.2. School readiness

It is important to see globally how to conceptualize school preparation and how the unique features, those considered important in certain cultures and countries, are highlighted in order for child adaptation to be successful in larger educational contexts.

According to the researchers Ionescu and Benga (2007), the main prerequisites of schooling, classified as relevant on the basis of the literature, are:

- a) physical and mental health
- b) cognitive skills - or pre-requisites related to basic cognitive functioning - which include:
 - The ability to stay focused on pregnancy
 - inhibiting irrelevant behaviours (or irrelevant stimuli)
 - attention
 - persistence in pregnancy
 - memory
 - language - the ability to communicate
 - the ability to solve problems
 - the organizational capacity of the material
 - interest in learning
 - curiosity
- c) socio-emotional skills - or pre-requisites related to efficient operation within a group - including:
 - listening, following the instructions, participating in group work, responsibility, cooperation, initiative (respectively social learning skills)
 - sharing with others, respect for others, positive interactions (ie, interpersonal social skills)
 - Recognition of own and other emotions, acquiring rules of emotional expression, emotional and behavioral regulation, positive affectivity (respectively, emotional ability)

d) academic abilities - or specific cognitive skills, pre-requisites for school-based knowledge and skills - consisting of:

- recognition of letters and figures
- Copying letters and numbers by pattern
- Knowing the different dimensions of objects (e.g. size, shape, length, colour, function, etc.)
- The ability to make various classifications (e.g animals, cars, objects with the same colour, objects of the same colour, etc.)
- solving simple math problems (e.g, gathering, dropping)
- knowledge of the part-whole type

At the individual level, research shows that training for school is related to learning, school completion, skills development, and the acquisition of academic skills and non-academic success.

Child Learning and Development Standards (RFIDT) are the starting point for developing a whole set of standards for human resources, services and public policies on childcare, care and protection from birth up to 6-7 years.

3. Research Method

It is very important that staff of institutions, teachers, parents, extended families, community and society work together to agree on the framework in which children develop and learn best. We also need a common vision on the transposition of quality into practice. This can be expressed through school or study programs based on good practice examples of how children develop and learn. Equally important is finding macro support, so policymakers must provide the resources, governance infrastructure and all those elements that will create what has often been described as a competency-based system that promotes quality at all levels, from the decision-making process to the children's experiences. The starting point for improving the quality of children's education is to ensure that we have a solid, competent, confident workforce that will find satisfaction in the work being done, in order to be able to project that positive attitude that shapes the educational process of young people. We must acknowledge as essential the work of preschool education professionals. If they do not do a good job in the education of preschool children, we will experience delays throughout the education system.

4. Analyses and Findings

The quality of a school or kindergarten can be given by a multitude of factors, including the educational climate, the physical environment, the quality of the interactions between the actors involved: children, teachers, parents. Indicators of a quality kindergarten appear in each lesson, auxiliary material, methodical activity, teacher-teacher discussions, the relationship of director-local authorities, teachers-parents. Therefore, a kindergarten offering quality education aims to achieve, through all its components, some educational performance criteria.

By defining the quality of education law as set out in the Guide to the Quality Assessment and Quality Assurance Committee in pre-university education establishments as "the set of characteristics of an education provider and its program through which the expectations of the beneficiaries and the quality

standards are met", we observe two aspects of this : The subjective side, the expectations of the beneficiaries, which may vary according to the kindergarten's social environment, the level of training, the social and material status of the parents, the objective side represented by the quality standards. There is no unitary concept of quality, judged according to the values promoted in society and at the level of the school organization, the educational policies, and strategies existing at the national, regional and local levels, the existing situation being defined by contextual and situational factors.

5. Conclusion

In Romania, there is a unitary national framework for quality assurance, for all that means education and training. The Education Quality Act has been developed, approved and has been in force since 2006, with promoters claiming that it is based on European initiatives and documents. It defines the general concepts of ensuring and assessing the quality of education as they emerge from other quality systems that underpin the development of quality assurance standards, tools and procedures. The areas and quality criteria considered for pre-university education are:

- A. Institutional capacity
- B. Educational effectiveness
- C. Quality Management (Calitate în educație, 2011)

Going through the "Total Quality Circle" (ARACIP, 2007), the starting point is the didactic process (as the first link to quality assurance), but the way it is reflected in the educational offer of the institution is the key to success. Of course, going through the quality circle requires setting up improvement measures that lead to individual, and organizational development, facilitating the link between what teachers actually make and the quality indicators /standards.

Analysing the offerings of several preschool schools in the urban environment, it is noted that most of them have a good organization of activity and infrastructure development, diversified services, curriculum and optional ones, too little stake in the quality of the human resource, which makes the difference in our opinion, between a high-quality education and the one that meets the minimum quality indicators. A great challenge for state educational institutions is the human resource. The Law of National Education, no.1 / 2011, states that the initial training for the teaching function includes initial training, didactic masters, practical training. In fact, the didactic does not exist, so that, after the initial training part, one year of didactic activity, the beginners can finish their education. Due to the very short time spent at the chair and the lack of experience, the training being more theoretical, the debutants are very confused and often overwhelmed by the many problems that arise in the department's work. A determinant factor in this aspect is the insufficient number of hours of classroom pedagogy and the lack of training on issues related to communicating and addressing issues related to interactions with children's parents. That is why a large part of the debut teachers quit the didactic career. This results in too much fluctuation of teachers, reaching paradoxical situations: there are kindergartens offering logopedic services, very good psychological counseling, having adequate infrastructure and organization, but poorly trained and disinterested teachers. Although the minimum standards are met, due to the quality of the didactic act, the number of children is reduced and the education units abolished. There are kindergartens that fail to meet some of the Institutional Capacity / School space quality indicators because they have

small spaces and are overcrowded with children who want to learn from highly trained teachers who do their profession with professionalism and dedication. It can't be disputed that the level of remuneration for this profession is also a demotivating factor for debutants. Consistent with the European vision of the quality of the educational activities offered by the educational institutions is based on a high level of qualification of the teaching staff, they need to involve and support the community as an equal partner in the formation of exceptional generations. Consequently, knowing and recognizing the importance of quality standards in education are absolutely necessary conditions, but never and enough to achieve quality education.

Good cooperation between all the actors involved in preparing children for school is one of the elements on which quality education is based. Developing a common framework that has as its primary objective the child and his / her well-being will facilitate the learning process.

In the paper Five Steps for Quality - European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (2016), the authors argue that the notion of quality is complex and relative. "It is constantly on the move, depending on the development of new perspectives or the domination of beliefs and values." Deciding factors should consider keeping and improving the quality of early education following three major directions:

1. structural quality refers to system and organization (recognition conditions, financing, safety requirements, etc.)
2. the quality of the process relates to educational practice within an ECEC framework (curriculum, parenting, interactions with children, etc.)
3. the quality of the results refers to the benefits for (development) of young children, parents, communities, and society (welfare, involvement, social skills and learning opportunities, etc.) (Tankersley & Ionescu, 2015).

Each child is unique, with its own personality, potential, needs, living conditions, etc. The child is considered to be a competent and meaningful agent of active intelligence, eager to learn and enjoy well-being. All children have the right to education and care, so the adults involved in their lives must offer them the opportunity to develop in the best possible way and under the best conditions (Van Keulen & Del Barrio, 2012). Parents are the first educators and must be actively involved in children's education as partners. It is also important to respect and respect the diversity of families and their beliefs and different views on education.

Acknowledgments

Early education has the strength to build the foundation that will give children the potential and to train them to take advantage of the benefits of education throughout the educational process, as well as in their professional and personal life. In the preschool period we build solid foundations, stimulating learning skills such as creativity, self-regulation, problem solving. We educate children capable of empathy, kindness and understanding, preparing them to be active members of the community and society.

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