

CONSTATIVE STUDY REGARDING THE CHOOSING CRITERIA OF THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

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Abstract: *The paper presents several criteria used by the parents of the kindergarten children before their children registration. They must choose from the multitude of existing kindergartens, the one that best suits their requirements. The research method used was the survey with the working tools: individual interview and focus group. The target group was made up of parents of preschool children from the municipality of Brasov. The research results follow the proposed objectives and hypotheses and are presented on the applied research tools. The ordering of the criteria was based on the results obtained by conducting the study. The conclusions drawn lead to the idea that the choice of kindergarten must take into account certain criteria, but also the characteristics of the child, his needs, his level of development and how he will adapt. With the help of the kindergarten and parents, preschool children will find the key to future success in adapting and integrating schools.*

Keywords: *kindergarten; criteria; preschool education; preschool children;*

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to realize an inventory of the kindergarten selection criteria by the parents with preschool children. When comes the time of enrolling the child in kindergarten, parents wonders what would be the best place for him. They must choose from the multitude of existing kindergartens, the one that best suits their requirements. As enrolment in kindergartens is taking place in a short time, the number of institutions in pre-school education is increasing, and the material demands are increasing, the parents are facing great difficulties.

In the past, state kindergartens were the only solution of teaching the little ones. In the present times the situation has changed completely. The state kindergarten began to be replaced with the private kindergarten by the vast majority of parents. The reasons for this phenomenon are diversified: the classes have few children enrolled, the teachers are better prepared, the educational activities are more diverse and attractive, the program is extended and the number of available places is higher.

However, there are also state kindergartens that have begun to diversify their activities. It is not always important that the amount that is paid within a preschool institution, but the child's assimilation capacities, as well as its results that are observed over time.

2. State of the art of kindergarten education

2.1. Early education - conceptual clarifications

In the broadest sense, education means the process that begins when the human is born and lasts a lifetime. Education aims to achieve the ideal of the human being, expressed by "being and becoming", a dynamic process, but also flexible, adapted to each person.

Preschool age is undoubtedly the educational foundation of all life. Due to their young age, preschool education has a specific character. This period, as care and education, forms the basis of the later life (Golu, 1995).

The family represents the first educational court, through which the child forms his personality and makes his debut on the path of social integration. Socialization is then achieved

through pre-preschool and preschool education. An essential impact on the process of socializing the child is the kindergarten, which contributes to the process of building the personality of the child in one of the most malleable and most vulnerable stages of age. Demonstrating itself as a unitary action, education fulfils its desires through the close connection between the family and the educational environment, respectively the kindergarten (Băran Pescaru, 2004).

The educational services offered by the kindergarten create for the preschool children the necessary conditions for a normal development, allowing each one to follow his personal path of growth and development. At the same time, it offers support for improvement of the psychic and physical potential of each child, for the interaction with the environment, favours the discovery by each child of his own identity and forms a positive self-image (Glava, 2004).

Early education takes place before school age, in order to develop the child's personality harmoniously. Early education should help a child be prepared for a smooth transfer to school.

Early education often focuses on learning through play, based on Jean Piaget's research and philosophy, which argues that play meets the physical, intellectual, linguistic, emotional and social needs of children. Learning through play will allow a child to develop cognitively (Butler, 2016).

Early education can be classified as follows:

- Pre-preschool education, addressed to the children between the ages of 1 and 3, also called the first childhood. Generally, pre-kindergarten education takes place in nurseries, day centres or kindergartens. It represents the primary, coherent life experience, being impregnated by the learning of verbal communication.
- The preschool education is addressed to children between 3 and 5/6 years, it is organized in kindergartens with normal, prolonged and weekly program and represents the stage in which the learning and psycho-behavioural deficiencies of the children are detected, ensuring at the same time preparing the child for entry into primary education.

In the context of the world view on the training and development of the child, from a qualitative point of view, early education places its mark throughout the child's life. The enrolment in the kindergarten and the participation in its entire educational path are conditions for a successful school and social integration.

1.2. Synthetic analysis of the role of the parent in the choice of kindergarten

When it is necessary to enrol in the kindergarten, the parents must choose from the multitude of existing kindergartens the one that best suits their requirements.

Following a study conducted in the online environment, we extracted, based on the testimonies of parents, several criteria for selecting a kindergarten:

- ***proximity to the house*** is a criterion taken into account by parents who have a low availability of time and who prefer to use the reduced distance from home to kindergarten. Sometimes, due to the need to structure their time according to other activities, parents leave in the care of their grandparents or close persons, the task of bringing or taking the child to / from the kindergarten.
- ***proximity to the employment place***
- ***the quality of the teaching staff*** - the professional training, the results obtained, the involvement, the affection manifested towards children
- ***the educational offer*** of the kindergarten, which includes instructional program: educational projects carried out; extracurricular activities (foreign languages, creative workshops, etc.); shows, excursions, visits, walks; the material resources available to the kindergarten (spaces, materials, etc.), human resources, etc.
- ***the recommendation*** is a criterion worth considering, because the recommendation is made from the previous experience of the one who does it and who is satisfied with the services

provided and the evolution of the child. This choice is based on trust, and expectations are mostly confirmed and satisfactory.

- *the value of the monthly fee* is a selection criterion, in the light of the approach regarding the value for money.

- *number of children enrolled in the class*

- *the security of the kindergarten.*

Depending on the time the parents have, they can choose one of the three options: normal program (4 hours), extended program (8 hours) or weekly program (Monday to Friday). Given that the time allocated to the child can only be valorised in the evening, the kindergarten program becomes a decisive factor. This choice is based on the need for compensation, the need to maintain a structured, adequate and varied program even in the absence of the parent. The expectations of the parent refer to the structure of this program (meal, sleep, educational activities, extracurricular activities, trips, individual activities), so that the parental role is fulfilled.

Depending on the material possibilities that parents have, as well as the educational offers of kindergartens, the following options are considered:

- the state kindergartens, with qualified personnel, low costs (only for the payment of food in the case of those with an extended program), but with many children enrolled in a class and often with reduced facilities.
- private kindergartens, with appropriate facilities, diversified activities that are not often found in state institutions, but which impose higher costs.
- "Step by step" kindergartens, which are oriented towards organizing on centres of interest where the child can develop his creativity and develop according to his own choices. The disadvantage of these kindergartens is the lack of continuity with primary education.

The parents of the pre-schoolers have difficulties in enrolling the children, they must respect the registration calendar and they have to choose from a large number of educational institutions. There is a preference for private kindergartens, because the number of children enrolled in the group is lower than in state institutions, the educational offer is more varied and included in the attendance fee, the work schedule and the number of vacancies is higher.

The state kindergartens have begun to diversify their educational offer, including activities that attract the attention of parents/ children and motivate them in their choice. Of interest are the results obtained over time (the skills formed for preschool children).

3. Research methodology

The aspects that make it necessary to investigate the behaviour of parents with preschool children regarding the choice of a kindergarten consist in the existence of a large number of kindergartens in the municipality of Brasov, both private kindergartens and the state kindergarten.

It is necessary for the kindergartens to know the criteria according to which parents are guided in choosing the kindergarten for their children, which are the features that differentiate one kindergarten from another, as well as the effort that they make to bring their children to one from kindergartens.

The research problem:

- *What are the reasons and criteria for choosing kindergarten in the vision of parents with preschool children?*

Research objectives:

1. Identification of the opinion of the specialized inspector regarding the criteria for choosing a kindergarten by the parents.

2. Identification of parents' opinion on the criteria for choosing kindergarten according to the following indicators:

2.1 Identify the criteria for choosing kindergarten

2.2 Establishing the importance given to each criterion for choosing kindergarten

The hypotheses from which we started are the following:

1. The parents from Brasov with preschool children choose a kindergarten for them according to certain criteria, the criterion of approaching the house being decisive.

2. The professional training of the staff plays an important role in increasing the quality in education.

The topic that is the subject of the research is the identification of the criteria for choosing a kindergarten by the parents of the preschool children.

The research method was the survey, with the tools: interview guide and focus group.

The objective of the interview was to identify the kindergarten selection criteria for the parents of preschool children, from the perspective of a specialized inspector. Therefore, we conducted an interview with the preschool education inspector, Mrs. Necula Gabriela, with a vast experience in education (41 years).

The guide is divided into two sections and contains six open questions. The first section aimed to identify the opinion of the inspector on the criteria of kindergarten choice for parents of preschool children, and in the second section it is proposed to identify recommendations for parents to help them identify the right kindergarten for their child.

The second research tool used is the focus group. This represents a variant of the group interview, focused and structured, in which the participants can get involved in the discussion, either by answering the same question, or by engaging in the discussion generated by launching a controversial idea, or by constructing answers, based on presenting a scenario of ideas, either through brainstorming (Bocoş, 2003).

The focus group guide consists of several sections. The first section presents the topic discussed and the way of working. The participants are then asked to present themselves. The rules to be respected are made known to the participants, as well as the duration of the meeting.

The second section contains the questions that will be addressed to the parents, in order to carry out the research. The questions asked are both open questions, which require answers from the participants, as well as questions for selecting a variant and motivating the choice, but also questions related to personal satisfaction and intervention in the case of a decision-making power. The moderator notes all ideas presented during the discussion, with minimal verbal interventions. The group of subjects is represented by parents with preschool children from Brasov County. For the focus group, the group is consisted of 15 parents recruited on a voluntary basis. All participants fall into the 25-39 years age segment, four men and 11 women. From the focus group volunteers 12 have higher education and 3 secondary education. 11 have one child and 4 have two children.

4. Research results

The processing of the results obtained after their collection with the proposed research instruments will be structured according to the objectives of the present research.

4.1. Interview analysis

The interview was held at the Brasov School Inspectorate, in the office of Mrs. Inspector, a comfortable environment, known, which aimed to obtain concrete information on the chosen topic. The interview guide used in the present research is structured, the topic and

the proposed questions are known. During the interview I also asked helpful questions, to clarify the information requested.

At the beginning, the parents' choice of kindergarten was discussed. When asked about the criteria considered by the parents, the inspector listed: the proximity of the house or the working place, as well as the quality of the teachers or the educational offer of the kindergarten.

- *What are the legislative provisions regarding the choice of kindergarten? Is your home account taken into account?*

From a legislative point of view, they have priority in the registration and admission, those that respect the general criteria of separation approved by the Ministry of National Education.

These are: the existence of a document that proves that a child is orphaned by one or both parents, the existence of a brother/ sister registered in the respective school, the existence of a medical certificate for the degree of disability of the child.

In addition, each educational institution may establish specific selection criteria, approved by the Board of Directors and submitted to the School Inspectorate Brasov for approval. These criteria cannot be discriminatory and cannot include pre-registration lists and will only be applied after the general criteria have been exhausted.

- *What is the minimum age at which children can be received in kindergarten?*

According to the specifications regarding the enrolment in the preschool education, the occupation of vacant places is usually done in the decreasing order of the age groups, so for beginner class, the children of 3 years old will have priority. In case the available places cannot be completed, children from 2 to 3 years old can be enrolled.

- *What would you recommend to your parents before choosing the kindergarten?*

The inspector would recommend to parents an overview of kindergartens in the home or working area, knowledge of the legislation regarding enrolment in kindergarten, as well as a comparative study between state and private kindergartens.

- *What information should they have?*

The information that the parents must have are those related to the kindergarten program, the number of teachers / child care persons, information related to the registration procedure.

- *What should parents clarify when they visit kindergarten?*

At a visit of the kindergarten the parent must clarify the notions about the type of existing meal (catering or own food block), the available spaces (classrooms, playground, dining room, etc.) and the knowledge of the Internal Order Regulation or other aspects specific to the unit. A visit to the schools targeted for enrolment is useful, as there may be questions that require a timely explanation or other clarification issues.

Through this interview I proposed to find the opinion of a specialized inspector, with vast experience in the field of pre-school education, regarding these criteria for selecting the kindergarten, respectively the information and the steps that parents must take before choosing the kindergarten.

Analysing the answers offered to the first question, regarding the criteria for the kindergarten's choice by the parents of the preschool children, the inspector confirmed that the proximity to the house is the main selection criterion, followed by the quality of the teachers and the educational offer of the kindergarten.

The legislative provisions approved by the MEN regarding the choice of kindergarten is favourable to the parents who have more than one child enrolled in the unit, as well as single-parent families, families with children who have been certified as disabled or children who are orphans. They have priority regardless of the area in which they live.

From the point of view of the legislative provisions, the children of 3 years old have priority in the enrolment, those between 2 and 3 years can be admitted, only within the limit of the places available.

The recommendations of the specialized inspector are aimed at informing the parents about the aspects related to the registration procedure and those concerning the specificity of each kindergarten.

The inspector's answers verified the hypotheses, according to which the parents choose their kindergarten for the child according to specific criteria, such as approaching the house and professional training.

4.2. Focus group analysis

We present below the data obtained from the focus group application. The activity took place in a classroom, arranged with a large blackboard, for about an hour. It started with a brief presentation of the topic and with the statement of the main rules for conducting discussions.

4.2.1 Themes analysis

Question 1. Is it necessary for a child to go to kindergarten?

The first question concerned the introduction in the topic of the participants. All participants consider that it is important for a child to attend the community, from the preschool age laying the foundations of education for the whole life.

Question 2. How important is it for you to attend a kindergarten by the preschool child?

The kindergarten has an essential impact on the socialization process of the child, it contributes to the process of building the personality of the child in one of the most malleable and vulnerable stages of age. Some participants admit that the kindergarten is also a place where they feel their children safe, supervised while the parents are at work.

Question 3. What do you most want from a kindergarten?

Parents expect from a kindergarten: safety, education, supervision, good conditions. Some expect collaboration and involvement from staff.

Question 4. What were the criteria for choosing your kindergarten for your child?

Some of the criteria for choosing a kindergarten are:

- proximity to the house (home). The kindergarten is chosen according to how close it is the proximity to the child's home. Usually this choice belongs to parents who have a low availability of time, sometimes bringing the child to kindergarten even being left in the care of grandparents or other close persons. This choice is based on the availability of the parent, the need to structure his time to be in agreement with all his activities. A close location implies the possibility of easy access to bring the child in the morning and take him at the appointed time.
- proximity to the employment place
- well-trained staff - affectionate, warm, communicative educators, who do their job with passion, dedication and respect towards children
- the educational offer of the kindergarten,
- recommendation.

Question 5. From the following list of criteria choose the ones that best fit with you. Motivate!

Each parent presented the criteria considered most important in choosing the kindergarten for their child, motivating the choice. One parent believes that the importance of early childhood education for the safety of ascending to higher education must be discussed, and for this the most important criterion for choosing kindergarten is the qualified, well-trained and constantly improving staff.

Most parents find it important home proximity when choosing a kindergarten, because it is more convenient to bring the child to kindergarten, while others consider that a quality

education is done only in a small group, with few enrolled children, where the educator can handle better each child.

- 9 parents considered the most important criterion house proximity, the frequency of quotation being $F_i = 0.6$
- 8 parents appreciated the professional training of the educators, with a frequency of F_i citation = 0.53
- 7 parents appreciated the small number of children enrolled in the group (citation frequency $F_i = 0.46$)

The other citation frequencies are:

Food menu diversity: 0.33; working place proximity: 0.26; the interior and exterior appearance of the kindergarten (courtyard, furnishings, facilities): 0.26; Optional activities (extracurricular): 0.13.

Question 6. If they were to be ranked, what would you consider to be the order of the kindergarten selection criteria? What do you take into account when looking for a kindergarten?

Following the horizontal analysis we will be able to see how the subjects appreciated each criterion separately, we will be able to calculate average scores for each criterion and we will be able to achieve their hierarchies.

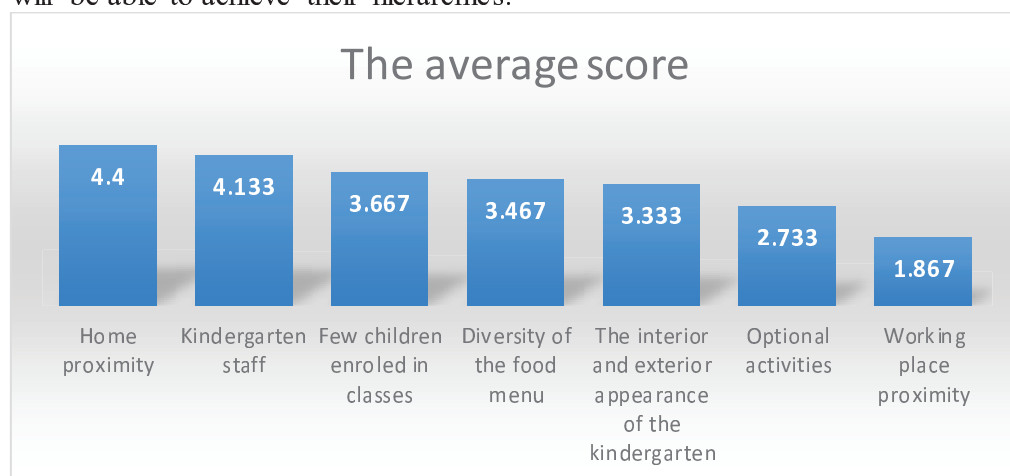


Figure 1 The average score of the criteria

Criteria	Subject															The average score
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Home proximity	5	2	5	5	4	5	5	2	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	4.4
Working place proximity	1	4	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	1	2	1	1	4	1.86
Few children enroled in classes	4	4	5	4	5	4	3	5	5	2	2	3	3	2	4	3.66
Diversity of the food menu	5	3	4	2	5	3	4	5	3	2	4	2	3	3	4	3.46
The appearance of the kindergarten	5	5	5	1	1	4	2	5	4	2	1	5	2	3	5	3.33
Kindergarten staff	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	1	3	2	5	4	4.13
Optional activities	3	3	2	4	2	2	4	2	3	1	2	3	2	4	4	2.73

Table 1 The average score of the criteria

Following the analysis of the data captured in the tables and the graph above, the differences between the opinions of the subjects can be noticed.

It was observed that the subjects consider the first choice criterion the proximity of the house (average score 4.4) when they intend to enrol their child in a kindergarten, which further verifies the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis is also verified because on the second place in choosing a kindergarten is the kindergarten staff from the perspective of quality, with an average score of 4.13 points. The second hypothesis was also confirmed by the data obtained from the processing of the interview of the inspector, who considered important the quality of the teachers in a kindergarten (from the point of view of their professional training), which is advisable to be clarified before enrolment.

The following criteria, in descending order of the average score obtained are: the reduced number of children enrolled in the group (average score 3.67), but also the diversity of the food menu (average score 3.47), the kindergarten aspect (average score 3.33), optional activities (average score 2.73) and proximity to the employment place (average score 1.87). *Question 7. How do we know that a kindergarten is appropriate for the child? What are the signs? How is the child's behaviour? (Indicator 2.3)*

The parents considered that they found the right kindergarten if their own child comes with pleasure in the morning. Parents expect to see the results of the child relationship with the educators, to have a permanent feedback on the child's progress, to see child interaction with other children, adaptation and progress. Parents expect an easy adaptation of the child in this environment and that he/ she will feel good during the time spent here.

Question 8. What would you change in kindergarten if you had the power to make decisions?

Only seven participants answered this question. They offered answers such as: extension of the kindergarten program, selection of teachers according to the preferences of the children, vegetarian menus and reduction of the number of children enrolled in the class.

4.2.2. Content analysis

In this analysis we identified a number of themes with the related sub-themes. These resulted from the questions asked to the participants, but also from the answers provided by them.

- Kindergarten attendance: education, easy access, liability, involvement, adaptation, professional preparation, collaboration, availability
- Selection criteria: proximity to the house, optional activities, personal, proximity to the workplace, program, diversity of the menu, aspect, quality
- The suitable kindergarten: freedom, creativity, results, friendship, relationship

4.2.3. Thematic analysis

This analysis aims to find certain statements that express an opposition, a contradiction. Thus, we identified a number of such pairs, in the participants' answers. Although there were conflicting opinions, no major differences were reached.

- Kindergarten attendance
 - education / supervision
 - responsibility / lack of interest
 - monotony / change
- Selection criteria
 - Near the house / employment place
 - Quality / disinterest
 - Staff trained
 - Diversity menu / vegetarian menu

- The suitable kindergarten
 - freedom / constraint
 - friendship / isolation
 - adaptation / maladaptation
 - communication / lack of communication

4.2.4. *Nonverbal analysis*

Participants: There were 15 people between the ages of 25-39 years, 4 male and 11 female. In addition to these, the moderator was present. Other people did not intervene in the elaboration of the responses of this focus group.

The place chosen for the focus group is the kindergarten address, in a relaxed and favourable atmosphere for the chosen theme.

The participants were attentive to the explanations and the rules presented. The analysis of nonverbal has shown interest in the proposed topic, the parents gladly participating in the focus group.

The four present fathers gave a humorous note to some of the answers, which set the mood apart. The moms were serious, involved and sincere in the answers offered.

All participants were actively involved in providing answers, expressed their views and expressed their willingness to participate in such meetings.

4.2.5. *Precision analysis*

Most of the answers were object or partially punctuated, which proves the involvement of the participants in the proposed research.

4.2.7. *Analysis of responses with emotional involvement*

The responses with emotional involvement were sincere. One of the moms presented the dilemma she had about the kindergarten suitable for his child, who had a more difficult and lasting adaptation. He was about to give up, but he had the support of the educators and, with good cooperation, she managed to overcome this problem.

4.2.8. *Conversational analysis*

The conversation between the participants was free, the questions were open and allowed the presentation of personal opinion. Generally, the fathers answered the first ones and they were the ones who had contradictory opinions. Different opinions were accepted and no conflict was reached.

5. Conclusions

Following the research conducted by the focus group method, it was found that one of the significant criteria in choosing a kindergarten by parents with preschool children is the proximity to the house. Another criteria, almost as important as the first, is the kindergarten staff, who must be well prepared and of a high moral standard, to ensure a model to be followed for children. Other criteria were analysed, the parents considering them as important as the small number of children enrolled in the group, the diversity of the food menu, the interior and exterior aspect of the kindergarten, the optional activities, but also the proximity to the employment place. As proposals, I can mention the need for quality improvement activities in kindergartens, in order to eliminate the discrepancies between those with many requests and those who cannot carry out the schooling plan. These can be: participation of teachers in training courses and of the director in new managerial training courses, retention of beginner educators in the system, initiation of national and international collaborations, partnerships with kindergartens from the county and from outside the county, identifying effective solutions

for the educational monitoring of children with very busy parents, developing and improving the material base, initiating collaborative projects with various companies. Proposals for parents refer to the need for more rigorous information on the human and material resources held by kindergartens before enrolling the child in a preschool unit. The choice of the kindergarten must also take into account the child's personality, his/ her characteristics, the level of development and his / her needs to ensure subsequent success.

Thus, we consider that, when choosing the right kindergarten, parents should take into account several criteria, which should be complementary and lead to the development and preparation for the life of the preschool child.

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