

## THE IMPACT OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE NEXT LEVELS OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: CASE STUDY THE CITY OF SKOPJE

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**Abstract:** Little attention has been paid to the principles in which early childhood education affects the quality of other educational system levels in terms of quality and long-life learning processes. In this research, we discuss some challenges of early childhood education with a bearing on its impact in the upcoming years of education, significance and importance of preschool education. The main reason is to be found in theoretical and empirical insights how this first level of education can impact the contextual and situational dimensions of all kinds of learning and how the system can affect stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Methodologically, as above mentioned, the research combines the theoretical and empirical approaches (literature review and survey) with particular focus on the empirical data. Through literature review we tend to emphasize the importance of preschool education and its positive effects on the process of learning. On the other side, the empirical approach provides data regarding the relationship between low attendance (in preschool classes) and the success of the child in primary education and further classes, with the aim to identify eventual weaknesses of the educational system and offer some recommendations on how the relationship between the levels of education can be improved in order to increase the general level of quality for all actors involved; pupils, educators/teachers and parents. It analyzes data from a survey of 60 pupils (divided in two groups) to identify discrepancies between those who have attended preschool classes and those who didn't. Parents have been part of the survey as well. An interview has been conducted with 30 parents with the aim to identify their uncertainties for not sending children in pre-classes and their perceptions and satisfaction towards the educational system.

The results have shown significant differences in terms of success between children attending preschool classes compared to the others, which is an important indicator of how attendance of preschool education can positively affect the system as a whole. Most of the parents interviewed communicate different reasons for not sending their children in preschool classes. Reasons prevailing are mostly related to the economic claims and parents' skepticism and dissatisfaction towards kindergartens' infrastructure, staff involved, etc.

**Keywords:** education; system; Macedonia

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*"All I really need to know, I learned in Kindergarten" – Robert Fulghum*

Preschool education corresponds with a very important period of childhood personality development and is crucial and is crucial for individual growth which will approach to success as a professional and productive segment of the society. As Sigmund Freud states: *"Early childhood experiences are crucial to the personality of an adult"* (Durmishaj, 2006). Said this, the importance of preschool education, ie, the kindergarten is indisputable in terms of alteration the child's abilities to socialize, interact effectively with others, and above all to increase his learning skills. When the child is attending the kindergarten, he will first learn the basics; in math, science, reading, writing, social studies and more. Most parents want their child to be prepared for the first grade and beyond and in almost all cases the kindergarten makes it possible. The kindergarten will expose the child to all sorts of things he should know, from the moment he reaches the first grade

As studies show, the kindergarten has a positive impact on the development of the child's ability to socialize with other children. Their ability to think, use and recognize their language and motor skills is further developed through game, art, dance, music, movement and other activities that take place in kindergartens. Most importantly, a nursery child learns to become an effective student. As he develops and expands his communication skills, builds self-confidence, learns to be creative and develops other skills that then help him succeed in math, reading or other subjects.

Previous Research findings from the past decade unequivocally agree that the first years of life are a critical period of intense learning for children; these years provide the foundation for later academic and social success. The value of investing to ensure that all children get the best start in life is increasingly evident to governments around the world. Key to this focus has been the acknowledgement that investment in the early years, in both time and

money, has been shown to be far more cost-effective than investments made at any other time (AIHW 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Heckman & Masterov 2004; Keatsdale 2003; Moore 2006).

This research is being undertaken to offer some indications on how preschool education can affect the child's development in terms of learning and overall process of education and in the same time investigate issues related to the process aiming to offer some concrete recommendations on how these issues can be overcome.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

From a methodological point of view, this research is a mix between quantitative and qualitative methods. The primary data was obtained by using the archives (databases) of the nursery and kindergarten directorate "Fidani" in the Municipality of Chair, from which we provided the data of 30 students who regularly attended preschool education before starting primary education. For the same children, the data was tracked and provided from the database of the primary school "Hasan Prishtina". From the same school was also provided a second sample with 30 other children who did not attend preschool education and used them to compare the variables: the success in the 5 years of elementary education among kindergartens and non-kindergartens. The sampling was intentional and the goal was to understand whether the success of students depends most on the educational work of kindergartens or the success of these students is the result of the work of teachers in elementary education and the kindergarten is not necessarily a success indicator. A qualitative interview was conducted therefore 30 parents were interviewed, whose children did not attend preschool education. The interview consisted of three parts. At the demographic part, the aim was to understand whether the educational and professional level of parents influences their perception of non-dispersal of children in kindergartens. The second part focused on understanding parents' perception towards preschool education and in the third and main part the aim was to understand the reasons why some parents choose or are forced not to send their children to preschool education.

*Specific objectives of this research are:*

- ✓ To analyze how the kindergarten affects the child's ability to learn and be successful in further educational levels.
- ✓ Identify the problems encountered in preschool educations which are subsequently transmitted or affecting the lower cycle.
- ✓ Investigate how parents perceive the preschool education and analyze the attitude of parents who decide not to send their children to kindergartens

## 3. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Data analysis in this study are addressed in two directions as a substantive analysis of primary data on the performance of pupils from preschool classes until the end of primary education. Then a qualitative analysis interprets the data collected from interviews with parents.

### 3.1 Findings and Analysis (primary data)

Taking into consideration the gathered data of children from the beginning of years of preschool education up to grade V, it was possible to identify the relationship between these two variables: success and time spent in preschool classes. This section of the work provides details on the differences between children who have attended kindergarten and those who haven't.

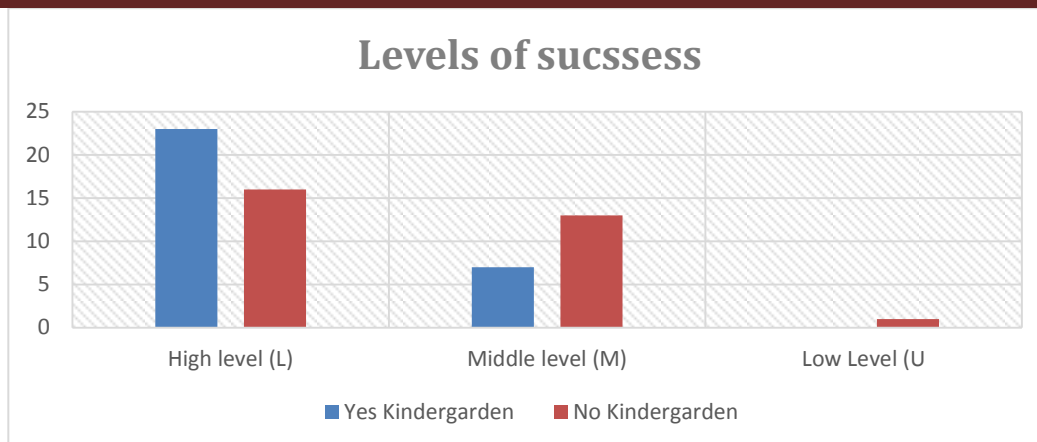
#### *-Pupils who have attended preschool education*

It was investigated on students who have spent on average 1 to 5 years in kindergarten. According the research results the average in passing year is 4 years, ie from 2 years up to almost 6 years (depending). These figures are associated with the individual success of each student sampled for this search for the two predetermined years of observation (1st and 2nd grade grades).

#### *- Pupils who did not attend preschool education*

It was surveyed the students who have not attended kindergarten and in parallel can see the individual success for each student in the first grade and then in the fifth grade. The results show that the success score seems to be flexible enough for one student to the other and in fact not always the time spent in kindergarten determines the success or failure of the child. However, the trend explains the existence of a causal connection between the two variables.

To simplify our analysis, we grouped students depending on their success by comparing the high, medium, or low success rates of both categories of students observed in the first grade and then in the fifth grade, ie at the beginning at the end of the primary cycle.



**Graph 1 Level of success of children that attended kindergarten and who didn't**

The graph shows the success rate of children that went in kindergarten and those who didn't attend. According to these data in the success of the first grade, there is a difference between the children who have attended kindergarten and those who have not attended. It is obvious that in the first grade the number of high school students is higher in the kindergarten children, where it is noticed that from 30 children 23 have high success, 7 are seen to have average success and 0-pupils with low level. As far as "non-kindergarten" children, only 16 are highly successful, 13 are successful (almost half of the sample for this category) and also a student with a low success rate. The latter was found not to be characteristic of 'Po - kindergarten' students.

**Conclusion 1:** As it seen in the data presented above, although the differentiating trend is not very high, it results that the success rate is higher amongst students who have attended kindergarten. Out of the 60 surveyed students, out of 30 for each category it turns out that most of those who have been in kindergarten have had high success in primary education. Of the 30 pupils who were in kindergartens, it results that 23 have high success, 7 average success and none of them has low success. By comparing the data of the two groups of students, it seems clear that time spent in kindergartens has a very positive impact on the skills of learning ability and success in primary education.

For the same sample of children, the success score in V grade was observed in order to see eventual changes to identify the work of teachers engaged in primary education and to see whether progress or stagnation in success is affected by the factors of education primary or not. To simplify these findings, 60 students were grouped on the basis of success where 30 "YES kindergartens" children were placed in front of 'non - kindergarten'. The success in grade V is no longer described, but grades are associated with the description of the respective grade.

As can be seen from the graph above for the students codified as ' YES kindergarten', the highest success rate is seen whereas by 30 surveyed students, half results excellent with grade 5, rating of maximum meaning excellent in primary education. Then with almost very good results, so with grade 4 there are 10 students. In the end, 3 out of 30 sampled students have the 'good' rating and only 1 'enough'.

While for 'non - kindergarten' children, the number of children with high success is less than half of those 'YES - kindergarten', i.e. only 7 students. 13 students rated "very good"(grade 4). It is further seen that 9 students have "good" outcomes and a pupil seems to have weak success.

**Conclusion 2:** even at the end of V grade it is seen that there are differences in success between 'YES' and 'NO kindergarten" children where success is higher in the first category of "Yes kindergarten". Obviously, children who have attended kindergarten are most successful in the learning process during elementary education, compared to children who have not attended kindergarten. Such results only confirm the hypothesis raised at the beginning of this search.

### 3.2 Finding and Analyzing Data Collected by Interviews

In terms of finding and analyzing the facts that affects the delivery or non-delivery of children to kindergartens, it was noticed from the qualitative interviews with parents and it was realized what are the reasons that they refused to send children to kindergartens. Thirty parents were interviewed through an in-depth interview divided into several questionnaire sessions and findings were reported in following sessions:

*-Findings from Session I - Demographic Data*

Out of 30 interviewed parents, it turned out that 27 of them were females, which confirms once that the gender variable is dominant in child education issues by considering education exclusively as a mother's task. The average age ranged from 28 to 45 years old with dominance in the thirties.

In terms of education level and occupation, only 5 of interviewees had higher education where only 3 practiced the profession for which they were studying. With secondary education, there were 7 respondents, 4 of them responding as households and staying at home, one of them was a worker, one cooker and one technician. What is interesting in this section is that the overwhelming majority (14 of the respondents) who make up about half of the sample are with 8-year education and even 4 out of the respondents have completed only primary education and out of 30 respondents 24 of them are housewives, i.e. they do not practice any kind of profession or apprentices.

*-Findings from Session Two - Perception of Parents on Preschool Education*

In this session, the first attempt was to understand how many children have the interviewees to find out whether all of them or some of them have sent in kindergartens their children. It came up that most have two to four children, whereas dominating parents with three children.

Further, respondents were asked whether they think preschool education (kindergarten) plays a role in educating their child. The answers received were very positive in responding that the kindergarten plays a very important role, especially in two directions: a) promoting the socialization of children with each other by not allowing them to become selfish; b) plays a particular role in succeeding. The most significant answer to this session was that of a parent who had three children and where he compared the first child he had sent to the nursery with the second child who did not send and where he states that the first child is more sociable and independent compared to the second who is more closely related to the parents. Only one parent responded negatively to this question by saying that he did not think the garden plays a big role.

At the same session, parents were asked whether they had information about the educational activities organized by the kindergartens and the answers were almost the same: the majority (20 respondents) have no information on these activities, a small part only affirm the question but the fact that they do not shows any kind of answer, only confirms that they do not have information. Here the explanation can be twofold: a) maybe parents generally do not show enough interest for the education of their children b) or communication bridges between institutions providing preschool education, with parents do not exist or is minimal. Only a small percentage of parents say that they know what activities are held in kindergartens, but the information in the answer is apparent, limited to drawing and coloring, and this reconfirms the lack of information of the parents.

The last question of this session, within the overall perception that parents have about preschool education and its importance, was whether they have been consulted with preschool education professionals on the role that a kindergarten can play in psycho-physical development of the child and it came out that only 11 of the interviewed parents happened to have talked or been consulted with professionals at this level of education, which again confirms the finding that there is a lack of communication bridges and co-operation between actors involved in education of children, respectively parents and relevant institutions.

*Findings from Session III - Reasons for not sending children to kindergarten*

The third session of the interview with the parents was the most important session because parents were asked directly why their children were deprived or omitted from preschool education. The responses to this question varied but most of them were routed into two main directions: the majority expressed dissatisfaction with the conditions offered in kindergartens, both infrastructure and human capacities whereas the other part accuses the inadequacy of educators who are not properly qualified, do not know how to behave with children, help them to adapt, and cope with them. The second group of dominant responses refers to the impossibility of family material conditions to send children to kindergarten. They cannot afford it economically. Only three of the respondents stated that they did not send children to kindergartens for personal reasons (they were in emigration or for child health reasons).

In order to stimulate the respondents to confirm whether or not to answer the foregoing question, but above all to see whether the cultural variable affects the perception of parents on kindergartens, also it was addressed the following statement: "The child may be better educated in the family than in kindergartens". The answers varied to this question most of the responded positively to the importance of the kindergarten, considering it effective in the education process but also emphasizing the role of the family. There are parents who think that the first alternative is better than the other. Parents who think that kindergarten is the best option says that in kindergarten the child can become more independent and can gain more knowledge than home. Some of them think that the child is best educated in the family. Only a small number of the interviewed parents thinks that the choice between kindergarten or family depends on the nature of the child.

The last session of the interview closed with the question of whether they would advise their relatives to send their children to kindergartens. Most of them responded "yes" even though they were parents who for various

reasons did not send their children to kindergartens. Only two parents responded they would not recommend to their relatives send children in kindergartens because they did not meet the conditions required to provide quality education.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Education marks a key moment in starting child education and should be enabled for each child in accordance with standards and where should guide the principle of respecting the child's highest interest.

From this research, it was discovered that children who attend kindergartens tend to have higher success than other children, where out of the 60 surveyed students, out of 30 for each category, it turns out that most of those who have been in kindergarten have had high success compared to others that hasn't. By comparing the data of the two groups of students, it seems clear that time spent in kindergartens has a very positive impact on the learning skills ability and success in primary education. Such results only confirm the hypothesis arised at the beginning of this research. One of the most important insights identified in this research is related to parent's perception, who have begun to question the importance of the kindergarten and whether their children even need to attend it or not. Some of them choose not to send children to kindergartens, thinking they can be better educated in the family or considering the gardens with inappropriate infrastructure for their children. Some of them happen to deprive children of this right, for economic reasons, although this factor cannot be considered relevant, appeared to be displayed by a group of parents.

Parents who have refused to send their children to kindergartens listed as main reason: dissatisfaction with the infrastructural conditions of kindergartens and the lack of qualifications or the lack of educative-educational methodology of kindergartens. Lack of confidence in their professionalism has pushed them not to send their children to kindergartens. These parents say that they value the kindergarten as a very good opportunity to educate their children, but they have preferred to be educated in the family better by influencing the above circumstances.

Some other supplementary data (public statistics) of this paper it was found that Albanians are ethnicity with high birth rate but the number of preschool kindergartens for Albanian children is still very low and unable to endure this high number of children.

- New preschools are needed and improvement should be made to the existing.
- It is necessary to strengthen the human capacities (of teachers and educators). Most of them should be included in trainings in order to help them increase their work performances.
- Parent-educator cooperation is a necessary condition in the process of raising, educating and accompanying children where the presence and participation of parents in teaching activities should be encouraged.
- Teachers should discuss with parents about the variety of activities that child has to do in the family. Parents on certain days can come in the kindergarten early to see how their children are involved in activities, how they apply the rules and respect the authority of the school, how to play and learn, and so on.
- Educators should bring to the parents the feeling of peace, confidence and promise that their children are in safe hands and on the other hand parents should see preschool institutions as the starting point for their children's relational processes, as the origin of the long education and training processes of their children.
- There should be no framework between the family and the educational institution, there should be good skills of dialogue and mutual understanding.

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