

Brief introduction of preschools and preschool teacher training in Hungary¹

BÖDDI ZSÓFIA – SERFŐZŐ MÓNIKA

Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a key of importance in educational systems. According to this training of teachers plays a crucial role in developing and educating young children. Recently a great interest is met in international preschool teacher training programmes. This paper, reacting to this need, presents briefly the Hungarian preschool system and the characteristics of preschool teacher training (especially at ELTE Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education). Enrollment rates, financial background, goals, and the principles of educational programs are presented in the description of the preschool system. Characteristic of Hungarian preschool teacher training programmes are presented as well by focusing on a brief historical background and showing a detailed picture about the outcome requirements and components of preschool teacher training.

Keywords: preschool/kindergarten, preschool teacher training, Hungary

1. Introduction

In our experience, there is some misunderstanding and confusion about terminologies of the earliest stage of education. Since different countries have various types of education systems before primary school years UNESCO has established (2012) a general terminology for that: *International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011*. ISCED level 0 is called *Early Childhood Education (ECE)* that is followed by *Primary education (ISCED 1)*. As one of the multiple varieties, the Hungarian system has its own specialties as well.

Our Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education of Eötvös Loránd University is developing more and more international relationships with professional partners worldwide. We have launched the international Kindergarten Training BA program in 2019 (*Kindergarten Education Programme*), at the same time initiated the regular visits of guest professors from all over the world. As

time went on, there was a growing demand for a summary of the Hungarian Kindergarten System and the Kindergarten Education Training itself. The following material is intended to meet this need.

1.1 Early childhood education

“Programs at ISCED level 0, or early childhood education, are typically designed with a holistic approach to support children’s early cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and introduce young children to organized instruction outside of the family context. ISCED level 0 refers to early childhood programs that have an international education component. These programs aim to develop socio-emotional skills necessary for participation in school and society. They also develop some of the skills needed for academic readiness and prepare children for entry into primary education.” (UNESCO, 2012, 26.)

ISCED 0 is divided into two categories: early childhood educational development (0 to 2 years) and pre-primary education (from the age of 3 to the start of school).

Preschool/kindergarten education is compulsory from the age of 3 in Hungary

¹ Parts of this article are published with the same content in the following article: Böddi, Zs., Kurt, G. & Serfőző, M. (2020): Preschool Teacher Education in Turkey and Hungary. *Conference Proceedings of IX. Trefort konferencia* (in press).

since the Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education has been introduced. Previously kindergarten was compulsory from the age of 5 with an opportunity to begin education from the age of 3 (*Act LXXIX of 1993 on Public Education*).

Recently children follow preschool education until they reach the compulsory school age of 6 years. Hence upon the suggestion of an expert, a child can follow the preschool program for one more year (*Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education*).

2. The structure of the preschool programs

2.1. Enrolment rates

According to data from the academic year of 2017/2018, the participation rate in preschool education was around 84,5% meaning 322.7 thousand children (which was 0.7% more than in the previous academic year). The average ratios are the followings: 10,3 children/teacher and 21,7 children/preschool group. In year 2017/2018 9200 preschool-aged children with special educational needs were registered, most of them (82.2%) attending integrated educational settings (*Eurydice European Commission, 2019*).

2.2. Finance

In Hungary preschools can be established and owned by the state and in the frames of local governments (either those of nationalities), churches, other people or organizations. The opportunity of free education is provided. (*Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education*) Of course parents meet financial needs regarding preschool education, at least food, but there are situations that provide opportunity to decrease the amount of payment or completely delete it (*Act XXXI of 1997 on child protection and guardianship administration*). Preschools belonging to churches or private owners can require tuition fees (*Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education*).

2.3. The main goals

The characteristics of preschools are regulated by the Govn decree 363/2012 (XII. 17.) on the Core Program for Kindergartens in Hungary. The Core program for Kindergartens clearly defines the main goals and principles of preschools:

- “A child – seen as a developing personality – shall be entitled to be treated with warm care and special protection.
- Upbringing of children is primarily the right and duty of their family. Preschool education has an additional and disadvantage compensating role.
- Preschool education should concentrate on supporting development of the personality of children. It should focus on the respect of human rights and children’s rights and equality in receiving high quality education.” (*Govn. decree 363/2012 (XII. 17.) on the Core Program for Kindergartens*)

The main goals and tasks of Hungarian preschool education is to satisfy the needs of preschool-aged children. Including: health education; emotional, moral oriented social education and development and education in the fields of cognitive and native language skills (*Govn. decree 363/2012 (XII. 17.) on the Core Program for Kindergartens*).

2.4. The program

Characteristics of Hungarian preschools are regulated by the *Govn. decree 363/2012 (XII. 17.) on the Core Program for Kindergartens*. This program provides the main principles and framework of preschool education. Hungarian preschools develop their local programs based on the Core Program and they are expected to work according to it.

Besides the principles (ideas of child and preschool) and tasks of preschool education the Core Program gives a clear framework of preschool life. There is a description of objective and personal conditions of preschools, daily routine (as being flexible and focusing on the crucial role of play) and the relationships of preschools (e.g. families, social institutes). Establishing the daily and

weekly routine is the competence of teachers. Tracking the development of children is also one of the tasks of preschool teachers.

Free play and play-based learning have crucial roles in scaffolding the development of children to reach school readiness.

The Core Program draws a picture about the types of activities in preschool education level: Play (as the fundament of preschool education); Rhyming and Storytelling; Drawing, Painting, Making Patterns, Handwork; Singing, Music, Singing Games, Children's Dances; Becoming Actively Acquainted with the Outer World (content in environmental and content in mathematics); Movement (physical activity); activities of a work nature (e.g. taking care of animals, plants); activity based learning.

The Core Program also provides a brief description of characteristics of the development stage of school readiness. It is an important aspect that Hungarian preschools develop and improve skills of children to reach school readiness. The aspect is that children reach skills at the end of preschool that help them in the process of transition to school. (*Govn. decree 363/2012 (XII. 17.) on the Core Program for Kindergartens*)

Environment and daily activities

Kindergarten groups typically consist of 13–25 children. This number may be increased by 20 per cent if necessary. The inclusion of children with special needs would decrease the maximum number of the group (*Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education*). You can find both same-age groups, and mixed-age groups in Hungarian preschool system. Each group has its own teachers and own classroom. Children spend the day in their classroom and outdoor. There are some occasions when they go to field trips, museums etc. During the day, two teachers are present, one of them in the morning and the other one in the afternoon shift, but having shared time in the middle of the day. They have a permanent nanny who helps the

children with the meals and dressing them up and down etc. Occasionally, pedagogical assistants and special pedagogical assistants can be present in the groups as well. Kindergarten teachers need to work or cooperate with other professionals, such as speech therapists, other special teachers, psychologists, developmental educators etc.

Kindergarten classrooms function as multifunctional interiors where kids can play, participate in educational activities, eat and even take an afternoon nap.

Typically, the rooms are divided into different types of spaces depending on educational purposes and types and forms of play (*Figure 1.*).

General daily routine:

- arriving, free play
- on-going breakfast (from around 8:00 to 9:00)
- planned activity directed by the teacher
- fruit time
- outdoor activity – (they use the preschool playground every day except bad weather.)
- lunch
- nap time
- snack time
- free play and going home





Figure 1. Some typical preschool classrooms and playgrounds.

3. Preschool teacher training

3.1. *The history of preschool teacher training*

Hungarian preschool teacher training dates to the 19th century. The first preschool (kindergarten) was founded in 1828 by Teréz Brunszvik (Janek, 2017; Golyán, 2018).

In the 20th century new regulations in the preschool education had been shaped. The length of studies had been increased (3 years theoretical, 1-year practical training). After World War II the need of preschool emerged since women started to get employed. This involved the need of teacher training as well. Besides preschool teacher training institutes, other types of training institutes were developed (1949) requiring one-year education after graduating from secondary school. Part time trainings were also introduced. In the 1970's, due to the increased number of children sent to preschools, vocational schools also appeared. Through a regulation decreed in 1958 preschool teacher training has begun to be offered in the higher education level, besides the vocational schools. Preschool teacher training in "training institutes" was terminated. In 1959 training in middle level institutes stopped and higher education training was offered to students (2 years). Preschool teacher training was raised to college level in 1985 (from 1989 with the length of 3 years). After 1993 only colleges began offering preschool education programs to the students (Hegedűs & Baska, 2013; Golyán, 2018). Recently, preschool teacher training programs are offered by the universities on the level of bachelor's degree (3 years), both through full and part-time programs.

3.2. *Preschool teacher training programs*

Besides applying for preschool teacher training program future students must take an entrance aptitude exam. As part of the exam, candidates must demonstrate their physical fitness as well as their ability to sing. The result is also significantly influenced

by the fact that students can speak clearly and correctly and have no serious speech problems.

The characteristics of Hungarian preschool teacher training are the following. It is practice oriented; theoretical and practical training are parallel; and beside university teachers, mentor preschool teachers play important roles in the development of students' profession (Golyán, 2012).

The Training and Outcome Requirements of Hungarian preschool teacher training are clearly defined (*Chapter IX 4 of Annex 3 of Ministry of Human Capacities Decree 18/2016 (VIII.5.)*).

Training and Outcome Requirements describes professional competences that are expected to be studied throughout the preschool teacher programs. These are presented in four fields with the following examples, accordingly a student:

a) knowledge

"Possesses a fundamental and instrumental foundation in the professional and methodological knowledge regarding the harmonious and complex stages of personal and comprehensive health development for a child between the ages of 3 to 7. Is familiar with the basic documents related to the professional field of preschool education and has a clear vision of the general aims and tasks involved, including the content of various forms of activity and their correlations. Has a strong grasp of the different stages of planning (as well as the theoretical and methodological foundation related to these steps) and is familiar with what characterizes each stage and their correlations. Has a basic awareness of both the psychological and biological factors and characteristics regarding a child's regular developmental and maturation process between the ages of 3 and 7, including the unique aspects related to childhood learning. The student is well-aware of early childhood's significant role as a developmental stage in establishing an individual life path, encouraging personal

development and determining life-long study habits, as well as the methods to be used in supporting this development.” (*Chapter IX 4 of Annex 3 of Ministry of Human Capacities Decree 18/2016 (VIII.5.)*).

b) skills

“Able to adopt his or her knowledge of pedagogy, psychology, sociology and methodology to the practice of preschool education while taking the unique, age- and personality-related aspects of the child and group into consideration. Capable of determining and selecting the appropriate educational and developmental aims, tasks and content based on the age-related and individual needs of a child or group of children ages 3–7. The student must furthermore be able to direct, facilitate, analyze and assess differentiated pedagogical processes. Able to observe, chart and record the unique, individual aspects of a child’s set of skill structures between the ages of 3–7 as well as the sociocultural family context with which the child is surrounded. Can construct in an adaptive way based on the different personalities of children aged 3–7, the child’s previous experience, knowledge, competencies and stage of life into consideration. Capable of supporting the harmonious emergence of a young child’s personality during the ages of 3–7 while developing his or her physical, social and intellectual development in an individual and age-appropriate way.” (*Chapter IX 4 of Annex 3 of Ministry of Human Capacities Decree 18/2016 (VIII.5.)*).

c) attitudes

“Is committed to selecting the strategies, activities and methods that encourage the systematization and expansion of a child or group’s experiences and knowledge during the age period of 3–7 while additionally creating a supportive environment. Is committed to the comprehensive development of a child’s (aged 3–7) health. His or her personality is characterized by a lack of biases, tolerance, social sensitivity and helpfulness; as a teacher

he or she strives to preserve and maintain cultural self-identity while supporting the child’s adaptation to a group community. Accepts that preschool education is child-focused, accepting and that the pedagogical influences used in the course of preschool education must be adapted to the child’s personality. Feels compelled to analyze and assess the process of preschool education from multiple viewpoints and thereby revises and modifies his or her future plans and activities based on attained results. Is open to recent national and international research methods, methodological innovations and is willing to be familiarized with and apply the opportunities offered by information and communication technology.” (*Chapter IX 4 of Annex 3 of Ministry of Human Capacities Decree 18/2016 (VIII.5.)*).

d) autonomy & responsibility

“Accepts responsibility for the children (ages 3–7) and the group placed under his or her supervision as well as for the activities conducted in the educational institution. Within his or her sphere of influence accepts responsibility for the comprehensive development of the health for children aged 3–7. Bears responsibility in creating the personal and physical environment necessary for the preschool-aged children’s healthy development and the emergence of their multi-faceted and harmonious personalities. Accepts responsibility for his or her decisions made during the course of preschool education and any consequences that may result from his or her pedagogical activities. As a reflective preschool educator and autonomous individual, he or she consciously acts to direct his or her professional development. Cooperates in developing and maintaining professional collaborations in a responsible way.” (*Chapter IX 4 of Annex 3 of Ministry of Human Capacities Decree 18/2016 (VIII.5.)*).

By completing their studies students graduate as Preschool Teachers or Ethnic Minority

Preschool Teachers (with this degree they can work in ethnic minority preschools) (*Chapter IX 4 of Annex 3 of Ministry of Human Capacities Decree 18/2016 (VIII.5.)*).

The training program contains four modules (*Chapter IX 4 of Annex 3 of Ministry of Human Capacities Decree 18/2016 (VIII.5.)*):

- pedagogy, psychology, social sciences, computer sciences
- the methodology of the types of activities in preschool education (play; native language and literature; mathematics; environmental sciences, music and singing; physical education)
- other specializations or ethnic minority professional knowledge
- practical training

As an example, the fields of preschool teacher training of Eötvös Loránd University are shown below:

Basics of Psychology; Basics of Education; Pedagogy as a Profession; Preschool Teacher's Role in Society; Digital Pedagogy; Music and Its Methodology; Native Language and Its Methodology; Children's Literature

and Its Methodology; Mathematics and Its Methodology; Environmental Studies and Its Methodology; Physical Education and Its Methodology; Visual Skills and Its Methodology; Preschool Practices; Comprehensive Preschool Practice; Elective courses (e.g. preparation for bilingual education) (<https://www.tok.elte.hu/en/content/kindergarten-education-programme-ba.t.5021?m=102>).

It is a quite new introduction that preschool teacher training programs are available in English as well.

The Hungarian preschool teacher training programs put a great emphasize on practical training (cf. *Golyán, 2012*). Due to this fact, practical training is constant during the whole training period providing experience and growing autonomy for students (Figure 2). After 5 semesters of practice students have to prove their skills during the comprehensive practice. That provides them more experience and also gives the opportunity for training places to work with potential employees.



Figure 2. A mentor preschool teacher leads a discussion with students after practice in the preschool classroom.

Early childhood education is a very important part of the Hungarian public education system. Due to its importance, we are committed to educate professional preschool teachers equipped with theoretical and practical knowledge. In order to maintain continuous development and modern education, we regularly monitor international trends, innovations, and incorporate the ones that are fitting into our structure. A strong

foundation is essential for both children and their educators/teachers. With this task in mind, we strive to advance early childhood education and train teacher candidates respectively.

References

- Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education.*
URL: http://njt.hu/cgi_bin/njt_doc.cgi?docid=139880.329881
- Act LXXIX of 1993 on Public Education.
URL: http://www.okm.gov.hu/letolt/kozokt/kozokt_tv_070823.pdf
- Act XXXI of 1997 on child protection and guardianship administration.
URL: <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99700031.tv>
- Chapter IX 4 of Annex 3 of Ministry of Human Capacities Decree 18/2016 (VIII.5.)*
URL: http://njt.hu/cgi_bin/njt_doc.cgi?docid=196922.325529
- Govn decree 363/2012 (XII. 17.) on the Core Program for Kindergartens
URL: <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1200363.kor>
- Böddi, Zs., Kurt, G. & Serfőző, M. (in press): Preschool Teacher Education in Turkey and Hungary. *Conference Proceedings of IX. Trefort konferencia.*
- Eurydice European Commission (2019): Magyarország: Az óvodai nevelés megszervezése. [Hungary: Organization of preschool education.]*
URL: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-programmes-children-over-2-3-years-21_hu
- Golyán, Sz. (2018): A kiseddévóképző intézettől az óvóképző főiskoláig. Az óvodapedagógus-képzés főbb állomásai a kezdetektől napjainkig. [From nursery school training institute to preschool teacher training high schools. The main stages of preschool teacher training from the beginnings to recent days.] In: Francz, M. (ed.) *Óvodavezetési ismeretek. 100. kiegészítő kötet* RAABE KLETT Oktatási Tanácsadó és Kiadó Kft., Budapest, 1–20.
- Hegedűs, J & Baska, G. (2013): A magyarországi pedagógusképzés története a recepció hatás tükrében. [The history of Hungarian teacher training in the aspect of receptional effects.]. ELTE, TÁMOP 4.1.2.B.2-13/1-2013-0007 „ORSZÁGOS KOORDINÁCIÓVAL A PEDAGÓGUSKÉPZÉS MEGÚJÍTÁSÁÉRT”
URL: http://pedagoguskepzes.elte.hu/images/anyagok/iii1/39_a_magyaropedkep_tortenete.pdf
- Janek, N. (2017): Nők a közgondolkodásban – a kiseddévónő, mint lehetséges „karrierút” a XIX. század végi pedagógiai szakfolyóiratok tükrében. [Women in public thinking – the appearance of preschool teaching as a possible female ‘profession’ in the nineteenth century’s pedagogical journals.] *Gyermeknevelés*, 5/2, 76–88.
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2012): *International Standard Classification of Education ISCED 2011*. Montreal, Canada.
URL: uis.unesco.org/en/topic/international-standard-classification-education-isced
- Böddi Zsófia & Serfőző Mónika (2019): *Brief introduction of preschools and preschool teacher training in Hungary.* *Gyermeknevelés*, 7. 2–3. sz., 187–194.