

Pre-Schoolers' Readiness for School: Research of Motivation

Renata Rudienė¹, Vida Volkovickienė¹, Tomas Butvilas^{2,3 a}

¹ Vilnius kindergarten "Lazdynėlis", Šiltnamių str. 36, Vilnius, Lithuania

² Vilnius Business College, Kalvarijų str. 125, Vilnius, Lithuania

³ Mykolas Romeris University, Ateities str. 20, Vilnius, Lithuania

Received 26 May 2017, accepted 23 June 2017

Abstract. The paper mainly deals with pre-schoolers' readiness for school, while presenting the research on motivation that was conducted in March of 2017. Survey on children's motivation for school was organized in Vilnius kindergarten "Lazdynėlis" using rather simplified and adapted questionnaire for children (aged 6-7) about both inner and outer factors of motivation. Analysing children's motivation at that age is quite important for both parents, educators and children themselves as this period is a time for great changes in a child's life. It is rather challenging and new social circumstances (including new educational environment, teachers, classmates and new requirements) most often demand inner strengths and proper social support for children. Therefore, the authors of this paper would briefly discuss the main aspects of children motivation for school and present a picture of pre-schoolers' readiness for new changes in their daily routine and the factors that motivate them to cope with the challenges.

Citations: Renata Rudienė, Vida Volkovickienė, Tomas Butvilas. Pre-Schoolers' Readiness for School: Research of Motivation – *Innovative Infotechnologies for Science, Business and Education*, ISSN 2029-1035 – **1(22)** 2017 – Pp. 11-13.

Keywords: Children; Pre-schooler; Kindergarten; Motivation; School.

Short title: Children Motivation for School.

Introduction

Motivation is a readiness to learn [1]. Throughout the life individuals learn incredibly complex skills without consciously trying at all. As British developmental scientist John L. Locke [2] notes, infants and children do not set out to learn any of the vast repertoire of skills that they gain in the first years as cited in Ref. [1]. Instead, they study the faces, voices and actions of others out of a deep biological need for emotional interaction with those who love and care for them. They simply find themselves in a social and cultural context that values certain skills and use them constantly.

Within the human evolution, certain proclivities on the part of the infant and child have emerged. In the same way, social and cultural mannerisms have arisen around children and in support of their learning [1, 3]. When it comes to understanding where motivation comes from, we should consider both the things that children actively try to master and the things that they just pick up along the way. As W. L. Ostroff [1] states, children's learning is dynamic and results from the interaction between inborn capacity and experience. Desire to learn is present even before the birth. As their world is suddenly filled with the new things to see, hear, smell, taste and touch, fetuses and new babies develop reflexive behaviours to organize that information and to make meaning from it [1, 4, 5]. Reflexes have evolved to help the young ones to adapt

to its environment. Sometimes reflexes develop into more complex modes of behaviour and set up learning. They are important clues to the development of motivation [1].

Having all this in mind, it became rather interesting and important to measure pre-schoolers' readiness for a school. Thus, a small-scale research was conducted among the group of 22 children (aged 6-7) in order to understand and describe those children's motivation for learning and taking the part in various activities.

Main objectives could be formulated as follows.

1. To analyze whether or not children are ready for learning activities.
2. To set children's readiness for life changes.

For research, method of quantitative questionnaire on motivation along with the descriptive data analysis was used.

1. Understanding Motivation and Challenges to Overcome

Many scholars would explore motivation through emotional-cognitive perspective. According to K. Barish [5], the problem of *lack of motivation* is the problem of demoralization, whether overt or disguised. Solution to this issue lays on first principle(s): children, when they are not angry or discouraged, want to do well [5]. They want to feel good about themselves and about others. They want to earn adults' praise

^aCorresponding author, email: butvilas@mruni.eu

Table 1. Children’s motivation. Adapted according to Ref. [5].

Motivation	=	interest	+	a sense of one’s competence	+	relevance	+	ideals
Motivation	=	interest	+	confidence (the anticipation of success)	+	anticipation of recognition (praise or appreciation) for our effort		
Motivation	=	having a goal	+	feeling that we can achieve it				

and approval, and they want adults to be proud of them. Children say that they do not care, but they do care. Sustained effort is a different matter. Our ability to work hard, to sustain effort at any task, requires a feeling of accomplishment or progress along the way, and some confidence in our eventual success [5, 4]. All constructive activity involves moments of anxiety, frustration and discouragement. Children who are "not motivated" too readily give in to these feelings; they do not bounce back [5].

As K. Barish argues, children often hide their anxiety and discouragement behind defiant and rebellious attitudes: *"What is the point of studying history or math anyway, I'm never going to use it"*. Good educators – teachers who encourage and inspire children, and then demonstrate the relevance of learning – may really help. But a demoralized child is unlikely to find any relevance in what we want to teach him [5]. A child will then be criticized, repeatedly, for his lack of effort, and he will become more rebellious. And he/she will look elsewhere for a feeling of acceptance and a feeling of pride.

Therefore K. Barish (2012) would raise such questions as: *How often do we understand the problem of our children’s motivation in this way? How often do we see a child’s lack of effort not as a problem of demoralization but as a "behaviour" problem? How often do we blame the influence of peers, or television and other media distractions? How often do we become frustrated and angry, and then, in our frustration, tell him/her that he/she just has to work harder?* Children are not lazy. They may be frustrated and discouraged, anxious or angry; they may have become disillusioned or defiant, self-critical or pessimistic, and they may lack confidence in their ability [5]. But this is not laziness, as K. Barish continues. The misconception that kids are lazy is one of the most common, and most destructive, misunderstandings of children [5, 4, 3]. When adults understand child’s lack of motivation as a problem of demoralization, they are supposed to be able to look into the real causes of child’s lack of enthusiasm and effort, and then they will be more likely to find helpful solutions.

Undiagnosed (or under-appreciated) attention and learning disorders are the most common source of discouragement and lack of sustained effort ("motivation") in children – stresses K. Barish [5]. For these children, doing schoolwork or homework is like running with a sprained ankle, which is possible, although painful, and they will look for ways to avoid or post-

pone it. Or they may run ten steps and then find a reason to stop.

2. What Makes Children Get Motivated?

In most of the scholar works and practical toolkits it is stated that motivation begins with one’s interest. Interest leads to exploration and learning, and to the development of different activities [5, 1]. All these activities (or so called projects) then become ambitions and worth targeting. Like all of us, children want to do what they are "good at". They want to shine and feel proud. Moreover, they want adults to be proud of them. A child’s motivation is also sustained by ideals. Children want to become like (liked or alike), to learn from (what or whom), and to earn the respect of the people they admire [5, 4, 3]. Too often, adults (parents, educators) would overlook this fundamental aspect of children’s motivation and emotional development. It is easy to forget that children look to adults and look up to us – and that we remain for our children, throughout life, sources of affirmation and emotional support [5].

Rewards and punishments have some short-term effect on children’s effort [5, 3]. In this sense we are all motivated, to some extent, to earn rewards and avoid punishment. But rewards and punishments cannot create interests or goals. It can be helpful to think of children’s motivation in the form of equations [5] as presented in Table 1.

3. Results of Motivation Research in kindergarten "Lazdynėlis"

As it was mentioned, the research on pre-schoolers’ readiness for school and their motivation was conducted in March of 2017 in Vilnius kindergarten "Lazdynėlis". There were 22 children (aged 6-7) – 8 girls and 14 boys – who participated in this survey. First of all it was set that motivation could be divided in two spheres – internal and external, while internal motivation is mainly seen through the ability to continue working or doing some tasks without additional social support for quite a long period of time, also to cope with challenges and not to give up in problematic situations. On the other hand, external motivation relies on external conditions that support learning activities.

The quantitative type questionnaire was based on early education programme and the competences foreseen in it

(social, health care, cognitive, communicational, and artistic) – willingness to participate (not participate) in kindergarten's/school activities and relations with group mates.

Analyzing data of social competence, it was revealed that all participants have friends in kindergarten, are willing to play with others (though 4 children pointed out that they prefer to play alone), share toys and other playing materials with others, and help other group mates. The above mentioned shows that children at that age have rather strong social competences and are willing to participate in different educational activities along with others.

Research data about health care competence shows that all participants would prefer to play with Lego, dolls, cars, soldier-toys, basketball, pick-a-boo etc. This fact indicates children's eagerness for a rather active style of play. Almost everyone in this survey pointed out that they care about their health; only one child would show indifference. Discussing about cognitive competence, research data allows us to explore the reasons on why children want to go to the kindergarten – "Interesting games; I have many friends over there; I've learned unknown things here; I have learned about universe and also about letters <...>". Everyone in this research says that they like going to the kindergarten as they learn new things there.

Communicational competence is also rather well developed at that age as almost all the participants pointed out that they like to read stories and fairy-tales. Only 2 children said that they are not much keen on it. 18 children have indicated and named their favourite book. 10 participants would even memorize and may repeat by heart short stories, while for a few it remains still a hard task as it is quite difficult to memorize. Also all children know the ABC, 14 of them even know how to read, while 8 children are still in the process of learning.

Artistic competence also shows children's abilities to differentiate seasons of the year and name the exact month

at the given moment.

Analyzing data on children's willingness to go to school, it became rather clear that 19 participants are waiting for this event in the upcoming months, while 3 kids were not that keen on this new adventure in their lives. Majority of the participants learned about school from their parents (11) or siblings (9).

The question about what image of school children have, could be illustrated with following answers: "Teacher teaches children; We have to study there; We have to listen to a teacher; We need to count, read, and listen, learn English, and do homework; We have to sit and teacher is writing on the board; There are breaks and we have to be on time – not to be late; There is no bed time at noon at school". All these answers clearly show quite good understanding of what school is and what is to be to expect there.

Conclusions

Motivation in this work was presented mainly through the emotional-cognitive perspective. As scholars would stress, the problem of "lack of motivation" is the problem of demoralization, whether overt or disguised. Children, when they are not angry or discouraged, want to do well.

Emotional-cognitive basis of motivation was revealed in the research with children and it was set that both boys and girls are motivated for school equally, as internal reasons of being motivated would be mainly – children are happy in the kindergarten, experience much of success, and the activities are interesting for them; external ones – friends, games and toys.

School image and motivation for this would also depend on internal reasons – children will learn new things (reading, counting, painting etc.), will get to know new friends; external reasons for going to school – will have many new friends, siblings are already attending school, will have to study hard and complete the assignments.

References

1. Wendy L. Ostroff. *Understanding How Young Children Learn: Bringing the Science of Child Development to the Classroom*. – ASCD book, 2012.
2. John L. Locke. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. – UK: Oxford University Press, 2008.
3. Roma Vida Pivorienė, Jolanta Šabliauskienė. *Mano vaikas – mokynys (in lith.)*. – Vilnius: Specialiosios pedagogikos ir psichologijos centras, 2011.
4. Kathryn R. Wentzel, David B. Miele. *Handbook of Motivation at School*. 2nd Ed. – New York, London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.
5. Kenneth Barish. *The Motivation Equation: Understanding a Child's Lack of Effort*. – <http://www.mom-psych.com/Articles/Family-Relationships/Child-Development/Parenting-Motivation-Problems-in-Children-KB1003.html>, accessed 2017 03 22.