

Evaluation in the Context of Early Language Education Activities

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Abstract

A subject around which a series of specialized debates revolve is evaluation, which is attributed the quality of being an integrative element of the educational process, alongside teaching and learning. In the context of current pedagogical thinking, evaluation is an action focused on the child's learning process, engaging their cognitive processes, as well as the regulation and self-regulation of knowledge. In other words, the process of evaluation goes beyond its traditional meaning – that of control, examination, and sanction – and tends towards a dynamic focused particularly on the child's mental processes, so that they can be aware of what they learn, how they learn, and especially why they learn. In this article, we have attempted to present some aspects related to didactic evaluation seen as a validation of the correctness of educational sequences, components of the didactic process, and a means of delimiting, fixing, and intervening in educational content and objectives. Educational activity in kindergarten is complex and requires varied, multiple forms of evaluation adapted to the particularities of preschoolers. The diversity of teaching situations, as well as the multitude of evaluation objectives, require the conception and application of different strategies to mediate the evaluative process.

Keywords: *evaluation, language, knowledge, learning*

Etymologically, evaluation means *issuing a value judgment, based on certain precise criteria, regarding an activity, process, phenomenon, object, person, institution, or system* (Panțuru, 2008, p. 256). Moreover, this process entails balancing the results obtained from conducting an activity with the previously established objectives, with the aim of adopting effective improvement decisions, thus assessing the quality and value of the process. The ideological attitude towards the concept of evaluation is very complex, with most defining notes referring to:

– measuring and assessing, based on criteria, the achievement of established objectives,

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– *assessing the performance of the learner by assigning a grade or mark,*
– *verifying learning and acquisitions,*
– *estimating/appreciating the level of children's school readiness,*
– *classifying and ranking children based on their achievements,*
– *identifying measures to regulate and optimize the teaching process,*
– *providing feedback on the quality and effectiveness of the conducted activity etc.* (Potolea, 2008, p. 113).

Mariana Norel offers a comprehensive definition of the act of evaluation. She states that evaluation *represents the totality of activities through which data obtained from the application of measurement instruments are collected, organized, and interpreted for the purpose of issuing a value judgment on which a certain decision in the educational field is based* (Norel, 2010, p. 207).

Education implies progress, and evaluation is *the tool for quantifying and guiding the preschooler towards evolution,* (Geantă, 2021, p. 141) being the most convenient method for the educator to control and analyze the pedagogical approach, aiming to achieve projected goals and prepare the child for optimal integration into the next developmental stage, school.

In order to conceive and apply adequate evaluation in preschool activities, one should consider „some accent mutations, noticed lately, resulting in the resizing and rethinking of evaluative strategies, in line with a series of requirements” (<https://edict.ro/evaluarea-in-invatamanatul-prescolar/> accessed on 04.02.2024).

From a pedagogical perspective, evaluation targets a learner, offering them the opportunity to understand their level of preschool preparation in relation to school and personal expectations, and an educator, providing valuable information about the quality and effectiveness of the conducted activities and, especially, forecasting improvement and optimization measures.

According to National Education Law no. 1/2011, the purpose of evaluation is to guide and optimize learning, meaning that the evaluative process will be designed and carried out in relation to the competencies provided in the school curriculum. From this point of view, evaluation is no longer reduced to a simple action of measuring the degree to which educational objectives have been achieved; on the contrary, it facilitates multiple opportunities to adjust, optimize, and improve the instructional-educational process.

Appreciating results, in relation to a set of educational objectives, is an important aspect of evaluation, providing the opportunity to collect necessary information about the child's developmental level, considering all aspects that fall under the scope of development.



The conduct of evaluation involves prior planning, aiming to identify the most appropriate answers to the following questions:

- What is being evaluated? – from the entire system to specific components, such as academic performance, the level of preschoolers' preparation, the effectiveness of teaching activities etc.;
- What is the purpose of evaluation? – formative, guiding, regulatory, and optimizing purposes;
- Who is subject to evaluation – children, teachers, the system itself;
- When is evaluation conducted? – at every stage of the process: at the beginning, during, and at the end;
- What evaluation methods are used? – specific evaluation methodology – methods, means.

The method is *a deliberate way of organizing the teaching content due to organizing learning, as a result of an interaction between the teacher and the children.* (Ionescu, 2021, p. 222).

Conducting optimal evaluation allows the educator to accomplish the following aspects:

- streamlining the organization of instructional-educational processes,
- realizing the need to make certain content accessible, adapt certain materials, differentiate certain tasks according to the age and individual level of preschool children,
- building improvement-oriented approaches (focused on both the negative and/or positive aspects of the results obtained by children at a given moment),
- nuanced/redesigned some of the relational, motivational etc., coordinates of the activity, the teacher-child preschooler relationship,
- anticipating and properly planning subsequent activities following the evaluation.

A correct evaluation allows preschoolers to achieve the following goals:

- reinforcement and consolidation of knowledge through repetition and positive reinforcement,
- integration of acquired knowledge into systems,
- association of theoretical elements with practical aspects,
- fostering confidence in their own abilities,
- discouragement of negative and inefficient behaviors,
- awakening and fostering interest in learning,
- stimulation of learning, formation, and consolidation of learning strategies, formation, and consolidation of (self) evaluation strategies,
- fostering competitiveness as well as cooperation (by choosing evaluation methods targeting both the individual and the group) etc.



The quality of evaluation, as an indispensable component of the teaching process, determines the exercise of functions aimed at regulating and optimizing the instructional-educational approach. Thus, we discuss *the general functions of evaluation aimed at understanding the activities that have taken place and, especially, the results that have been obtained* (Norel, Bota, 2012, p. 255).

From the category of general functions belong:

a. The constative function aims at understanding the state of the evaluated phenomenon. This function allows highlighting the level of preparation achieved by children, correlating it with their own expectations as well as those of the educator, thus becoming a relatively faithful indicator of the efficiency of the teaching process.

b. The diagnostic function indicates the level of school preparation, providing information about difficulties, gaps, and critical points that arise in learning, as well as aspects related to the factors that determine school success or failure.

c. The predictive function, as the name suggests, allows predictions to be made about the future performance of children, as well as their future progress. In other words, the predictive function contributes to anticipating future actions aimed at regulating and perfecting the instructional-educational approach.

These functions are interdependent since predictions cannot be made without establishing a series of data and without knowing in detail the observed situation. The general functions of evaluation are complemented by specific ones, which can be analyzed from two perspectives: that of the educator and that of the evaluated.

Regarding the educator, evaluation constitutes an indispensable element in the three key stages:

- at the beginning of the teaching activity. Evaluation is carried out with the aim of understanding the children's level of preparation in order to design an efficient educational approach, in accordance with their actual learning possibilities and age characteristics.

- during the teaching activity. Evaluation involves making assessments of the quality of the process, aiming to regulate and improve the activity.

- at the end of the teaching activity. Evaluation represents the moment when the overall conduct of the activity is observed, with reference to the achievement of educational objectives and, implicitly, the formation of the pursued competencies.

From the children's perspective, evaluation guides and directs their learning process, indicating what and how they should learn and offering them opportunities to understand to what extent they have achieved



educational objectives; evaluation encourages children to engage in various activities, work in groups or independently, and respond to the requests of the educator.

According to the functions performed by evaluation, the following forms of evaluation are distinguished:

- initial evaluation: involves actions to measure and assess the overall level of the child's development, representing the starting point in designing efficient educational approaches;

- continuous evaluation: accompanies current activities throughout their development, being represented by continuous observations of children's behaviors, reactions to various tasks, or requests;

- summative evaluation: conducted at the end of sequences, through activities reviewing the acquired competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes).

Oral evaluation involves *a series of conversations through which the educator obtains information about the volume and correctness of the preschooler's knowledge* (Norel, Bota, 2012, p. 257). This evaluation method can be used in all educational activities carried out in kindergarten.

Written evaluation can take the form of graphic exercises, which involve writing various symbols, isolated letters, numbers, or in the form of drawings, paintings, through which the educator checks the level of preparation of the children.

Practical evaluation is used to assess children's ability to apply various knowledge in practice.

I will now present some methods used in the evaluation activities of preschoolers.

- ***The observation method*** consists of capturing and recording events that are defining for the child's development. Usually, the results obtained by the educator through evaluation are materialized in open, direct appreciations, with evaluative value or written records of data reflecting the plan of evolution and development of the child. It is advisable for the educator to use an individual observation protocol for each child.

- ***The graphical recording of preferences*** facilitates the recording, analysis, and interpretation of data obtained about each child by highlighting aspects related to their interests, preferences, but also aspects related to the difficulties they encounter. The graphical recording method of the child's progress allows highlighting the progress made by the child from one activity to another, thus suggesting the degree of assimilation/formation of the pursued competencies, using gradations or qualifications: unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good, very good, exceptional.



Progress Chart Model. Level II 5-7 years old. Language Education

Name of the child	Week																			
	Activity: Language Education																			
	Takes part in group activities										Listen carefully a					The accuracy of				
	As a speaker					As a listener					text					the spelling				
	N	S	B	FB	E	N	S	B	FB	E	N	S	B	FB	E	N	S	B	FB	E

The grades used in the chart are distributed on a grading scale with the following gradations: N – Unsatisfactory, S – Satisfactory, B – Good, FB – Very good, E – Excellent.

Name of the child	Week						
	Activity: Language Education						
	Language Education	Creative activities	Maths	Environment	Cube games	Cognitive games	

(Ezechil, Păiși Lăzărescu, 2002, p. 147)

● **The portfolio method** involves selecting and preserving various works done by children, which will form the basis of cumulative assessments, thus highlighting the progress made over a stable period of time. The portfolio is an assessment method that stores data about the child's progress and can be considered as a „business card” of the preschooler.

We can talk about several types of portfolios:

- presentation or introductory portfolio (includes a selection of the most important works);
- progress or work portfolio (contains all elements carried out during the activity);
- evaluation portfolio (includes: objectives, strategies, evaluation tools, result tables etc.)

The portfolio may include:

- a list of expected behaviors;
- observations on the child's evolution;
- the child's works;



- pictures of tasks/activities completed by the child during the school year;
- results of extracurricular activities (certificates from various competitions) etc.

In conclusion, the portfolio is not only an alternative method of assessing the child but can also be representative in creating a positive image of a group or a kindergarten.

● **The visual map** is a way for preschoolers to reflect on the relationships they establish between images belonging to the same sphere or different spheres of knowledge, reality etc.

Depending on the reflected theme, the visual map can be branched, tree-like, linear etc.; For example, the visual map of the *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* fairy tale may include the silhouettes of the characters, black and white circles (corresponding to positive and negative characters, respectively), arrows of different types (with one end, with two ends etc.), their arrangement indicating how preschoolers perceive the relationships between different types of characters (for example, one child may place the king and the queen – Snow White's mother – at the top of the map, another child may place the stepmother next to the silhouette of the king etc.); phased activity, involving: explaining the chosen theme, discussing new elements that arise as work progresses, followed by solving any problems; for example, the project aimed at creating an album in which preschoolers, as they go through various activities conducted in kindergarten.

● **Standardized tests** aim to track changes produced through learning, especially at the cognitive level. These can take the form of a set of questions or tasks, which can cover a specific thematic area and are used rather for periodic checks. The main difference from other assessment methods is the existence and application of a grading scale. Diagnostic tests are also used in preschool education, understood as knowledge tests adapted to the specifics of the age.

The assessment of preschool activities is best achieved by exploiting thematic projects and children's portfolios carried out within the specific activities of the Language and Communication experiential domain. Projects carried out with small groups or even with the entire group/team contribute to strengthening group cohesion, encouraging participation with a sense of responsibility towards achieving the assumed task. Carrying out projects is an activity that can offer numerous satisfactions to children, offering them the chance to express themselves in various ways, through speech, drawing, play, mime etc. The themes can be proposed by the teacher or can be established together with the children,



as long as they have an educational purpose and are attractive to preschoolers.

For preschoolers, the assessment process is not about finding out what they do not know, but about adapting the teacher to the preschoolers' learning pace. Assessment is *a complex didactic act, integrated into the teaching process, which aims to measure the quantity of knowledge acquired, their value, performance, and efficiency at a given moment, providing solutions for improving the didactic act.* (Geantă, 2021, p. 130)

In conclusion, we can affirm that assessment should be considered *a psychological act through grades, ratings, classifications, appreciations of the educational results obtained by a student in a study subject (knowledge, skills, mental abilities, moral attitudes towards learning activity and putting into practice what has been learned).* (Văideanu, G., Manolache, A., Muster, D., 1979, p. 235)

It is important to consider, in the assessment of preschoolers, the variety of responses they can give, the diversity of ways in which they are able to solve the proposed problems, to accept their solutions, even if they do not fit into our patterns, because *both preschoolers and young schoolchildren possess a naive and effervescent creativity, due on one hand to the spontaneous manifestation of curiosity and lively receptivity to stimuli from the environment, a rich imagination, articulated around an appetite for the fantastic and a tendency towards activity and investigation, and on the other hand to the ignorance of the objective obstacles that would hinder the implementation of ideas. The censorship that the rational factor exercises in adults does not yet work, the imagination being free, unleashed, unhindered by any canons.* (Usaci, 2005, p. 58)

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