

Construct of the Quality of Preschool Education in the Representation of School Principals (Evidence from Moscow)

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to study and describe the ideas of the directors about the quality of the preschool level, to study possible problems that they have to face when organizing conditions in preschool organizations, approaches to the formation of a standard for preschool education. Since the solution of managerial problems related to preschool organizations that are part of territorial educational complexes in Moscow is within the competence of school principals, the question arises on the basis of what objective characteristics, indicators, directors make managerial decisions. The paper answers the following research questions: 1. How do school principals understand the “quality of preschool education”? What's a good kindergarten? 2. How do directors measure the quality of preschool education in their institutions? Is there an indicator system? 3. What conditions, according to the directors, should be created or what conditions are created/created to improve the quality of preschool education? The work carries out qualitative research using thematic interviews. During the interviews, we tried to identify the main factors affecting the quality of preschool education, the work of the kindergarten, and the attitude of directors to these factors, in order to find out how strong, in the opinion of directors, the influence of these factors. Based on the analysis of data, similarities and differences in the representations of the directors of territorial educational complexes of Moscow on the quality of preschool education were determined. Cognitive graphs were constructed for three main groups of ideas about the quality of preschool education based on the results of interviews.

Keywords: quality of preschool education, indicators of quality of preschool education, federal state standard of preschool education

1. Introduction

In Moscow, since 2015, almost all kindergartens have become part of territorial educational complexes (TECs). The main objectives of the integration of kindergartens and schools were: improving the accessibility and quality of education, the possibility of transferring a child after completion of kindergarten to a school of the same complex, the possibility of cooperation between school and kindergarten teachers, continuity, the linkage between preschool and school education, etc. (Kozmina & Tararukhina, 2016). According to the state programme “Metropolitan Education for 2012–2016” (National study of the quality of preschool education..., 2019) in Moscow in 2011, there were 2.043 municipal preschool educational organizations. All of them were included in the territorial educational complexes. According to the reference system of education and science of the city of Moscow, currently, the number of territorial educational complexes is 667 (DONM help system, 2021). School principals became the principals of territorial educational complexes (Perminov & Testov, 2020; Smaliakou, 2019).

Currently, not all parents are satisfied with the quality of the services provided, and not all parents believe that continuity is organized between the kindergarten and the school. In general, only 52.9% of families are fully satisfied with the preschool education of their children, and a third of parents (33.2%) assess it at an average level. However, 5.2% of families believe that kindergarten is only for the care and nurturing of children (Monitoring of CENO IPEI

RANEPА, 2018). The child's readiness to study at school (within the framework of one educational complex) does not satisfy all parents. Among families whose children attended the preschool department as part of the school, 24.8% of parents did not see the linkage between preschool and school preparation.

Historically, the state was seen as the main customer of educational services, however, since the parents bear primary responsibility for their children under Russian legislation, which makes it certain to say that in recent years there has been a turn towards the main customers of educational services – parents. In this connection, there is much research on parents' expectations regarding the expected outcomes of educational services, satisfaction with kindergarten services, and the selection criteria, etc. (Savinskaya, 2015; Nisskaya, 2016; Kozmina, 2016).

According to the data, different groups of parents have different attitudes towards preschool education, including different objectives (Nisskaya, 2016). As a result, parents focus on different environmental factors and, consequently, evaluate the quality of the services provided and the quality of preschool education differently. It is important for educators that their work is positively assessed by parents and the head of the preschool, the successful teaching of children, the provision of teaching, the optimum distribution of time, the methodological and material provision of the educational process, the cultivation of certain qualities of their pupils, etc. (Tokatligil et al., 2021; Ilina et al., 2019).

It is important for teachers that the child is ready for school. Thus, according to the data of the Monitoring CENO IPEI RANEPА (2018), 47% of teachers consider necessary compulsory preparation of children of their schooling. As previous studies show, there is a connection between quality preschool education and the child's education in the future: if a child received quality preschool education, then this is the key to successful learning in the future and reduces learning problems (Heckman et al., 1997; Philpott, 2019; Barker, 2015). Thus, the relationship between preschool and school education is traced, where the director is the link. In a large part of scientific publications on this topic, it is indicated that the quality of preschool education is difficult to assess and there is no common tool and opinion on the usage solely valid assessment tool (Savinskaya, 2015; Dryagina, 2017).

2. Materials and Methods

Recent studies related to the quality of preschool education, which aim to identify the main criteria for the quality of preschool education and a unified methodology for the developmental monitoring of the quality of preschool education in the Russian Federation include the development of an internal quality assessment system for preschool education, the Framework for quality assessment of preschool education, quality assessment using ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale), CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) (Yudina, 2015). Some of the most recent developments on this topic include National research on the quality of education conducted by the Federal Institute for Educational Quality Assessment using the international instrument “Scales for Comprehensive Assessment of the Quality of Education in Preschool Educational Institutions ECERS-R”, the study conducted by the National Institute for Educational Quality was carried out “National study on the quality of preschool education – 2019” (Research on the quality of preschool education, 2018) in order to create a basis for the formation of a single educational space of the Russian Federation, a single methodology for developing preschool education quality monitoring in the Russian Federation (PEQM RF). In 2021, Rosobrnadzor conducts monitoring activities in preschool education to a common methodological background of the PEQM Concept in all regions of the Russian Federation in pilot exploitation mode.

Once preschool education has become part of a single educational network, it can legitimately be considered the first level of education, whose results influence all subsequent stages of training (Heckman et al., 1997; Philpott, 2019; Barker, 2015). The main priorities reflecting the socialization, development of the child, support for children's initiatives, determining the conditions for the successful development of the child's mental and physical abilities are related to the main guidelines set by the Federal State Educational Standard for Preschool Education (FSES PE). The Standard is based on three groups of requirements: to the structure of the basic educational programme of preschool education, to the conditions of its implementation and the results of its development. Based on the educational programme of the preschool institution, the quality of preschool education can be defined as the degree of compliance: whether the actual educational programme and the conditions (including psychological and pedagogical) and the results of the programme meet the requirements that are set in the programme. In the FSES PE, five areas of child development are identified, such as social and communicative development; cognitive development; speech development; artistic and aesthetic development; physical development.

Many publications concerning the quality of the assessment of the FSES reflect the “unconventional” nature of the FSES PE, in which solely targets are set, thereby both the results and the child cannot be the object of evaluation (Asmolov, 2013; Sleptsova, 2018). Unlike other standards, the FSES of preschool education is not the basis for assessing compliance with the established requirements of educational activities and training of students. The mastery of the preschool education programmes is not accompanied by intermediate certification and final certification of students. When we talk about the main player in the educational process, the child, the priority for him is an interesting pastime, classes in a fun way.

To define the design of quality of preschool education in heads of schools (on the example of the city of Moscow), it is proposed to use qualitative methods, taking into account their orientation to the search for meanings, an opportunity to understand the phenomenon itself and to identify the main problem points (Gushchin, 2021). Note that the study of some phenomena can refer to both quantitative and qualitative research methods. These methods solve different problems. Qualitative data provide information on the phenomenon under study, describing its properties, these data are poorly formalized and it is impossible to apply the statistical processing methods available to quantitative data, which are more formalized.

In terms of a qualitative study, it is assumed that the data obtained are related to the model construction phase of the object under study (Kishinskaya, 2011). While quantitative research can be used further, allowing for model verification. The main difference between qualitative research and quantitative methods is that qualitative research provides an answer to the questions “what?” and “how?” Qualitative research involves obtaining a complete answer to a question that cannot be answered unequivocally “yes” or “no”, it allows accumulating the opinion of respondents.

The main types of qualitative research may include observation, such as the case-stage (Gerring, 2005; Baxter & Jack, 2008) and the ethnographic method (Nickerson, 2011), interview (depth, expert, focus group) (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), experiment, role-playing, historical analysis (Nevett, 1991), etc. Considering that in the study the extended answers to the questions “how” and “what”, the methods of qualitative investigation are justified in this case. The study proposes a phenomenological approach, which refers to the study of the subjective experiences of other people, for which purpose thematic interviews are conducted with the directors of TECs (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). A semi-structured guide was chosen for the quality of the interview: the main research questions are recorded, the questions are answered openly, the order and the form of the questions can change.

3. Results and Discussion

Standards are set for each level of education, which contain a set of characteristics and take into account the specificities of the given level of education. However, it is difficult to speak about the quality of preschool education, as there are no results requirements, but mainly the quality of the conditions of the educational process (for example, the requirements for the structure of basic education programmes). In assessing the quality of the development process of any system, it should be noted that the evaluation is based on a comparison of its actual state with that of necessity (Brylevskaya et al., 2020). Thus, it is necessary to come to a clear understanding that there is a necessary “perfect” state of the system to which the system should come in the process of development. Without a clear understanding of this, the development of the system cannot be called focused.

The solution of management problems, including kindergartens and influencing preschool education in the city of Moscow, falls within the competence of school directors. We will try to answer the question, do school principals have guidelines for building preschool education and determining its quality? There is an urgent need to build a system of school principals' perception of the quality of performance evaluation of preschool education, and to identify approaches to shaping the standard of preschool education.

The respondents selected for the interview sample were the following:

1. He has been a director of the Moscow school for at least 2 years.
2. The structure of the regional educational complex includes several preschool departments.
3. Willingness to conduct the interview, availability of time resources to answer all questions.

In the current study, the sample is open, meaning that neither the size of the sample nor its structure can be determined accurately before the result is compiled. In such studies, the survey continues until new information emerges. Eleven directors of Moscow schools from different districts of Moscow took part in this study. The duration of the interview ranged from 20 minutes to 1 hour and 50 minutes. The average interview time was 35-40 minutes. The age of the school principals involved in the study is between 32 and 65 years, indicating that

interviewees are from different generations. There were both men and women among the directors. Among the interviewees, the minimum experience as a school principal was 2 years, with a maximum of 29 years.

The data obtained from the qualitative survey may not be unconditionally extended to the entire TECs surveyed in Moscow, but represent some trends, directors' views on quality assessment indicators, problems of understanding the quality of the preschool level. Thus, we can describe certain patterns of perception. Despite the design of the sample, which implies coverage of the main types of directors, some types may not be covered at the time of the study, so that the data may not be complete but present a picture of the situation, directors' opinion, understanding of the quality and evaluation of the preschool level. Qualitative research should take into account the subjective and interpretive nature of our research efforts (Rozhdestvenskaya, 2014).

The question of *how the "quality of preschool education" is understood* was asked to all the directors during the interview. None of the directors had a precise definition of the concept before. In answering the question, some of the directors referred to the fact that FSES does not define the concept of "quality of preschool education". Some directors said that they deny the very notion of "quality" for preschool education, and to speak of this concept from their point of view, it is only possible to refer to school education, for which there are such criteria for defining quality as certification. Sometimes the answer to the question about the concept of "quality of preschool education" "shifted" and the respondent started to talk about "indicators" or about kindergarten, implying a connection with the concept of "quality of preschool education", but not defining it. Let us give the main respondents' answers received to the question "*How do you understand "the quality of preschool education?"*": "Parents feel trust towards your child care centre", "Quality of preschool education is not a simple question. Because State certification of preschool education does not exist and there are no such official measurements at all", "The level of trust of parents", "Reliability. Anything to do with safety. Everything that "closes" the sides related to security", "We have the main, let's say, the rate of transition of children from preparatory group to first grade", "The preschool education standard does not have a clear requirement in this respect, so we are guided by two main indicators: the transition from kindergarten to school and attendance", "...the child wants to go to kindergarten", "... children ask for kindergarten", "I have a small primitive dissonance, because I deny the concept of quality in kindergarten", "There is no concept of quality of preschool education". Thus, it is worth noting that, first, the answer to the question caused difficulties for almost all respondents, the answers were given not immediately, but after a few seconds of reflection, and secondly, the respondents do not have a single opinion about this concept.

Directors were asked whether they *"consider quality to be measurable or immeasurable"*. Thus, we wanted to bring them to the question of indicators used to measure the quality of preschool education. The opinions were divided on this question. We got a group of respondents who thought that quality was measurable and a group of respondents who felt that it was not possible to measure it. Let us give the answers of respondents who consider the quality of preschool education to be a measurable value: "We have invented a way to measure it [the size of it]", "If the quality is immeasurable, then the conversation is completely pointless. You have to know that it has become better. And how do you know what has become better? Well, somehow, I felt it. This is not a serious conversation. It is necessary to measure", "The value is measurable, we have basic indicators, for example, attendance", "Measurable [quality]".

All respondents, who consider the "quality of preschool education" to be immeasurable, said that it is possible to measure quality in school, but not in kindergarten. Let us give some answers: If I deny the concept of quality [preschool education], then the concept of zero multiplies by zero gets zero. Quality in kindergarten is not affected by anything, because this concept of [quality of preschool education] does not exist", "Quality in school, of course, is measurable. The quality of kindergarten is immeasurable. Children in kindergarten need to be children and live their childhood fully. There is no need to measure them there with a ruler at all".

It is worth noting that the directors who deny the concept of "quality of preschool education" during the interviews spoke about "quality of life of children in the kindergarten", "quality of stay of the child in the kindergarten", "quality of work of the kindergarten": We need to watch them evolve and try to follow them as far as possible. If this is a tougher programme, such an authoritarian one, then it's easy to develop, but measure it... We can probably talk about the dynamics of development, but not about quality. Because quality, the quality standard – is like GOST, it has certain criteria, it is difficult to distinguish here. And the dynamics – yes – for example, the vocabulary has increased in a child, or he, for example, began to celebrate the seasons. This is probably about development, but not quality". Furthermore, the last statement characterizes the position of some directors: the FSES does not define indicators for measuring quality, hence we cannot speak of the "quality of preschool education", but we can talk about the development of a child, the dynamics of development, but it is impossible to measure or determine whether

it meets certain standards. Respondents who report the immeasurability of quality, obviously assume to measure the change of the child, and not the quality of the conditions.

To the question “*what is a good kindergarten?*” almost all the directors gave a detailed answer that does not require time for reflection (unlike the question about the “quality of preschool education”), which gives reason to assume that there is a formed opinion on this issue. According to the directors, the main characteristics of a good kindergarten are the child's desire to go to kindergarten, safety, the transition from kindergarten to school within the same territorial educational complex, orientation to the development of the child, the professionalism of educators, the ability to work with children. Many of the directors noted that, after being integrated into educational complexes, the situation of kindergartens has improved materially and they do not experience any difficulties with either premises, equipment, or additional support: “A good kindergarten is the one from which the transition to school takes place”, “...the child wants to go there [to kindergarten]”, “The integral characteristics of a good kindergarten are safety, creativity, reliability”, “It is important to look at the conditions so that they are safe and comfortable. Safety in terms of nutrition, physical security, psychological security. And the child is an indicator: if he wants to go, if he hugs his teachers, if he tells his parents himself and he doesn't have something that I don't want to go there. Then we can say that the kindergarten meets my expectations as a parent, as a director”, “The necessary thing for a good kindergarten is close professional communication. This already depends on the selection of people, the selection of teachers”.

One of the directors noted that the problems concerning the quality of preschool education that he had had to deal with were precisely those of a child's development orientation and of teaching him or her to take the initiative. This respondent shared the opinion that the situation in many kindergartens develops in such a way that the initiative of the child is stifled and there is no orientation to the development of each particular child.

The opinions of the directors on the working hours of groups, problem points in groups depending on age (short-term stay group, junior group, middle group, preparatory group) showed that the directors experience the greatest difficulties with short-term stay groups and the younger group due to the fact that the pupils go irregularly and it is very difficult to build a unified system in this regard. The directors also noted that it is easier to control standard groups (with a daytime 12-hour stay and regular visits by children). At the same time, the directors note that groups other than the standard ones are usually not in demand among parents. Most of the directors expressed the opinion that standard groups are in demand from parents, and the rest of the groups (evening, weekend) are not needed due to lack of demand and, accordingly, their establishment does not affect the quality of preschool education: “...we have short-term groups. We are developing it as a strategic direction. Although, in fact, there are more problems with it, because they [children] sometimes go, then do not go and it is difficult to build a normal system there”, “...children are not regularly assigned to Short Stay Groups (STGs)”, “...we also tried to open weekend groups... to form it [the system], we need a request from parents. There, after all, it is no longer for development, but for overexposure, say”, “They are ready to hand over children on a day off just to do their own business at home”, “Groups are not permanent and it is almost impossible to build some kind of system for preparing classes... at least we have”, “Standard groups are easier to administer”, “...the biggest negative and problems are more in the preschool group. And so, it is everywhere”, “...we have different groups. But everything is standard, just like everywhere else. GKP, juniors, pre-schoolers... changing the schedule [evening groups, weekends] is not in demand”.

All the directors, without exception, note the important role of the educator-teacher, also mentioning the staff of the garden (speech therapists, music workers, etc.). Despite the fact that the directors note different inherent qualities of teachers-educators, there is a consensus that: firstly, a teacher must have special education, that is, the employee must have a diploma, and secondly, the age of the teacher does not give any reason to consider a person more or less professional or successful in working with children: “It is clear that teachers, speech therapists, speech pathologists, music directors – they can be so creative and interesting regardless of age. But who comes as an educator...? I can't tell by age how it affects”, “I think that this is very subjective for children. Someone wants to be younger, for example, whose mothers are young. Those, for example, who spent their childhood and spend their childhood with their grandmother, are mostly drawn to grandmothers. Therefore, it is good that this is all an individual story, but I don't think that age greatly affects”, “I don't have confidence or prejudices about any age. If you look at the end, therefore, we have such a smoothed Gaussian history by age. That is, our area for 40 years has most teachers”, “A healthy history, as in the village, all ages are well represented”.

The directors note that regardless of age, employees need to be able to transform the way they work and be able to respond to changes. The capability to change is evaluated by the directors as a positive trait of the kindergarten staff: “Everything depends much more on personal characteristics than on age, gender or any other... this also applies to

teachers. There are very old educators and teachers, and caretakers who will give a head start in the situation of changes in which we are. In fact, we are changing the content and the way of working, it seems there is a need to place bets on the young, because it is easier for them to change. But life shows that there are also a lot of people among the age group, at least there are people... who are happy to participate in some kind of transformation”, “There are no questions about methodology. But it is, certainly, a change of role...”.

Some directors had already referred to the age teachers, who sometimes offer children “outdated” tasks, games, but at the same time these employees do not have any negative feedback from parents: “... for example, it came to the point that the music director, everything seems to be fine, there are no complaints, but he studies the Soviet repertoire of songs. As she came to the kindergarten 30 years ago, that's all. It's the same thing every year. This, of course, raised issues among parents, although everyone was happy”.

Some directors noted that young employees, due to the presence of small children in the family, can sometimes take sick leave more often than older employees: “I have a very mature team, in fact. The average age is over 50 exactly. Accordingly, young people have their own nuances. They are usually with young children. Accordingly, they often get sick”. Six out of eleven respondents attributed teamwork and professional interaction to the quality of the educator: “Very often the educator is not able to work with the parents or works separately from the school’s tasks. It is necessary to work in a team”, “... working for the overall result is also a very important quality that not everyone has”, “...I need good professional interaction between people, because they are beginning to develop each other. But if several people in the team think this way, and a few do not, then there is an opportunity to advance if they communicate very closely with each other”, “...I come and see that random people work for me, because they came to the profession when the salary was very small. They were thanked for coming to play with the kids. And there is no professional interaction. And therefore, some problems of children are not solved. The problems need to be solved: firstly, it is necessary to change people, then to start professional communication between them, setting a task, and these will result in the most important thing when they develop task-thinking in relation to their children”.

Some respondents noted that the kindergarten teacher depends on whether the child will continue to study in the 1st grade of the same TEC. The need to work “in one bundle” was noted. One of the directors expressed the opinion that the low transition from kindergarten to first grade was due to the influence of educators on the choice of parents: “...there were directly specific cases when educators discouraged parents from going to first grade, sabotaged this case and believed that they were doing it better. That is, they were not ready to build some kind of system that would suit everyone”.

Speaking about the qualities of teachers, the respondents also noted the general cultural level, the ability to change, the ability to work with parents, the desire to work with children, knowledge of the basics of psychology. Here are some statements concerning the qualities of teachers: “Maybe, after all, the general cultural level. I drove them together to the meta-subject testing at the Moscow Centre for Education Quality”, “The opportunity to change”, “First of all, he [the teacher] should, relatively speaking, be in his place – which means that he wants to work with children. He is interested in doing this. He is happy to come to work. This is the first and most important thing. That is, he does not fulfil his duty, because there is nowhere else to go, but works with pleasure. Then, of course, he should master the basics of age-related psychology and pedagogy. That is, he should understand why the child is crying, what he wants. He should be very communicative. He should communicate not only with the child, but also with the parents”, “Everything depends on personal characteristics”.

The respondents were asked the following questions: “*Is there a need for additional training of employees? Do teachers take advanced training courses for employees? Do the directors think that the training of employees of a preschool organization has an impact on the quality of preschool education?*”. Many directors noted that teachers in kindergartens periodically take advanced training courses, the process of certificate getting is formal. These respondents attributed advanced training to a factor that does not affect the work of the institution and the improvement of the quality of work of employees: “Teachers go to professional development, of course, but here, again, the story is about the fact that they have a significant pressure and they do not always have time for advanced training. And so, of course, all the relevant diplomas are available”, “They are undergoing advanced training, but this is more a formal question than a useful one”, “It is unlikely that these [advanced training] programmes have any additional impact”.

Many have noted, however, that advanced training may often be necessary for narrow specialists, such as speech therapists and psychologists: “If we are talking about psychologists, speech therapists ... neuropsychology, work with disabilities (HIA) – they need advanced training. When we were in deficit and we could not provide training

conditions, we sent these specialists to advanced training. They turned on, and remained satisfied, began to apply”, “It makes sense for specialists to undergo advanced training, but for a teacher at high load, rather not”.

Some directors noted that the personal qualities of an employee are important, whereby training can be successful. If “man is in his/her place”, then it is possible to further his education, otherwise – any education is useless: then his further training is possible, otherwise, any training is useless: “In order for advanced training or retraining courses to give results, it is necessary that the basic conditions are met: this is the fact that a person is in his/her place and goes to work with interest. When it is there, I can build up a lot on this foundation and turn into a mega-professional. And if this is not the case, then it is a waste of time and money, school or personal”, “According to international studies, the fact of whom you recruited to work influences most of all. And in second place, what you taught them after they came”.

More than half of the respondents noted that employee training is a necessity, given the constant changes in the ways of working and obtaining additional knowledge. On the other hand, many suggested that the variety of courses presented on the market does not guarantee successful training, it is necessary to take into account the very content of the course, the form of training, and the total number of employees sent for educating. Thus, it can be noted that, according to the respondents, the professional development of employees affects the quality of preschool education if the training courses are effectively organized and contain elements of team interaction: “Of course, I consider training is very important. Because if one of them watched a webinar, another looked at something else, the third went to some courses, the fourth went somewhere else-in chunks, something, somewhere, then they did not exchange it among themselves – and went on to work. Such courses do not help”, “It works well if it is a corporate history and several people study at once, and if there is some support before and after the course itself, training”, “Training is of great importance, only it can be organized in different ways and more or less effectively”, “There are several forums in which they [educators] interact with each other, come up with something... this is also professional development, just informal and within the corporate. There are forums, but there is no certificate of completion of something, identification, a certificate – are not available”, “If these are some kind of training courses, where we gather a team or some part of the team, they affect. For example, when we changed the programme, we had these dives three times a year, with 40 people. This is slightly less than half of the teachers have learned”. Three directors noted that employee training is required if there are any problems in the team, otherwise, it is not necessary: “When it is damp in the team, we have to rely more on external forces. And when such professional people are selected and relationships are built between them, they can give a lot to each other, and then you can buy fewer experts”.

When conducting the study, it was important for us to identify approaches to measuring the quality of preschool education among Moscow school directors, whether there is a system of indicators, methods that school directors use to assess the quality of preschool education in their institutions. When answering the questions: “*Do your preschool educational organization have methods and indicators that are used to assess the quality of preschool education?*” four respondents gave a negative answer, referring to the fact that the FSES PE does not establish criteria for assessing the quality of preschool education: “We do not measure in any way. Children in kindergarten cannot, in principle, be measured”, “We don't do this at all. Perhaps we should. I'll think about it”.

Some respondents noted that there are standard indicators to assess quality, such as 'attendance', 'morbidity rate', 'percentage of transition of children from kindergarten to first grade': “The 'attendance' indicator is checked every month. If the teacher has authority in the group and keeps an eye on attendance, the children are happy to go. If educators do not monitor [children], attendance, when children are in a group under open windows, then, for example, the same level of morbidity may be higher”, “The percentage of children's transition [from kindergarten] to the first grade”.

Sometimes the directors argued about “obvious” indicators that cannot be measured: “...the indicator is an indicator of trust in the school and kindergarten in security issues, including”, “The indicator is a child. He wants to go to the kindergarten, so everything is fine”. Nevertheless, some respondents pointed out that sometimes they use some additional assessment indicators in the institution, but they are evaluated on an irregular basis, only in case of problematic situations, in order to make a decision in a specific situation: “Adapted ECERS and IPIPS (international Performance Indicators in Primary School)... IPIPS is used for primary school from 1st to 4th grade, but if we want to know in advance that everything is good at school, some of the elements of [IPIPS] can be 'released' into the preschool group...We do not regularly conduct [assessment]”, “We launched [assessment]... just to see how they [indicators] work”, “We conducted sometimes when it is necessary. When there was a problem and we had to show what exactly was not quite right. We have taken measurements: we have many of our preschool children entering the first grade from different enclosures and mixing with children who are not from our kindergartens. And we spent in

the middle of the first grade in the first half of the year... And then we developed these guys, we ourselves analysed who came to us from which group, from which preschool building. And accordingly, we showed the employees of the preschool department where they have the strongest, weakest places in their groups, which they gave us”, “The method is, anyway, an expert assessment of the teacher. And there are encrypted questions, results recorded in the FSES of preschool education. And about each child, it was necessary to note how it was: this is at this level, this is at this, and this is at this”, “We did not conduct this every year, but when it was necessary to transform the preschool greatly, we did it, but it was, as it were, a symbolic act so that people understood that it is impossible to work in the old way...”, “There is an assessment personally for the child, but no one rolls it out for him and his parents – it is generalized further by groups and buildings of the preschool department”, “...I have heard about ECERS, but we haven't done it on a full programme... as an internal evaluation to see where we have shortcomings”.

Based on the responses to the questions about assessment indicators and the use of their results, the following can be noted: the directors do not conduct regular evaluation and do not regularly use any indicators to assess the quality of preschool education. Some of the respondents say that they tried to conduct an assessment to “just see” how these indicators work. It is important to note that the directors say that they conduct evaluations sometimes as a forced measure to identify shortcomings in case of problems, rather than to prevent them.

Many studies concerning the quality of preschool education are addressed to parents as one of the main subjects of educational relations. When conducting the interviews, we wanted to find out the principals' opinion on whether the parents of the pupils determine the criteria for quality assessment and whether they have an influence on the work of the kindergarten. We asked questions about the form in which teachers are evaluated by parents, whether the influence of parents, the parent committee and the governing board have much influence in establishing quality criteria for preschool education. Many directors noted that no surveys or questionnaires were conducted among parents in their organisations: “We do not conduct questionnaires or surveys among parents”, “We have conducted questionnaires among parents at school, we have not done it at preschool”.

Almost all the directors expressed the opinion that parents are subjective in their assessments because they were difficult to follow. Respondents often noted that the educator is the link between the kindergarten and the parents, thanks to whom the child wants to go to the kindergarten. If the teacher is sufficiently communicative and knows how to conduct a dialogue with parents, then, according to the directors, there should be no problems in the organization: “Parents are quite subjective. The main criterion seems to be the child too, if he goes to kindergarten, we have a good teacher. And the second part is informing, i.e., parents understand: if something happens, they should know where, why, at what time – exhaustively”, “...the child likes the kindergarten in general, i.e. the teacher is able to create this environment, and does not shove a herring into his [the child] mouth so that he eats every last crumb. There is no yelling on a walk. Well, some such things, if we talk about parents' assessment of teachers”, “...the child understands that he/she is comfortable with the educator, he organises the space well”.

Worth mentioning, less than half of the respondents conduct questionnaires or surveys of parents in preschools, noting that such assessment is irregular. Almost all the directors who said that there are no questionnaires or surveys for evaluation in their preschool organizations, noticed that they use a similar assessment at school. At the same time, almost all the directors who answered that they did not conduct an assessment of teachers by parents or any questionnaire about preschool education, said that they would definitely think about conducting such an assessment: “It seems to me that it is not so important. Although, maybe we should think... I have never thought about this question”, “We do not conduct, although maybe we should have. But if there were any problems... there are no problems”, “I understand what you are saying... that this may be an important topic. But we don't hold”, “It seems a little strange because there is nothing to invent... You can prescribe the condition of the child of the "yes-no" type. Like a child comes after kindergarten and feels good-OK. The child after kindergarten is happy, cheerful, cheerful-OK”.

Often, the directors said that any assessment or questionnaire should be carried out only in case of problems. If there are no problems that are expressed in the parents' appeal, then, therefore, it is not necessary to conduct any surveys: “For me, an indicator that is easy to measure is always important: this is the parents' appeal to the administration about something that is not right. We have practically no appeals above the senior tutor. Parents of pre-schoolers don't come to me, they don't write – they're doing fine”, “We used to conduct such a survey, it was for incentives for teachers, additional payments”.

When talking about the influence of parents, more than half of the directors believe that parents have rather a negative influence on the work of the organisation. Some principals expressed the opinion that parents should not always be listened to because of their incompetence in matters of preschool education. Respondents believe that

parents cannot set any criteria as they are not experts in preschool education: "...as far as preschool children are concerned, we probably try to get into an expert position here, not in the middle", "...we meet with parents to tell them how the child is developing and what they also need to do, not for them to tell us their complaints", "...sometimes from their [parents] words followed, they want to live their childhood again, want their child to have the same as they did. We explained to them that we did not understand a little, 20-30 years have passed, and the school is already different. We are preparing him [the child] at another school. And it will not be so there. Even the content of the programme is different. Actually, the country is already different, the economy is different, and you need other things to fulfil yourself", "...parents of preschool children should be supported, they are quite young people themselves, especially if it is the first child", "...their [parents'] wishes should not be taken under a visor. They need to tell them what to read and how and what to react to".

Several directors noted that their preschool organizations work with parents in order to increase their competence in preschool education, noting the complexity of such work: "We organised a parent club with a psychologist. They were invited to come, learn the peculiarities of child psychology, how to play with children, study, teach... parents did not want to come to these classes", "... like Lev Lvovich Lyubimov, he has such a system that he recommends to schools for working with parents of preschool children. We started it so slowly, because you have to talk to everyone, and we have thousands of them... and there always has to be a psychologist nearby. We moved in this direction with new parents, recruiting younger groups and doing this kind of work year after year".

Following the results of the interview, we identified several negative reactions of the directors to the interference of parents in the work of the organization: "... sometimes they [parents] ask almost for molecular physics in the preschool group to be given to them. Others, for example, begin to control nutrition or something else", "... their activity, anxiety goes more in this direction... they wrote to all instances, to the prosecutor's office, to the department, everywhere... instead of asking something", "...sometimes you want to move something or change, they [parents] immediately go out with a pitchfork, not listening to any arguments at all, in terms of why they should do it", "... how many different schools did not work, the biggest negative and problems [with parents] are in the preschool group", "I would say that the parent committee hinders more than helps in the work of the kindergarten".

Some respondents noted that they had conducted questionnaires and surveys of parents on an irregular basis regarding the evaluation of teachers by parents, with more than half of these respondents indicating that parents were not prepared to give an objective assessment. Sometimes respondents noted that assessment results influenced management decisions, such as the dismissal of teachers or the awarding of incentive payments: "This year I experimented in the school: I conducted an anonymous questionnaire. It was a shock for the teachers. No one knew about it. I just came in giving questionnaires anonymously, but the names of teachers, educators were written... This was all processing. Moreover, the simplest indicator is the number of votes. For me, for example, quantity is more important than evaluation. It is clear that parents know at most about the school either from their children or from their own chats... And the number of questionnaires submitted is an indicator of parents' readiness to participate in school management", "...when there was so much negativity in the school, I told them [the parents]: let us evaluate objectively, as you think, each teacher, educator, and then we will deal with it, together with you seek ways to resolve it. But it was interesting, not only that the teachers were not ready for this, most parents were not ready. I cannot say that the data that was written there was objective. I did not even take any action and decisions based on the results of this survey", "...somewhere in the group completely boycotted – this [questionnaire] thing. Or, on the contrary, it was a tool of revenge and they started with the fact that they almost eat babies... where there were five everywhere or only unsubscriptions", "... where fears were confirmed, we realised that we would be breaking up with someone or we had already broken up with someone. But we do not use this questionnaire in depth at school. Because the data was not too relevant", "...we had such a rating: part of the evaluation was included in incentive payments. Where there was a high level of evaluation by parents, we paid extra during the year...".

It was revealed that all kindergartens belonging to the directors' TECs have a parents' committee. However, almost all respondents noted that the existence of the parents' committee does not affect the quality of preschool education, the committee representatives cannot set any criteria for quality assessment and the role of the committee is not defined anywhere, which is why principals usually do not interact with representatives of the parents' committee: "The role of the parents' committee... now they are in such a role of activists and their main task is to help maintain some existing traditions", "What does the parents' committee... honestly, I can't say", "In my experience as a parent, I can say that the role of the parents' committee is to organize congratulations to children and organize congratulations to adults on holidays", "I think the parents' committee has two functions: to preserve traditions and help educators congratulate children, help children to congratulate educators. It seems to be a small role", "There is no legally the same association as a Parents Association. Therefore, it is some kind of underground organization.

Well, of course, they are doing something there...helping children organize something. But since it is underground, I don't even know what they are doing there. The educators are well aware of this and hopefully control it because it has not gone completely out of hand", "The minority cannot represent the majority", "The last time I gathered all these chairmen of these parent committees of the whole school and kindergarten about three or four years ago to tell them that we have procurement assumes everything necessary, no need to collect money so that they do not pester other parents much to make sure. That, in general, is all".

Speaking about the functions of the Governing Board, all directors said that the main competencies of the Governing Board include agreeing the amount of parental fees for day care, but noted that this body is advisory and some decisions are taken in consultation with the Governing Board. However, directors did not mention that the Governing Council sets any criteria for assessing the quality of preschool education: "It [the Governing Council] is responsible for agreeing the number of parents' fees for care and supervision. If we have any mega-renovations or relocations, we discuss them through the Governing Council", "...when we changed the incentive system for educators, when we decided that all parental fees would be used for salaries of preschool teachers – such decisions were discussed and through the Governing Council", "...no pressing issues about preschool children to discuss in the council now", "The competence of the Governing Council includes approval of the fees for preschool care. In principle, it is an advisory body", "... once a year we should discuss when to raise [the fee]. We can raise it a little every year, or we cannot raise it, not raise it, and then raise it all at once in three years. And then at this point there is a vector of discussion", "...the governing boards are probably not discussing any details on the content or quality assessment".

One respondent noted that the presence of opposition parents hindered the implementation of decisions through the Governing Council: "... when some of the opposition parents thwarted me in the council elections, I had to hold re-elections in the preschool group because they did not agree with the results. And in general, it was necessary to re-vote. The interesting thing is that they still voted in favour of those candidates who were loyal to me, let's say. Because the minority cannot represent the majority. People who tried to block all decisions that concern their children wanted to break through".

During the interview process, we tried to identify the availability of indicators used to assess the quality of preschools. In addition to the main indicators for measuring the quality of preschool education, parents' evaluation of teachers, the question was asked whether the territorial education complexes use individual rating of kindergartens and nurseries and whether it affects anything. 3 principals noted that there is no such rating within TEC: "There is no rating, it is not taken into account", "I dare to tell my parents that our kindergartens are all good and can be recommended by anyone". 8 principals answered that rating within TEC exists, speaking about the influence of rating only some principals noted that it is only sometimes used and can influence incentive payments to employees of a distinguished educational institution: "The buildings are in different initial conditions. But sometimes I showed that in the dynamics, the case that gave us the least and gives the quality that it has the highest dynamics. And showed this graph to support", "Ratings in the TEC are reviewed, monitored. Sometimes we are guided by what our parents say".

One director explained the lack of ranking by a reluctance to create competition in the TEC: "The fact is that competition and cooperation are opposite things. They are not good friends with each other. If you have to build cooperation, you don't have to build competition. Therefore, there is no competition between the buildings in our school and in the preschool. We have a competition of the whole complex; we have a desire for everyone to show the maximum results of the complex".

During the interview, we wanted to get answers *about what conditions need to be created or what conditions have been created/are being created to improve the quality of preschool education*. When answering the principal's question, the directors argued both about improving the quality of preschool education in general and about improving the quality of their preschool organisation. All respondents considered that there are no problems with the material provision of kindergartens in the city of Moscow, that all the kindergartens are well equipped. Among the main conditions for improving the director's quality they highlighted a comfortable psychological environment for the child, professional staff, safety, availability of additional activities for the child's all-round development, quality nutrition: "In my opinion, it is necessary to observe safety conditions and most importantly to protect the child from psychological, physical, emotional pressure of violence. Moreover, so that it has high-quality nutrition. That is, these norms have to be met in order to be able to say that the quality of life of children in kindergarten is high", "The main conditions for improving the quality of preschools are personnel", "Of course, it is an emotionally comfortable environment. That is, the teacher should be such a community manager, create children's parties, organize them into joint activities, so that they are distracted from sadness and grief at home and get involved with each other, some

processes”, “A wide range of opportunities for comprehensive development-that is, the presence of, for example, some circles, sections, clubs, that is, where you can go so that the child stays there and that it does not just turn into supervision and care, but that there are competent teachers who could take and teach the child English, cutting and sewing, something more. And this is also important”, “If it is not only supervision and care, and if there is a desire, then some academic skills will be developed”, “To have people, we need finances. But it seems that we have a salary of educators from 55 to 90 thousand, but the average is somewhere around 70 thousand. With that kind of money, you can attract good people and professionals. Here is the main condition that there is an opportunity-this is due to the policy of the city of Moscow on the rational use and efficient use of funds. In general, many good measures have been taken to ensure that the money that is in the system reaches the employees who work with children. And therefore, there is a good replacement for more professional people”, “It seems to me that it is possible to improve the situation in the kindergarten somewhat in order to improve the quality of life of children in kindergarten and the quality of children's stay in kindergarten. To do this, we must first of all improve what we have or, in general, what should be at a good high level”.

Many of the principals pointed out that in order to improve the quality of preschool education, a mechanism for continuity between kindergarten and school is used. Speaking about the continuity between kindergarten and school, all respondents mentioned that one of the grounds for continuity in their organisations is the possibility of attending preschool preparation courses at the TEC. Many directors emphasised that often preparatory courses are organized in such a way that the teacher of the courses becomes the teacher of future first-graders. Respondents noted that the "fixing" of a teacher or the opportunity to choose a teacher to whom a child will go to the first grade increases the percentage of children moving from kindergarten to the first grade. The directors also noted that interaction between school teachers and educators is organized, open lessons, the presence of children with disabilities is taken into account: “First, teachers try to interact with teachers of senior preparatory groups in order to understand what programmes of the preparatory group, so that they already have some idea of what the child will do, what programme to follow. And there is an effect: the children come very prepared – they are such good fellows. And also, primary school teachers come to kindergartens in order to give open lessons for both parents and children. In order to look at each other, find out what and how”, “... since this year we have only started to take the first steps in the continuity of children with disabilities. In other words, there is interaction along this line, we understand, for example, how many children in the first grade will be with special needs, what areas, what spectrum. And that, in fact, is important because we understand whether a remedial or speech therapy class is needed or whether they can grow within an inclusive education through the classes that will be created”.

Some respondents argued that in continuity, it is important to inform parents and their readiness to understand what the school expects from them: “Continuity in the sense that parents of preschool children understand what the school expects of them and what is expected of them. Telling parents what we have at school: because we have three different programmes in different buildings – all three are interesting and unusual. There are plenty of options to choose from. And when you choose, it would be nice to understand what you choose, so that you can be very surprised later”, “... the parent has time to ask all the questions in advance, get answers and, accordingly, the level of anxiety decreases, and the level of understanding and adequacy of our interaction increases”.

Two principals pointed out that it is not the preschool children's mastery of the school curriculum that is important, but the child's psychological readiness when they enter school: “A child comes to the first grade who is bored by the content. He already knows the first-grade curriculum. And in terms of psychological readiness, he is very far from the first class, that is, he does not hear, does not control... Just writes, counts, sings. Preschool time should be spent not on mastering the school curriculum, but on psychological readiness, so that the child can hear both an adult and peers, be able to say what he wants, does not want, somehow declare”, “We tried to convince educators and parents that teachers will teach you to write, count in order to learn better self-service, put on shoes and somehow respond adequately to the requests of an adult, to some requests of peers”.

Many principals note that continuity has an impact on the transition from kindergarten to school and helps to maintain the contingent of students: “What we just did not create: free classes for additional education for all children who will apply for first grade. They recorded the exact teacher they would go to. What, in principle, we cannot do, but we agreed to such conditions”, “I had zero-group classes opened as the first class in preschool groups. In half a year, the children learned the first-grade programme and were transferred to the second grade already in school in the middle of the year. I wouldn't say that it was super effective, but I managed to attract a couple of classes on this, in terms of retaining children and the contingent”.

Some principals noted that attention is being paid to the alignment of primary school and preschool curricula: "...the plus side is that we have changed the curriculum in both primary school and preschool so that they are aligned to each other. In principle, Veraksa and "School of Russia" corresponded well to each other: that is, they build up children there and build up children here, they do what they are told, they sit here and wait until they are asked – everything is fine. And since our tasks are different, we had to construct a different logic. It has, in principle, taken place. Now all pupils are on "Discovery " and the primary school, too. Thus, there is continuity of programmes, continuity of people – people are familiar”.

Based on the results of the interviews, we identified three main groups of directors' perceptions of the quality of preschool education. The division was carried out on a sample of 11 respondents who took part in the study. We do not believe that the division into three groups representing the main positions of directors regarding the quality of preschool education is the solely possible one, however, each of the respondents could be assigned to one of the three groups presented below.

A cognitive graph is presented for each of the groups, showing the main influences on the quality of preschool education. The columns below include the main influencing factors that have been highlighted by the directors. It was important for us to highlight the main factors from the managers' point of view. The groups were given conditional names “Administrators”, “Antagonists”, “Creators”, characterizing the position of directors on the quality of preschool education.

Group 1. “Administrators”. This group included 6 respondents out of 11. The main purpose of preschool education is seen by this group as well-organised care and supervision of the child. The concepts of “child care and supervision” are often used by respondents from group 1. Representatives of this group believe that a child's basic development lies in school, not in kindergarten. According to the respondents from this group, the main functions of the educator are the supervision and care of the child and it is important that the parent is satisfied.

Speaking about parents, these directors point out that parents have an influence on preschool education and kindergarten work, but rather negatively: they resist change, want to establish order themselves – and this hinders the work of the staff, and this interferes with the work of employees. According to the representatives of this group, all employees should have appropriate specialized education, a diploma is mandatory. These directors note the importance of the general cultural level of the teacher, the qualification, although the training itself is considered rather as a formality that does not bring much benefit.

Among the main indicators for assessing the quality of preschool education highlighted in this group are the percentage of admission to school from a preschool organization, the attendance rate, the level of morbidity in the preschool group, the percentage of satisfied/dissatisfied parents (by the number of reviews/complaints), the level of trust in preschool education, expressed in terms of whether parents will take their child to the same TEC school. The quality of preschool education according to 4 out of 6 headmasters is necessarily measurable, but 2 representatives of this group said that the quality of school education is measurable and that there should be clear criteria to measure the quality of preschool education, which they do not have.

According to the 'administrative' directors, there may be indicators and methodologies to measure quality, but it is possible to do without them. The most important thing for “administrators” is a clear, established 'work mechanism that exists as a daily routine, for example' and needs to be respected. The position of this group can be formulated as “all must be well: few children get sick, many go to school after kindergarten, few external complaints from parents, good kindergarten attendance”. The representatives of this group have a great deal of influence from administrative factors: groups of different lengths of stay are created; a large number of additional classes and sections of different profiles are introduced based on the wishes of parents; all staff members have certificates of education and advanced training, etc. These directors focus on financial incentives for educators, which they see as having a positive impact on their performance.

Group 2. “Antagonists”. This group included 2 respondents out of 11. Representatives of this group, in principle, reject the notion of quality in preschool education. They believe that quality cannot be measured as it does not exist for preschool education, referring to the fact that the FSES does not establish any criteria for assessing the quality of preschool education. The directors do not use any indicators to draw conclusions about what has improved or, on the contrary, worsened in the kindergarten. “Antagonists” note that changes towards improvement or deterioration are very subjective and "just felt". Representatives of this group often talk about the subjective opinion: their own and their parents'. The “antagonist” directors, however, deny the strong influence of parents on the work of the kindergarten and their participation in the life of the kindergarten, pointing out that parents cannot set any criteria for the work of the kindergarten.

The key figure in preschool education is the educator: “He must be in his place”, “...the children respond well to him”, “the educator knows how to find common language with the parents”. It is the kindergarten teacher who creates the image of a good kindergarten, according to the principals, and the impression of the school. Thanks to the educator, the children will either go to the first grade of this school or not. It is also noted that complaints from parents will or will not be received due to the teacher-educator. Representatives of this group are dominated by an orientation towards subjective perception, which largely depends on the teachers of the preschool organization. Remarkably, these directors, when talking about the qualities of educators point out that “a person just has to be in his place”, “it's very subjective, some like one thing and some like another”, considering that educators themselves are not characterised by their professional qualities, qualifications, work experience, age, but by their desire to work as an educator.

The “antagonistic” directors do not consider training of kindergarten staff or professional development to be an important component of the organisation's work. These directors say that the child should develop, but it is not known exactly how, because all children have different levels of development, intelligence, family circumstances, socio-cultural level, etc. According to the “antagonists”, it is the school that will “show” a child's development, but it is impossible to assess it in kindergarten.

Group 3. “Creators”. This group included 3 respondents out of 11. The group of directors is of the opinion that the concept of “quality of preschool education” exists, but it is very difficult to define it. At the same time, all the directors of this group believe that the quality of preschool education is a measurable value and that there is a need to compare indicators in order to see whether there are improvements in performance. These directors noted that they were aware of the various indicators for assessing the quality of preschool education, but that they were not used regularly, most often when there was a problem and it was necessary to identify its causes.

The representatives of this group consider that the development of the child is already planned in kindergarten and that everything that happens to the child in preschool childhood is of great importance. The directors – “creators” point out that in the kindergarten it is necessary to lay down the groundwork for the proper development of the child in the future, in the school; child can learn to be independent, to self-initiate and make choices, in order to choose his/her own path of life. These directors suggest that it is possible to create certain conditions in the kindergarten to improve the quality of preschool education. These conditions are based not so much on the maintenance of the kindergarten, which means good repairs, good nutrition and other similar essential characteristics of a good kindergarten, but on the deeply thought-out formed teamwork of the staff of both the kindergarten and the school, elaboration of problems arising in the child, the continuity of preschool and school education programmes.

Preschool education, in the opinion of the “creators”, should be oriented towards the development of the child, rather than a desire to “present a pretty picture to adults”. They often say that it is necessary to solve specific problems of each child: the educator should be able to see them and work with the child without weakening his or her initiatives (Somkin, 2019). The directors of this group talk about the importance of professional interaction among employees. They pay great attention to corporate training; they talk about the ability to work as a team for a common goal.

In relation to parents, these principals prefer to take an expert stance, believing that “parents' wishes should not be taken for granted”, but that parents should be supported and advised on how the child can be developed. Representatives of this group pay great attention to the continuity between kindergarten and school, noting the continuity of the programmes and the people who organise learning in both school and kindergarten. For principals in this group, the foundation of continuity is laid from the moment the child enters preschool, starting at a very early age, whereas, for the most part, representatives of other groups, when talking about continuity between school and kindergarten, focus on the kindergarten preparatory group, after which the pupils enter school.

Taking into account the fact that in the city of Moscow, kindergartens are part of TECs and are managed by school directors, and solving management problems concerning kindergartens and influencing preschool education in the city of Moscow is in the competence of directors, it was important for us to know the guidelines by which preschool education is built and its quality determined from the perspective of the TEC director (Abankina et al., 2019; Avraamova et al., 2019; Remorenko et al., 2017; The concept of monitoring the quality of preschool education in the Russian Federation, 2021).

4. Conclusions

As a result of the study, we were able to identify the main factors influencing the quality of preschool education, according to the principals of Moscow schools. Based on the results of the interviews, we identified three main

groups of principals' perceptions of the quality of preschool education. Based on the results of the study, the following preliminary conclusions can be drawn for the sample under consideration. The response to the question about the concept of quality in preschool education was difficult for almost all respondents and there was no consensus on the concept. Not all principals believe that the concept of quality in preschool education exists. At the same time, all principals point out that it is possible to talk about the quality of school education and how good preschool education was, the school can show, where application of "measures" of quality is possible. All principals note that quality assessment, various indicators, surveys, etc. are carried out by them at the school level. However, only a few respondents try to use quality measures from the school and relate them to the impact of preschool education in order to build some kind of management strategy for the kindergarten, having received the assessment results from school children, former pupils of their preschool organisations.

Perhaps principals should use the quality assessment indicators they regularly carry out in the school, in the primary grades, to build a management strategy concerning kindergartens. Considering that a large part of the primary school population is pupils of preschool organisations of the same TEC, it is possible to identify positive and negative characteristics of preschool organisations of the TEC by testing, indicators used in primary school.

Principals do not regularly use any assessment indicators to evaluate the quality of preschool education and most often the use of assessment indicators was triggered by the emergence of a problem, as acknowledged by the respondents themselves. From the principal's point of view, one of the key players in preschool education is the educator. It is he who interacts with children and parents, creates a favourable emotional environment, to which parents pay great attention. Precisely the teacher is responsible for the safety and promotes child development, taking into account his individual characteristics and needs. Professional personnel, according to respondents, are the foundation of good preschool education, therefore, all respondents mentioned among the most important factors influencing the quality of preschool education and the quality of work of preschool organization, a teacher-educator. However, some respondents consider that the teacher should have certain already developed personal qualities and be "in his/her own place", while some directors state that additional education is important for the educators, professional staff require not only successful learning, but also the organization of the process so that employees have the opportunity to interact within a team. Several directors clarified that working at TEC involves working in the same team, without competition, and that therefore great emphasis should be placed on teamwork, close cooperation and working for a common purpose. This position allows developing a strategy of training of employees using corporate methods and teamwork, which will allow increasing professional interaction and the ability to work in a team.

The reasons for continuity between the school and the kindergarten are considered by the directors as an important factor affecting the quality of preschool education. The grounds for continuity should be established already on the child's admission to preschool education from the earliest age: it is possible to speak not only of the link between educational programmes, but also to enable the child to develop his or her initiative and his or her ability to respond adequately to requests from adults, to communicate with peers, to have choices, to improve his self-service skills, etc.

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