

FORMATION OF INDEPENDENCE OF CHILDREN OF SENIOR PRESCHOOL AGE BY MEANS OF PROBLEM TASKS

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Abstract. *Considering the current situation in the educational space of Ukraine, the teacher should cultivate in the younger generation the ability to analyze, think critically, find solutions to problems, develop a personality capable of taking responsibility for their own actions and deeds. In this context, the problem of independence education is relevant, significant both in theoretical and practical aspects. We associate perspective ways of research with the study of the implementation of modern scientific approaches to the transformation of the pedagogical process, increasing attention to the personality of the child as an agent of cognitive activity, providing him with freedom of choice of activities and forms of participation in it, democratization of the educational process on the basis of cooperation between teachers and pupils, differentiation of education and training, development of flexible pedagogical technologies that best meet the needs and capabilities of pupils, in their independent mastering of various aspects of life. In this context, problem tasks that put the child in a situation where he/she is encouraged to use various methods of mental activity (comparison, analysis, synthesis, classification) are of undeniable value. This activates independence, the ability to find ways to solve problems, draw conclusions and generalize. Therefore, the aim of the study is the search for effective ways to form independence in children of senior preschool age. Studying the formation of independence as a basic personal quality in children of senior preschool age, we were guided by the fact that the independence of children of this age group is best manifested in new unfamiliar situations. By solving them, children can demonstrate independence of thought, originality of ways to solve the problem. In the light of this, we took into account the children's interest in independent actions in the conditions of choosing between the new and the familiar; independence and autonomy of*

actions in relation to the adult; ways of solving the problem; the result of the activity. As a result of the experimental study, we found that a significant number of children in the experimental group do not realize the possibilities of independence and do not reach the optimal level of its formation. The search for ways to solve this problem made it possible to identify effective means of forming independence in children of senior preschool age, among which a special place is occupied by problem solving tasks. They put children in the conditions of practical search for a solution to the problem, which pushes them to search independently, awakens the child's opinion, forms non-standard thinking. Such tasks encourage children to express their original ideas, to analyze problematic and ambiguous situations, to establish cause-and-effect relationships, to think over the situation, to build hypotheses, which also stimulates independence of thinking, flexibility of mind, develops creative abilities of the child. Thus, problem-based tasks effectively influence the development of preschoolers' independence as an integral quality of personality.

Keywords: children of senior preschool age, independence, preschool education institution, problem tasks.

Introduction

In view of the current situation in the educational space of Ukraine, a teacher must educate the younger generation's ability to analyze, think critically, find solutions to problems, and develop a personality capable of taking responsibility for their own actions. In this context, the issue of independence formation is relevant, significant in both theoretical and practical aspects.

Independence is a dynamic personality characteristic that is constantly developing. Existing scientific data indicate that by the end of the senior preschool age, under conditions of optimal upbringing and education, children can gain independence in various types of activities: *through games* (Savchenko, 2014); *work* (Krutii, 2012); *cognition* (Udina, 2008); *in communication* (Kuzmenko, 2001); *in productive activities* (Lisovets, 2018). Certain aspects of independence have not been overlooked by researchers. In particular, there are studies concerning manifestations of the abovementioned basic personality quality *in drawing* (Nosachenko, 2006); *in designing* (Demydova, 2006); *in paper crafts activities* (Halaida, 2004); *in constructive play* (Matviienko, 2019).

Taking into account such a versatile study of the problem of the formation of independence in senior preschoolers, we associate promising ways of research with the study of the implementation of modern scientific approaches to the transformation of the educational process, increasing attention to the personality of the child as an agent of cognitive activity, giving them the freedom to choose types of activities and forms of participation, as well as with democratization of the educational process based on cooperation between educators and children, differentiation of upbringing and education, the development of flexible educational technologies that best meet the needs and capabilities of children, in the independent growing awareness of various spheres of life. In this context, problem tasks that put the child in a situation

where he/she uses different methods of mental activity (comparison, analysis, synthesis, classification) are of undeniable value. This promotes independence, the ability to choose ways to solve problems, draw conclusions and generalize.

The abovementioned determined the choice of the topic of our research, the aim of which is to substantiate the effectiveness of the use of problem tasks in the formation of independence in senior preschool children.

To achieve the defined goal, the following research methods were used: theoretical ones: analysis, systematization and generalization of the theoretical data presented in psychological and pedagogical literature; and empirical methods: designing experimental treatments and parent questionnaires.

Theoretical basis of the research

One of the system-forming qualities of a personality is “independence”, which acquires special importance in conditions of the up-to-date socio-economic situation. The development of this quality leads to the development of the child’s personality as a whole. Therefore, an important task of Ukrainian education in modern society is the formation of free, independent individuals who take responsibility for their own life.

The need for the formation and development of independence is dictated to us by society’s needs for exceptional people who know how to think creatively and make discoveries for the benefit of humanity. And the solution to this issue is reflected in the process of developing independence, which allows a person to pose new challenges and find new solutions.

Attention to the child’s personality and creating conditions for them to receive education and develop moral, intellectual and aesthetic qualities presuppose finding the solution to the important issue of promoting individual independence.

The concept of “independence” covers not only the aspect of direct physical activity: to do or change something, but also mental, intellectual activity that contributes to the achievement of a real goal.

The author of “Ukrainian Pedagogical Dictionary” S. Honcharenko interprets independence as one of the properties of personality, which is “characterized by two factors: firstly, a set of means – knowledge, abilities and skills possessed by the individual; secondly, the individual’s attitude to the process of activity, its results and conditions of implementation, as well as connections with other people established in the process of activity” (Honcharenko, 1997).

In “Modern Explanatory Psychological Dictionary” (Shapar, 2007) it is noted that “independence” of personality is related to active work of thought, feelings and will. On the one hand, this relation is aimed at the development of mental, emotional and volitional processes as a necessary precondition for

independent judgments and actions, and on the other hand, it includes judgments and actions that are formed in the process of independent activity, strengthen and shape the ability not only to perform consciously motivated actions but also to strive for the successful implementation of the adopted decisions despite possible difficulties.

In “Pedagogical Dictionary” (Yarmachenko, 2001), independence is defined as “a generalized quality of personality, which manifests itself in initiative, critical thinking, adequate self-assessment and a sense of personal responsibility for one’s own activities and behavior”.

In view of the given definitions, independence is a volitional quality of personality, it is characterized by a proactive, critical, responsible attitude to one’s own activity, the ability to plan their own activity, set tasks and look for ways to solve them without anybody’s help, while relying on one’s own experience, knowledge, skills and abilities.

Numerous psychological and pedagogical studies (Demydova, 2006; Dudnyk, 2018; Krutii, 2012; Kuzmenko, 2001; Lisovets, 2018; Savchenko, 2014; Udina, 2008) testify to the great importance of a preschool childhood in the formation of personality, basic characteristics of which are independence, initiative and creativity. During this period, children’s independence develops from actions of a reproductive nature to actions with elements of creativity, with a constant, steady increase in the role of consciousness, self-control and self-esteem in the implementation of activities. At the same time, the indicators of independence are as follows: independence of personality’s actions, the ability to implement one’s plans without seeking help in the outside world; the ability to set and solve various tasks of the practical activity.

As Y. Demydova notes, the main psychological mechanisms of independence formation in preschool age are as follows: identification, differentiation, pride, decentration, and the important factors are: emotional and valuable attitude to one’s own success; elements of self-control and self-regulation; development of reflective features of a growing personality; the need for recognition of activity results; a sense of pride in one’s own achievements and motivation (Demydova, 2006).

The manifestation of these factors depends on skillful guidance of the child’s independent activities and behavior, expansion of degrees of their freedom, approval of independent actions; regulation of the amount and form of assistance when a child encounters difficulties; positive emotional support for independent efforts; recognition of the child’s successful achievements.

In this context, it is important to find the means of formation of independence in children of senior preschool age. In our opinion, means are effective not when they motivate the child to get adults’ approval for their achievements, but when they encourage independent active cognition of the

surrounding reality, give children the opportunity to feel the joy of knowledge and inspire further independent discoveries.

Methodology and findings of the research

Taking into account the aim and objectives of our research, we conducted an experiment on the levels of independence formation in senior preschool children. 150 senior preschoolers participated in it, including three preschool education institutions in the city of Drohobych, Lviv region (Nursery School No. 11 “Svitliachok”, Nursery School No. 13 “Kazka”, Nursery School No. 24 “Smerichka”). 75 children were included in the experimental group (EG), and 75 in the control group (CG). The experimental research was conducted during October – December 2021.

At the preparatory stage, a system of criteria and indicators was selected to determine the levels of independence of senior preschoolers. At the same time, we were guided by the fact that the independence of children of this age category is best manifested in new, unfamiliar situations. By solving them, children can show independence of thought, originality of problem solving methods. With this in mind, we singled out the following criteria for the levels of independence of senior preschoolers: interest in independent actions in the conditions of choosing between the new and the familiar; independence and autonomy of actions in relation to an adult; ways to solve the problem; result of activity. These criteria made it possible to identify the levels of independence of senior preschool children.

– *high level* – the child shows interest in independent actions in new situations, shows a desire to solve the situation independently, consistently prefers new choices; demonstrates a desire for independence of the help of an adult, both in a usual and in a new situation, uses new means and combines familiar ones, performs trial actions, orients well in the conditions of the situation; independently reaches an original conclusion, shows interest in it, seeks to perform an action on one’s own (adds details, elements);

– *sufficient level* – the child shows interest in independent participation in the situation with separate elements of something new, which is similar or familiar; gives preference to actions independent of an adult, in a familiar situation, in a new situation; accepts some targeted help, uses familiar means of achieving the task, reaches a traditional conclusion, into which he/she independently introduces separate complementary elements of the new; expresses satisfaction with the achieved result;

– *intermediate level* – the child shows interest in independent actions only in a well-known situation and prefers it, needs guidance in a habitual environment, and shows uncertainty in a new one; actively seeks help,

persistently uses familiar methods, does not try to combine, does not strive for innovation, improvement; is satisfied with the result.

– *low level* – the child has no peculiar interest in independent actions in a new situation with elements of novelty, and in a familiar situation shows apprehension in relation to the new, continually asks for help or passively expects it from the teacher, even in a familiar environment; does not try to solve a new situation without the help of an educator, experiences difficulties while choosing solutions independently, applies ineffective actions without analyzing the conditions, does not achieve a result, does not try to correct a mistake independently and improve the result; the attitude towards the result is generally neutral.

We used such experimental tasks as “Choose a game”, “Tricks”, “Theatre”, “Occupy yourself”, “Toy” to study the levels of independence in senior preschool children. Observing the children, we found out how independent they were in the process of solving these tasks. In the protocols that we kept for each child, it was mentioned whether the child was trying to understand the rules of the game by him/herself or was waiting for help; whether he/she maintained the initiative and persistence till the end or lost interest in the game when faced with difficulties; whether he/she used unconventional or traditional means of activity; we also examined the degree of the child’s awareness of the methods of action, the sequence of actions to achieve the goal, and the ability to express it independently.

According to the generalized data obtained on experimental tasks performance, we were able to determine whether the children can be referred to one or another level of independence. So, we referred 6.7% of the children of the experimental group (EG) and 5.4% of the children of the control group (CG) to a high level of independence, 56.7% of the EG children and 50% of the CG children – to a sufficient level, 24.8% of EG children and 24.8% of CG children – to an intermediate level, 11.8% of EG children and 19.8% of CG children – to a low level.

The results of the ascertainment stage of the experiment showed that a significant number of the children from the experimental and control groups do not realize the possibility of independence and do not reach the optimal level of its formation. Many children do not demonstrate independence in solving new, creative tasks. Thus, we can obviously conclude that the formation of independence as a basic personality quality is not so much related to the development of some special skills of children, but rather to their personality qualities. The latter are prominent in an effort to find a way out of a difficult situation that occurs both in everyday life and in various types of activities, in a positive focus on the result, in experiencing success or failure. In addition, senior preschoolers constantly expect adults to approve the results of their activities, and they show satisfaction with the work done if it is successful.

Usually, children value their achievements highly and get offended if their actions are not approved.

Considering the formation of independence in the family very important, we conducted a survey of senior preschoolers' parents. 150 parents took part in it. Its results proved that all parents understand the importance of the formation of independence as a basic personality quality at preschool age, but most of them (80%) do not have sufficient knowledge of the pedagogical tools (forms, methods, means) of its formation and a significant number (60%) give priority in this process to the teaching staff of the preschool education institution.

Taking into account the results of the ascertainment experiment, we can state that the formation of independence in older preschool children largely depends on the teacher's organization of educational activities. Considering problem tasks as an effective means of the formation of independence in children of senior preschool age, at the stage of the formative experiment, we conducted our work with the children of the experimental group in two directions:

- work with children in the conditions of a preschool education institution which included the development and implementation of a series of problem tasks in the work of a preschool institution to familiarize children with objects and phenomena of the surrounding world;

- work with children's parents. This included: parent meetings on the topic: "Developing children's independence"; development of a reminder for parents; organization of consultations for parents on issues of development and formation of independent behavior in children; introduction of diaries for parent self-observation of their children.

The first direction of work was aimed at determining the content of tasks, methods and forms of educational activities for preschool children, which would be carried out as a system of interaction – a dialogue between the teacher and subgroups of children – depending on the level of independence and based on mutual trust and foreseeing a certain growth of children's independence. A complex of special tasks and situations was created to implement the formation of children's independence. It combined three directions:

1st direction – problem tasks in order to develop divergent thinking in children which is based on imagination and serves as a means of coming up with original ideas and self-expression.

2nd direction – problem tasks that involve the development of cognitive abilities and skills, the main ones of which are processing a large amount of information, analyzing the situation, establishing cause and effect and other relationships, using alternative ways to search for information, as well as the ability to think over the situation, build hypotheses, use their own ideas in practice, etc.

3rd direction – problem tasks that contribute to the development of the child's emotional sphere, shaping respect for others, an emphatic attitude towards people, persistence in completing tasks, independence in thinking and behavior, confidence in one's strength and capabilities, a tendency to introspection, etc.

At first, much attention was paid to the development of children's imagination through analogizing (direct and fantastic analogies). An example of such analogies is the task for children to identify themselves with various objects and phenomena in the game "Who am I?". The children were given the task to come up with endings for sentences or, conversely, beginnings of sentences: "I feel that I am a piece of ice that has melted...", "I am a glass of water...", "I am a wonderful flower...", "I am like a fish...", "I am a song...", "I am like the letter 'O'...", "I can be the wind...", "I am a path..." , "I'm a firefly...", "I feel like I'm a rock...", "I'm like an ant when...", "I'm a light bulb that now...", "I'm an interesting book...".

Children learned about living and non-living nature. The relevant classes included the games "Who Lives Where" and others. These tasks were supplemented by an offer for children to show these objects or phenomena in motion, to invent a fairy tale with them, etc., as well as games "Where does it fit?", "Do the opposite", "Invent a new way", "Who needs what?", "Turners".

We used a number of problem tasks and situations that we carried out during the formative stage of the experiment in classes.

However, we believe that problem tasks can be used not only in classes but also in everyday life. This is an effective means of consolidating and deepening the knowledge gained in classes. In this regard, we conducted effective work with parents of senior preschoolers; it was aimed at revealing the role of problem tasks in the development of visual and logical thinking, intelligence, cognitive interests, and personal qualities: goal orientation in search, practical and mental activity, perseverance, independence, creative abilities of children.

The next stage of the research – the control stage – was aimed at finding out the qualitative and quantitative changes that occurred after our work at the formative stage.

There were 75 senior preschoolers of the experimental group who participated in the control experiment and were involved in three stages of independence formation, and there were 75 senior preschoolers of the control group where the educational process took place in the usual way.

In order to obtain the necessary data to find out the levels of independence of senior preschool children, we used the criteria and diagnostic methods applied during the ascertainment stage. According to the results of the control experiment, we attributed 21.2% of the children of the experimental group (EG) and 6.7% of the children of the control group (CG) to a high level of independence, 37.5% of the children of the EG and 32.8% of the children of the

CG to a sufficient level, 34.6% of EG children and 48.7% of CG children – to an intermediate level, 6.7% of EG children and 11.8% of KG children – to a low level of independence.

The analysis of the results obtained at the control stage of the experiment proves the success of our work with the children of the experimental group at the formative stage. In particular, most of the children in the experimental group can easily express their individual, authentic ideas, analyze problematic ambiguous situations, establish cause-and-effect relationships, reflect on the situation, and build hypotheses.

Conclusion

Summarizing the theoretical and practical aspects of the issue we are analyzing, we can say that senior preschool age is a sensitive period for the formation of cognitive independence. This is explained by the desire of a child of this age to be independent, to demonstrate independent behavior. It is essential that during this period the leading activity is replaced by the learning and object-oriented practical activity; thinking, cognitive and volitional processes prove to be at a significant level of development.

This is facilitated by problem tasks and situations. Unusual in content and form, they arouse interest in children. After all, only when a child is interested, he/she finds the result of an activity on their own, he/she gains firm knowledge, skills and abilities, develops creative search thinking.

When offering children problem tasks, the teacher, on the one hand, should widely vary the material in terms of its use (invent a wide variety of solutions), and on the other hand, should not go beyond the limits dictated by the simplicity of tasks for children of a certain age.

Problem situations put children in the conditions of a practical search for a solution to a task, which prompts them to search for solutions to tasks independently, awakens thought, and fosters original thinking. Search-oriented questions encourage children to explain their answers, their reasoning, and activate the child's mental activity. Logical tasks put the child in the conditions of the need to consider the phenomenon from different angles, to find ways to solve the task, which also stimulates independent thinking, flexibility of the mind, and develops the child's creative abilities.

Thus, problem tasks effectively influence the development of independence in preschoolers as an integral quality of personality. At the same time, the logic of using tasks and situations, focus on personality development, and coordination of work with parents play an important role.

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