

*The 28th International Scientific Conference
“Educational Research and School Practice”*

**THE STATE
PROBLEMS
AND NEEDS
OF THE MODERN
EDUCATION
COMMUNITY**

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

Editors

Jelena STEVANOVIĆ

Dragana GUNDOGAN

Branislav RANĐELOVIĆ



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“Educational Research and School Practice”

The State, Problems, and Needs of the Modern Education Community

December 9th, 2022
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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MATHEMATICAL ACTIVITIES IN KINDERGARTEN

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Research Problem

A large body of research shows that developing early mathematical skills has a profound impact on later mathematical and reading abilities (Clements & Sarama 2014; Duncan *et al.*, 2007). McCain and Mustard (1999) argue that children's preschool experiences are crucial for their future competence and effective problem solving and have an influence on health and employment. It is sensible to integrate mathematics with other curricular areas in preschool, as the Kindergarten Curriculum (1999) dictates. Cross-curricular integration can elevate the quality of the educational process, which is in line with the characteristics of children's development and learning. It can lead to better academic success, a deeper understanding and better application of knowledge, and more permanent knowledge, while preparing children for lifelong learning (Lake, 1994).

Despite numerous studies (Claessens, Engel & Curran, 2013; Zigler, 2006) reporting on the importance and benefits of early mathematics learning and its integration with other areas, preschool mathematics activities are not as common as we would expect. The problem may stem from educators' lack of confidence in their mathematics skills and their poor understanding of the concept of cross-curricular integration.

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Therefore, our research aimed to determine the extent to which educators implemented planned mathematics activities and identify the areas with which mathematics was most often integrated. Meaningful cross-curricular links prevent repetition and help students achieve long-lasting, high-quality learning.

Research Method

A two-part questionnaire was developed for the purposes of our research. The first part of the questionnaire included demographic data, while the second part related to opinions and experiences in implementing mathematical activities in kindergarten.

The aims of our research were:

- to identify the frequency of planned activities in all areas of the kindergarten curriculum;
- to determine the frequency of integration of mathematics into each area of the kindergarten curriculum, especially in conjunction with science.

The data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28 and presented at the level of descriptive statistics. As our variables were ordinal and not normally distributed, conditions for the use of the Pearson correlation coefficient were not met (Field, 2000). Hence, all correlations presented were calculated using Spearman's correlation coefficient.

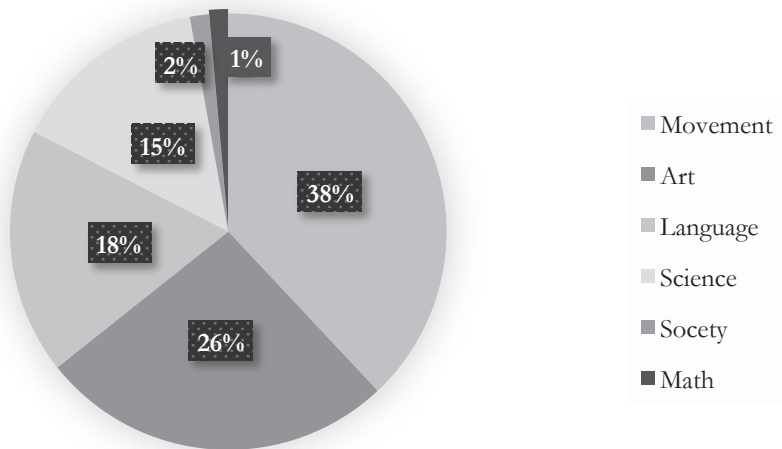
A total of 69 teachers and assistant teachers working in Slovenian kindergartens took part in the survey. Only two participants were male. The participants were mainly younger educators with an average age of 32.8 years and an average kindergarten work experience of 10.1 years. Around half of the respondents had completed higher education.

In the school year of 2020/2021, when the survey was carried out, 47.8% of participating teachers worked with the second age group, i.e., children aged between 3 and 5 years. A total of 33.3% of the teachers worked with the first age group and 18.8% worked with the combined group.

Key Findings

The first aim of our research was to determine whether teachers planned activities in all areas of the Kindergarten Curriculum equally and to what extent they implement the planned mathematics activities.

Figure 1: *Areas of Activity*



According to the results, the largest percentage of educators planned physical activities (38%). The lowest and worryingly low proportions were in social sciences (2%) and mathematics (1%). Simpson and Linder (2014) make a similar point, stating that educators assign greater importance to the promotion of pre-schoolers' socio-emotional and language skills compared to mathematical and other cognitive skills.

Based on the collected data, we attempted to discover the reasons for such a low proportion of planned mathematical activities. To this end, we looked for correlations between the frequency of planning activities by area and the seniority of the teachers, the age group in which the teachers worked, and their educational background. The correlation coefficient showed that there was no correlation between the frequency of planning activities by area and the teachers' work experience ($r=-.005$, p (two-tailed) $>.05$). We were unable to identify a correlation between the frequency of planning activities by area and the age group in which the educators worked ($r=-.024$, p (two-

tailed) $>.05$). Likewise, there was no significant correlation between the frequency of planning activities by area and the educators' educational background ($r=-.178$, p (two-tailed) $>.05$).

Reasons why mathematics activities were least often planned by educators fell outside the scope of our research. However, we found that the majority of educators were convinced that mathematics was important in the preschool period (85.5%), that it was one of the fundamental areas and played an important role in supporting other areas (88.4%), and that preschool mathematics dealt with fundamental and mathematical concepts important to everyone (91.3%). Other studies have shown that educators are aware that mathematical skills are important for later development (Ginsburg, Lee & Boyd, 2008). Nevertheless, we observed that the majority of educators implemented mathematical activities only once a week (36.2%) and some educators did not even implement them every week (15.6%).

Therefore, it would be useful to investigate which factors may influence the frequency of implementing specific activities in kindergarten, such as aversion to mathematics. We know that fostering children's mathematical thinking is a particularly challenging task for some educators, as it is accompanied by anxiety, helplessness, fear, and resistance to mathematics, which often stems from personal negative experiences or uncertainty about one's own mathematical skills (Wood, 1988). Research has shown that educators who have more positive attitudes towards mathematics and have a better understanding of mathematics are more likely to implement mathematical activities, as they recognise the importance of early mathematics learning (Thiel, 2010). Likewise, studies have found that educators prefer teaching language-related skills compared to mathematics, as they find teaching early mathematics difficult (Baniower *et al.*, 2018, Copley, 2004). The implementation of activities in kindergarten is influenced by the beliefs and values of educators, as their choices of activities to implement are strongly linked to their personal beliefs about the appropriateness of the learning content and pedagogy (Brown, 2005). It is also interesting to note that educators' beliefs influence the implementation of activities to a greater extent than the subject knowledge they may have (Pajares, 1992). Hence, it would be necessary to consider how to encourage educators to implement all areas of the Kindergarten Curriculum equally. Training programmes that target educators' knowledge and awareness of mathematical development have shown positive effects on the implementation of mathematics activities in kindergarten

(Gresham, 2007). Implementing such programs or workshops would be beneficial for all areas implemented to a lesser extent.

Since mathematics plays an important role in supporting other areas of knowledge and since preschool children tend to perceive the world holistically, we wanted to identify the areas from the Kindergarten Curriculum with which educators most often associated mathematical activities. Teachers rated the frequency of integration of mathematics with each area from the Kindergarten Curriculum on a five-point scale (1=very rarely; 5=very often).

Table 1: *Area of Integration*

With which area do you most often integrate mathematics?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Movement	69	3.62	1.456
Language	69	2.84	1.313
Art	69	2.90	1.374
Science	69	3.10	1.363
Society	69	2.54	1.378

The results showed that mathematics was most often integrated with movement ($M=3.62$, $SE=1.456$), followed by science ($M=3.10$, $SE=1.363$). As expected, apart from movement, which was the most common activity for educators, mathematics was most often integrated with science. The link between mathematics and science in preschool and later schooling is of paramount importance, as highlighted by various studies (Czerniak, 2007; Ríordáin, Johnstson & Walshe, 2016). The integration of these areas fosters children's motivation, commitment, and critical thinking and aids the development of problem-solving skills and critical evaluation of the concepts being studied.

Conclusions

The present research aimed to gain insight into the frequency of mathematics activities in kindergarten and the integration of mathematics with other curricular areas. In our study, sciences were implemented slightly more often than mathematics. Our findings

also indicated that mathematics was often integrated with science. We find this encouraging, as this form of cross-curricular integration can promote the development of mathematical literacy in kindergarten. With this in mind, the Faculty of Education of the University of Primorska has prepared a course entitled Interdisciplinary Integration of Mathematics and Science, within which students of preschool education can learn about modern didactic strategies for interdisciplinary teaching of mathematics and science. It seems beneficial to empower educators with specific skills in planning and implementing cross-curricular activities that significantly contribute to raising both mathematical and scientific literacy levels. Using, developing, and building on the materials prepared for this purpose should allow educators to holistically develop children's abilities, which is the key focus of our Kindergarten Curriculum.

Keywords: mathematics, integration, preschool, teachers, science.

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