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**KINDERGARTEN TEACHER TRAINING  
IN THE ERA OF SOCIALISM**

**Practical Training at the (Higher) Kindergarten Teacher Training  
Institute in Sopron (1959-1972)**

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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## **Presentation of the topic**

The main title of the dissertation, "Teacher Education in the Era of Socialism", defines the two main areas of our research. The period of socialism and teacher education as a research topic define the subject we are investigating. The period of socialism, which we identify with the Kádár era, covers the period between 1957 and 1989 in Hungary. In analysing socialist teacher education, we also seek to take an international perspective, and therefore we also present the kindergarten teacher education systems in the socialist bloc. We also examine the relationship between kindergarten teacher education and socialism in the dissertation. The link suggested by the main title also highlights how socialism changed the demands placed on kindergarten teachers and shaped the image of the teacher of the period.

The subtitle of the dissertation, "The Practical Training of the Sopron Institute of Nursing (1959-1972)", refers to the local context of our research. Our aim is mainly to explore and describe the circumstances of the opening and operation of the Sopron-based higher teacher training institute and to detail the characteristics of its practical training. It is important to emphasise that our study is not limited to the practical training of the institution in the period in question, but also describes the national and Sopron context of the transformation of

kindergarten teacher training into a higher education institution. The training, which used to end with a school-leaving examination, was then taken over by higher kindergarten teacher training institutes. In addition to Kecskemét and Szarvas, Sopron was the first higher-level kindergarten teacher training institution in Hungary to start training. Before the turn of the century, in 1899, the city had already been training nursery nurses and, at that time, several institutions were already training teachers. In our research, we will also look at the way in which the institution, which previously had the staff, equipment and facilities for secondary teacher training, was able to adapt to the requirements of higher education.

In presenting the research topic, we cannot ignore its classification in terms of scientific discipline. According to the discipline nomenclature of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the topic of the dissertation is situated within the *humanities and social sciences* within the field of *educational sciences*, within the framework of the history of pedagogy and comparative pedagogy. Our research is conducted primarily in the field of pedagogical history and its methods, but due to the complexity of the topic, it is also partly related to the field of higher education and pedagogical research, and is also linked to the disciplines of educational theory and philosophy of education.

## **Topicality of the subject**

Research on kindergarten teacher education will become particularly topical in 2024, with celebrated anniversaries such as the 65th anniversary of the transition to tertiary education and the 125th anniversary of institutional kindergarten teacher education in Sopron. Research on school history and the history of education, although less accepted in the post-1945 period, gained momentum after the change of regime, especially in the context of the millennium of the Hungarian school, which is a thousand years old. Since then, the amount of research on school history has been steadily increasing. Although there have been a number of transformations in pre-school teacher education since the transition to higher education, it is also important to transfer knowledge from good practices of the past. Historical and educational history research can help us understand the impact of past processes and can also help us anticipate present situations.

## **The research problem**

The aim of the research is to present the socialist teacher education and the practical training of kindergarten teachers in the process of becoming higher education in general through the example of the Sopron (Higher) Institute for Teacher Education. The topic covers a

wide range of historical trends and research backgrounds. Historical research on higher education and teacher education has been used as a basis for detailing the process of kindergarten teacher education. The development of kindergarten teacher education in the context of primary teacher education and the feminisation of the teaching profession also sheds light on the historical aspects of women. As no detailed work on the history of the Sopron (Upper Secondary) Institute for Teacher Education has been done before, the dissertation also takes an institutional history approach. At the same time, the focus of the research is on practical training, its development and theoretical foundations, so curriculum and curricular history are also mentioned. A detailed analysis of the subject requires an introduction to the social and political context of the period under study. In addition, within the discipline of pedagogy, the work also touches on the discipline of pre-school education, with particular emphasis on preparation for practical life and the practical aspects of teacher education in the period under study.



## **Research questions and hypotheses**

Our questions fall into three broad categories:

### ***Questions that are specific to the practical training of higher teacher education:***

- How did the training of kindergarten teachers work in the countries of the socialist bloc during the period under study and what similarities can be found with the training system in Hungary?
- What are the similarities and similarities in the training of kindergarten teachers?
- In what way did theoretical and practical training work together during the period?
- How was practical training organised and conducted?
- What were the responsibilities of the kindergarten teachers who supervised the practical training? How were the kindergarten teachers involved in the training of students?

### ***Issues related to regional professional practice:***

- What is the system for organising and conducting regional traineeships?
- What trends can be observed in relation to regional traineeships?

- How did the training institute and the official institutions linked to the placement work together in the organisation and implementation of the placement?

***Issues concerning the specificities of the practical and regional apprenticeships specific to the Sopron training site:***

- What information and data have been kept on the practitioner training institutions providing practical training at the Sopron training site?
- Have there been any changes in the number of training institutions or in their operation during the period under study?
- What points of cooperation can be identified between the training institutions and the training establishment?
- Can the sources reveal any reform or innovation in the field of apprenticeships that is specific to the Sopron site and takes account of local characteristics?

**Structure of the dissertation**

In order to make the essay easier to read, we have structured our argument around several nodes.

- In the first major chapter of the thesis, we introduce the topic, the background, the methodological basis and the sources of our research.
- In the second chapter of the thesis, we summarised the main findings of previous literature and compared them with each other. Following an analysis of the national and international literature, the socio-historical background of the research topic is presented in detail.
- In the third and fourth chapters of the thesis, we systematically present the results of our research, which have been analysed partly on the basis of literature and partly on the basis of primary source material. In these chapters, we have drawn on primary sources in addition to literature. In the fourth chapter, we analyse in detail the sources of practical training and detail the results of our research.

The thesis concludes with a summary of the results, followed by a detailed list of the literature and archival sources used.

## **Methodology**

Katalin Kéri (2001) distinguishes two important trends in research on the history of education: diachronic and synchronic research. In the former, the historical sense of time is the primary factor that helps to guide the research and the process of inquiry, while in the latter, the research is structured around certain problem-historical nodes. In preparing our dissertation, we have conducted our research primarily from a synchronic perspective, but the historical implications of the topic mean that we cannot ignore the inclusion of a diachronic perspective.

The research methodology employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods due to the availability of resources, but relies primarily on qualitative research methods. The starting and ending dates of the period under study (1959-1972) are linked to important junctures in the history of problems in the professionalisation of pre-school teacher education, and the research therefore tends to use the synchronic method. Because of the need for a holistic perspective of reconstruction, the research places the events and processes in a broader context, rather than examining them in isolation. A selective sampling procedure was used for the document and content analysis (see Sántha, 2006, p. 82.)

### *Document analysis*

Bowen's (2009) document analysis used minutes, manuals, textbooks, and internal and external correspondence as sources. In addition, he reviewed legal and substantive regulations and official archival documents. Cohen and colleagues (2017) refer to the work of Travers (1969) to assess the authenticity of the authorship of documents. They consider the professional competence of the author and his/her relationship to the event the document is about to be important. The impact of the political situation on the author and his or her possible falsification of data is also an important consideration.

### *Content analysis*

Kuckartz (2019) explains that in qualitative content analysis, all relevant parts must be coded and describes three coding schemes: empirical, conceptual and theoretical/hypothetical. The theoretical/hypothetical categories were used to analyse the available source materials. Due to the deterioration of the documents, the examination of the sources was mainly carried out by manual analysis.

### *Quantitative methods*

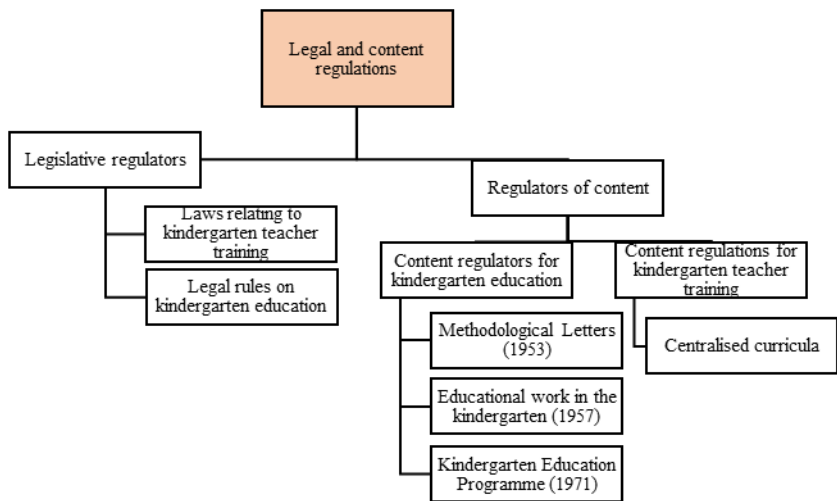
Despite the highly qualitative nature of our doctoral research, some parts of it can be analysed quantitatively. The quantitative part of the

study consists of data sets collected in the study department between 1959 and 1972, and quantitative data from the state examination records. Quantitative data are the number of students in each year group, the number of hours known from the timetable information, especially for practical training, and the grades found in the state examination records.

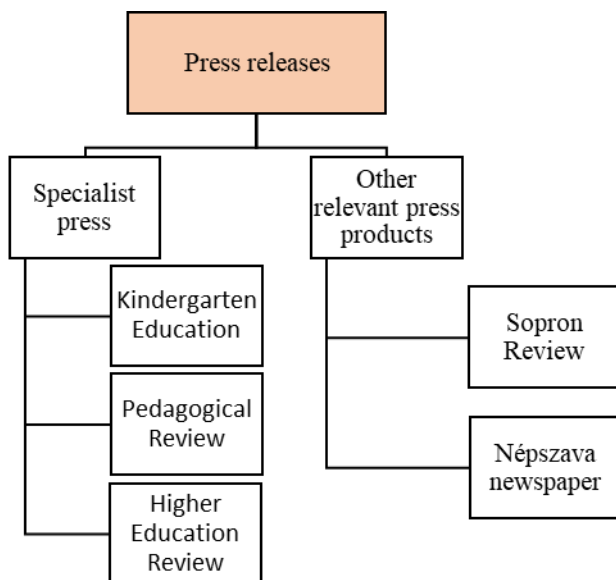
## Resources

The research has drawn on a wide range of sources. Four areas of potential sources were identified in the sampling process.

- The first area covered by our research is the legislation and content of pre-primary education and teacher training. Important laws and regulations of the period provided the basis for our research.

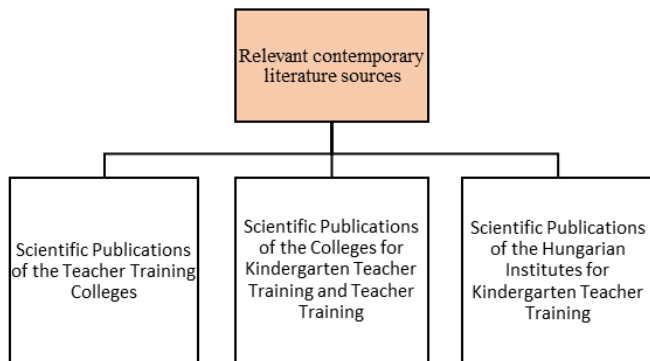


- The second group consists of various press products. Among the trade press products, we examined the relevant issues of Kindergarten Education, Pedagogical Review and Higher Education Review. Due to the local character of the research, we also used some studies from the Sopron Review.





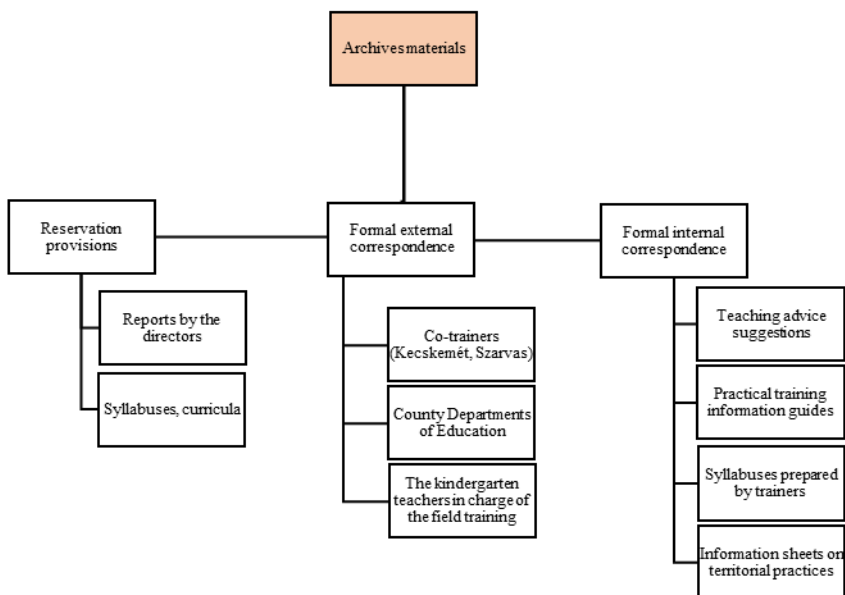
- The third group includes academic publications written by teachers of the training institutions at the same time as the period under study, which can be used as a contemporary source for exploring the system of kindergarten education of the period. A significant part of the contemporary literature was taken up by the Scientific Publications of the Hungarian Institutes for Kindergarten Teacher Training, the Scientific Publications of the Teacher Training Colleges and the Scientific Publications of the Colleges for Kindergarten Teacher Training and Teacher Training.



- The fourth group consists of the sources kept in the Archives of the Benedek Elek Faculty of Education at the University of Sopron. In addition, a special source was used in the research, which contained a former student's attendance diary and preparatory sketchbooks from the academic year 1971/72.
  
- From the surviving sources, the relevant sources were selected during the sampling procedure according to the following criteria:
  - Correspondence between the maintainer and the institute regarding curricula syllabuses and principal's reports;
  - Formal external correspondence with the co-trainers (Kecskemét, Szarvas), the county departments of education and the actors of the regional practices (kindergarten teachers, kindergarten directors, kindergarten supervisors)
  - for official internal correspondence on training in practice, regional training in practice and curricula, teaching proposals and syllabuses

According to Cohen et al (2007), primary sources include manuscripts, documents, laws, records, archives, official publications,

contemporary press and visual sources. In our research, these categories include archival materials, legal codes, professional press products and academic works from the period under study.



## **The research results**

### **5.1.1. General characteristics of the practical training of higher education nursery teachers**

*How did kindergarten teacher training work in the countries of the socialist bloc during the period under study and what similarities can be found with the training system in Hungary?*

In our chapter on kindergarten teacher training systems in the socialist bloc countries, we divide the training systems presented into two broad categories: secondary and tertiary. The Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic and the People's Republic of Bulgaria trained kindergarten teachers at the tertiary level, while Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland and Romania trained kindergarten teachers at the secondary level. In the Soviet Union, higher-level kindergarten teacher training based on secondary education was introduced in 1954. Soviet teachers obtained a higher education qualification through a four-year university course. In the German Democratic Republic, the 1960s saw the introduction of higher education, followed by a three-year university course.

***How was the socialist pedagogical ideal of the period expressed in the training of the institution under study?***

Because of the uniformising tendencies of the social order, little attention was paid to the individual interests and personalities of teachers. Kindergarten teachers, as educators of the younger generations, were expected to be fully compliant with the political system. The main aim of the educational programmes was to train socialist kindergarten teachers, with particular emphasis on ideological conviction. Kindergarten teachers were expected not only to show political-ideological loyalty, but also to take an active part in socialist construction. In the recruitment process, individual movement life also counted, and preference was given to applicants from working-class and peasant backgrounds.

There was no dividing line between work and private life in the lives of teachers, and they had to constantly set an example for the rest of society. This high level of commitment and discipline was reflected in the daily running of the teacher training and in the lives of the students.

***How did theoretical and practical training work together during this period?***

Throughout the period under review, draft reforms and proposed amendments to the training of kindergarten teachers have emphasised the importance of close links between theory and practice. However, in the early years, the ratio between theoretical and practical training was not yet sufficient to prepare students effectively for the work of kindergarten teachers. The reforms emphasised the importance of methodological training and proposed the abolition or integration of several subjects into other subjects, so as to allow more time for practical training. Practical training and methodological subjects were closely linked and the head of the Methodology Unit was actively involved in the assessment of students' draft sessions. The close link between theory and practice is reflected in the literature used for practical lessons and in the use of manuals on the content requirements of kindergarten education. It is also reflected in the preparation of documentation related to practical lessons, such as the attendance diary or the year project. With the introduction of the new curriculum, the students have become familiar with the requirements for the preparation of timetables and weekly plans, and have dealt with methodological and practical educational issues in the course of the year project.

### ***How was the practical training organised and delivered?***

During the period under review, the three higher education kindergarten teacher training institutions in Sopron, Szarvas and Kecskemét were actively involved in the educational work of the training kindergartens. The students gradually increased their autonomy and responsibility, from caring for the children to working in the educational fields and planning their own activities.

The teachers of the institutes, the group leader teachers responsible for the practical training and the heads and head teachers of the practising kindergarten played a key role in the organisation and delivery of the practical training. Practical documentation, such as observation logs and planning workbooks, was a crucial part of the practical training. The curricula and themes were drawn up partly on the basis of official Ministry of Education documents and partly on the basis of guides and information sheets prepared by the trainers of the institutes. Practical training in kindergartens was also an integral part of the correspondence course, in the form of demonstrations and consultations in kindergartens near the students' homes.

***What were the responsibilities of the kindergarten teachers in the practical training? In what ways were the supervising teachers involved in the training of the students? What points of cooperation can be identified between the practitioners and the training institute?***

During the period under review, the involvement of the kindergarten teachers working in the field was a priority in the practical training. They were the ones whose work the students were able to observe at close quarters and from whom they could learn about the implementation of the sessions, the contact with the children and the cooperation with parents. The practising pre-school teachers also played an important role in evaluation and kept records of the students' work and progress. During the placements, the students were able to observe directly the work of the pre-school teachers and learn from them the practical skills of the profession. Kindergarten teachers were expected not only to have professional knowledge and skills, but also to be role models and active community members, representing socialist ideology and values. For trainee pre-school teachers, particular attention was paid to ideological commitment and moral integrity.



### **5.1.2. Research findings on territorial and professional practice**

#### ***What was the system for organising and running the regional traineeships?***

A major part of the practical part of the higher kindergarten teacher training was the field placement, during which students did their placements in different kindergartens for four to six weeks. This placement gave the students from the institutes the opportunity to experience all aspects of teaching in a real nursery environment.

During the field placements, the students had to carry out various tasks and prepare written documentation such as a visiting diary, preparatory sketches and drafts. This exercise allowed them to synthesise theoretical and methodological knowledge with real-life experience and prepare them for their future profession. Throughout the process of preparing and conducting the field placements, the institutes worked closely with kindergarten teachers, kindergarten directors and county supervisors working in the field.

### ***What are the trends in regional practices?***

The tasks, organisation and management of the regional practice have undergone significant changes during the period under review. Initially, only a few counties designated nursery schools for students, but later more and more counties joined the provision of practice sites. Over the period, the need arose to extend the duration of the placements and later to modernise the regional placements. In selecting the placement site for each student, a variety of motivations were observed and the students' place of residence or county was taken into account when selecting the placement sites. The selection of placements varied over the period, and efforts were made to place students as close as possible to their county or municipality.

### ***How have the training institute and the official institutions linked to the regional training cooperated in the organisation and implementation of the regional training?***

In order to monitor the successful implementation of the regional-professional practical training and to examine the effectiveness of the higher education teacher training, both the Ministry of Education and the training institutes regularly visited the practical training sites and the participating students. Both the teachers and the supervisors of the institutes took part in the visits, and visited the practice of the partner

training institutes on an exchange basis. During the regional placements, the teachers of the host institution, in particular the kindergarten teacher in charge of the placement, were given a special role. Their tasks included mentoring the students, checking and supporting their documentation. On this basis, the institutions identified the areas where the students' theoretical-methodological knowledge needed further strengthening and the competences they needed to develop for their practice.

### **5.1.3. Specificities of apprenticeships in Sopron**

*What information and data is available on the training institutions providing apprenticeship training in Sopron? Have there been any changes in the number of training institutions or in the way they operate during the period under study?*

The training of kindergarten teachers in Sopron, which became a university course in 1959, inherited the location and conditions of the secondary course. From the statistics, reports and information bulletins that have survived on the training institutions, it can be seen that from the very beginning of the training there was a kindergarten with four groups close to the training building, which soon became cramped and could not fully meet the needs of practical training. It was therefore

necessary to build a new training nursery, which was set up in the courtyard of the training institute.

The training institute applied for financial support for the construction of the new kindergarten building as early as 1965, but it was not until 1970 that construction of the four-group kindergarten began. The new training kindergarten has been operating in the same building ever since, which was completed after long negotiations and financial difficulties.

In 1962, the training institute also took over another kindergarten from the city, which was also a training kindergarten, and where the trainer kindergarten teachers received an extra allowance for their work as trainer teachers. Daily contact and collegial cooperation in the interest of the students ensured the successful implementation of the practical training and the professional development of the students.

***Do the sources reveal a reform or innovation in apprenticeships that is specific to the Sopron site, considering local specificities?***

Under the modified practical training system introduced in 1964, the kindergarten training was dropped in the first semester. Practical training was only mentioned in the official prospectuses for the second semester, but on the basis of a "verbal agreement" the training

institutions allowed students to participate in practical training in the first semester with the help of the tutors in charge of the practical training. As a result of local opportunities and institutional initiatives, the training site in Sopron started the kindergarten placement already in the first semester, although it was not included in the official core curriculum. The renewed regional-professional practice introduced from the 1965/66 academic year can be seen as a development of the Sopron Kindergarten Training Institute. This innovative system of practice was characterised by the renewal of professional methodological aspects and the integration of the suggestions of the kindergarten teachers and supervisors who led the regional practice. The students were prepared for the challenges they would face by central briefers and by the supervising teachers before the placement. The renewed system built on the previously non-existent base nursery system, which allowed students to do their placements with the best teachers and helped the training institution to measure the effectiveness of the training.

## **Further research opportunities**

In addition to the analysis of apprenticeships, we found that there are a number of further research opportunities around this topic. It is important to consider the continuous changes in the theoretical and methodological training that support practice and their interaction. In addition, the contextualisation of trainers and teachers, as well as practitioners, is essential to the presentation of apprenticeships.

Research topics could include methodological training in different types of pre-school activities, the interaction between teacher trainers and practitioners, and the analysis of methodological training notes. In addition, a detailed analysis of the content of theoretical subjects could be a further line of research.

The study of the teacher image in the period is also an important line of research, which could include the formulation of the teacher image at all levels and types of teacher education. The inclusion of international research and sources can also help to examine the teacher image.

Further building on the historical dimension of education and focusing on the historical aspects of teacher education and higher education are also among the future plans for our research.

An important aim is to process narrative interviews, in which the recollections of former students and kindergarten teachers who spoke will help to further refine our knowledge about the situation of training and the expectations of the teacher image.

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