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EDUCATION



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**The development of traditional and alternative kindergarten programs in  
the light of the social and educational policy changes following the 1989  
regime change in Romania, with special reference to Hungarian  
kindergartens and kindergarten teacher training in Bihar County**

Theses of the Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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## **1. Introduction**

In my dissertation, I examine the evolution of preschool programs in Romania from the 1989 regime change to the present day, with a special focus on the Hungarian minority. The research topic covers a period of reform and changes in Transylvanian education policy and kindergarten affairs, which is still unexplored and untapped.

## **2. Justification and relevance of the topic**

In my work, I examine how the kindergarten system changed after the regime change, along the lines of educational regulations and curriculum changes, highlighting the points of action and reform efforts that resulted in significant changes and innovation in the practical implementation of kindergarten education. Through the history of kindergarten institutions and teacher training in Bihar County, I approach the examined period from a practical point of view, constantly comparing the results with theoretical approaches.

To define the chosen topic with regards to time and location, I pointed out the historical junctures that had a significant impact on education and minority policy in Romania. This is how I arrived at the 1989 regime change, which became the origin of my research. I examined the historical, social, legal, and administrative background emerged because of the regime change, which is closely linked to the educational policy of Transylvania. The theoretical framework established this way provided a strong basis for a detailed exploration of post-communist Transylvanian kindergarten system. I thought it was important to highlight the nodes and efforts that resulted in the consolidation and development of kindergarten education.

Within the scope of the dissertation, it was not possible to explore the kindergarten education regarding the entire Transylvanian Hungarian minority in detail, so my empirical research is limited to the county of Bihar, bordering Hungary. The selection of this area has a double importance: it has a rich historical past in terms of kindergarten and teacher training, moreover I felt personally motivated to explore the kindergarten sector of the area where I live and work as a kindergarten teacher.

Looking at the international education policy scene, kindergarten education has been marginalized across Europe over the past century. The same behavior can be observed in Romania. After the millennium, there was a European-wide paradigm shift in the perception

of early childhood institutional education. Alongside with social policy changes and because of research results published on the topic, the institutional education of young children received special attention, with early childhood education as the main platform for developing the key competencies for lifelong learning. This approach and research attitude also demonstrate that the public perception of early childhood education has been raised to the pedestal where it deserves to be in the 21st century. The question arises: how did this process of completion achieved, what changes and influencing factors have shaped the system of kindergarten education?

In my research, I present and analyze the characteristics of the Hungarian minority kindergarten education within the Romanian education system, during the period of 1989, how it has developed in the past 35 years and where it is today.

The originality and novelty of the topic lies in the fact that it examines an era of great importance for the Hungarian kindergartens in Transylvania. Seeing that the institutional history of Transylvanian kindergartens at the time had not yet been studied in detail, I felt it was important to create a synthesis that would provide valuable new information and could be the starting point for further research.

### **3. Definition of the theoretical framework, objectives, research questions and hypotheses**

Along the lines of educational science, my research can be integrated into the historical and social political framework of education, the combination resulting in an interdisciplinary approach to the research topic. These fields were the focus of my research, but for the sake of multidisciplinary investigation and versatility, I have linked them to other frontier fields, such as curriculum theory, history of education and kindergarten pedagogy.

The synthesizing analysis of the educational policy and social policy changes of the examined period - along the main nodes- provided the framework within I was able to place the unfolding of the history of the Hungarian kindergarten institutions in Transylvania and to show the context of the positive changes in the kindergarten pedagogical programs.

My dissertation is divided into two separate parts, which are different in their structure and methodology, however linearly and horizontally unified, they form a whole. The exploration

of the partial results of the empirical research is followed by continuous feedback to the theoretical parts to ensure that the obtained results are grounded and relevant in terms of similarities and differences.

In the first, theoretical part, my goal was to create a logically coherent, theoretical-conceptual framework, in which I present the economic, demographic, legal, and educational policy changes after the 1989 regime change, pointing out the main connections, essential and defining elements.

Demographic indicators are closely linked to the education system and legal regulations. Therefore, I examine the situation of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania and its role in mother-tongue kindergarten education over the past 35 years along the connection point of these three bordering areas. During the examination of the education laws and the kindergarten curricula, I focused on two main aspects: I have highlighted innovations and innovative measures, and I have examined whether they contain regulations or references regarding minority education and kindergarten education.

During the creation of the theoretical framework, I considered the following research questions:

**Q1.** What changes characterized the Transylvanian kindergarten education with common roots after the Treaty of Trianon?

**Q2.** What were the most defining features of communism regarding the social and educational policies of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania?

**Q3.** What historical, social, legal, administrative and educational background characterized the regime change in 1989, regarding Hungarian minorities, and how has it changed in the past 35 years?

**Q4.** What were the main structural and content changes in the kindergarten core curriculum during the examined period?

**Q5.** When how and in what form have alternative pedagogical programs been introduced in the Romanian education system?

In the second part of the dissertation, the aim of my empirical research was to present the practical implementation and development of Hungarian kindergartens in Transylvania

from the 1989 regime change to the present day through the example of Hungarian kindergartens and kindergarten teacher training in Bihar County.

The questionnaire survey among teachers in Bihar County aims to explore the attitudes of kindergarten teachers towards alternative pedagogic programs. With this method, I investigate the impact and practical implementation of alternative pedagogical programs on people and in every day kindergarten practice.

Through qualitative interviews with teachers, I tried to reconstruct the case of kindergartens pre and post regime change, through the answers of the interview subjects, completing the events mentioned literature of the examined period.

Since kindergarten education is closely linked to teacher training, in the next chapter of my empirical research, I will analyze the curriculum of teacher training in Bihar County to explore the emergence of alternative and contemporary pedagogies.

The paper will focus on the pedagogical diversity of today's kindergarten practice in Bihar County. Within this framework, I will carry out a comparative analysis of traditional and alternative pedagogical programs along the lines of similarities and significant differences and attempt to place the pedagogical programs of church kindergartens into a framework.

Research questions related to my empirical research:

**Q6.** Are the kindergarten teachers in Bihar County familiar with the alternative pedagogic programs? Do kindergarten teachers use methods and good practices adopted from alternative pedagogies?

**Q7.** How do teachers remember the beginning of their careers? What were the characteristics of kindergarten education before and after the regime change?

**Q8.** How have the formative content and subject programs of kindergarten teacher training changed in undergraduate and higher education? Are alternative and contemporary pedagogies included in the curriculum?

**Q9.** What are the similarities and differences between the traditional and alternative educational programs in the pedagogical practice in Bihar County?

As a result of reviewing the literature and research in the topic, I formulated the following hypotheses:

**H1.** Alternative pedagogies are not included in the curricula of kindergarten and teacher training in Bihar County; however, kindergarten teachers are aware of the specifics of alternative pedagogic programs and implement these methods and good practices in their everyday work.

**H2.** I assume that, according to the opinions of the respondents'', there was a significant difference between urban and rural kindergarten education during communism.

**H3.** In the decentralization processes after the regime change, a small number of kindergartens undertook the introduction of alternative pedagogical programs in Bihar County due to central regulations and the lack of qualified staff.

**H4.** A significant element of the traditional Romanian kindergarten program – the 2019 *Early Childhood Education curriculum* – can be traced back to alternative pedagogical programs.

#### 4. Structure of the thesis

My dissertation is structured around five major chapters, following a logical flow of thought.

The title of the thesis identifies the topic. This is explained in more detail in the introduction following the thematic and temporal frameworks. The research questions and hypotheses provide the framework of the research, on which I have been able to build the structure of the thesis. Also, in the introductory section, I define the concepts used in the dissertation, determine the disciplinary position of the research topic and briefly summarize the relevant literature.

The second chapter is a historical overview with a focus on kindergarten education. Since the roots of Transylvanian kindergartens are linked to Hungarian education, I will briefly examine the development of kindergarten education from the Treaty of Trianon to the change of regime from different aspects, supported by statistical data. In the third chapter, I highlight the effects of communism on the Hungarian minority in Transylvania and present the main characteristics of the society and education policy that emerged after the regime change. From the research perspective, I felt it was important to examine the regulation of kindergarten education and - the central curricula along the lines of innovative measures.

The fourth chapter is based on the literature-theoretical summary, which includes the presentation of the structure and methodological apparatus of the empirical research part.

The fifth chapter is the longest part both in terms of length and content, as I explore the current situation of kindergartens in Bihar County using various methods. Through document and content analysis, I examine the curricula of kindergartens and teacher training courses, as well as the characteristics of the kindergarten programs used in Bihar County. I used a questionnaire to analyze the attitudes of kindergarten teachers in Bihar County a semi-structured narrative interview to ask older teachers about the characteristics of kindergarten education before and after the regime change.

The sixth and seventh chapters synthesize the research findings and provide evidence to support the hypotheses.

The remainder of the dissertation includes the list of cited literature, figures and tables, the acknowledgments and the appendices.

#### 5. Limiting factors of the dissertation

During my research work, I encountered limitations that made it difficult and influenced the thorough exploration of the chosen research topic. Since Hungarian education in Transylvania functions as a subsystem of the Romanian education system and is also subject to national level decisions, the Romanian-language sources (laws, regulations, curricula, publications) were part of these limiting factors. however, examining and translating them were essential for a full interpretation of the topic. Furthermore, during the research, I had to face the difficulty that the statistical data on the Hungarian kindergartens and kindergarten teachers in Transylvania is incomplete, the data lines of the specialized literary sources and publications are incomplete, and there is no analytical or synthesizing work on the subject. There are no adequate sources on the development of the fate of the Transylvanian Hungarian minority, its rights, the limitations and opportunities of using their mother tongue, and their role in the education system. Most of the important works have been discontinued since 1990, others only tangentially cover the period I have been examining. The lack of data series results in the fact that the content of some subsections differs from the main thread of the research.

Despite the difficulties described above, my dissertation attempts to reconstruct the Hungarian minority kindergarten education after the regime change by analyzing the Hungarian kindergarten system in Transylvania in the context of social and educational policy changes by presenting pedagogical, legal, methodological and ideological elements and detailing their practical implementation. In some sections, there is contradiction between legal regulations

and pedagogical practice. To investigate this phenomenon, I used several research methods: interview, questionnaire, document and content analysis. This synthesizing attitude required difficult exploration and thorough research. I hope that this dissertation can be a solid basis for further research on Hungarian education in Transylvania.

## **6. Sources of research work**

One of the challenges of my research is the search for authentic sources and sources that formed the basis of my dissertation. Since the history of Hungarian kindergartens and preschool regulations in Transylvania has not been studied in detail before, my research is based on a synthesis of the primary and secondary sources available to me.

To explore the changes in education policy and kindergarten education after the regime change, I used digitized educational laws and educational regulations published in Romanian. The information I obtained was complemented by the recollections of the kindergarten teachers, providing the missing pieces of the examined period. Another primary source was the central national curricula, which formed the basis of the pedagogical work in kindergartens from 1989 to the present day. In the examined period, they published 5 kindergarten curricula and out of these the last three (2006, 2008, 2019) were published in Hungarian too. I analyzed these documents in terms of similarities and differences.

To learn current statistics of Hungarian language kindergarten education in Bihar County I used the database of the Bihar County Education Inspectorate and online databases. The local and international literacy regarding education, especially its dimensions, in educational science, history science, social science, and pedagogy paradigms are in line with the topic of the thesis. This includes works of educational historians, also the activities of educational specialists who work directly with kindergarten education and alternative programs.

Exploring of the history of education for my dissertation, I looked back at kindergarten education in Hungary at the end of the XIX century. During the research of this period, I used the following materials: Fritcz, (1930); Basket, (1970); Romsics, (2017); Pukánszky, (2005); Molnár B., Pálfi, S., Szerepi S. & Vargáné Nagy, A. (2015). Köpeczi (1986) reports on the educational problems that emerged as a result of the Treaty of Trianon, the difficulties of the integration regarding the education policy of the territories annexed to Romania, and the attempts to unify the different levels of development; L. Balogh (2023); Szabó (2014) and



Falusi (2018). Furthermore, the statistics and figures of Gidó (2013) helped me to map the geographical distribution of kindergartens. The works of Vincze (1997) and Boia (2017) describes the conquest of the communist system in Romania, including the creation of a multifaceted communist society and the nationalization process. Novák (2011) describes the education policies of the communist system, highlighting the discriminations against Hungarian minority.

The chronicle of Kormányos (2019) was my starting point for the historical study of kindergartens in Bihar County and Nagyvárad. In this, the author only touches the subject of the situation of kindergartens. A more detailed description was provided by the chronicle of the House of the Order of Saint Orsolya in Nagyvárad (Balla & Lakatos, 1996). An analytical study by UNICEF' in published in Romanian presents the past and present of kindergarten education in Romania in detail, supplemented by statistical data. However, the study does not cover minority kindergarten education.

My research topic is closely related to reform pedagogy and alternative pedagogies, which receive outstanding attention in the literature and in twenty-first century institutional education. The works of Németh (2002), Nóbik (2001) and Németh, *Mikonya*, & Skiera (2005) supported my work, to learn about the development and characteristics of reform pedagogy: they present doctrines that not only dismantled and transformed the structural framework of education, but also brought radical changes in the practical elements of the methodology.

Alternative pedagogies show different characteristics and some differences in terms of goals, structure, educational content, organizational forms, methods, and tools (Réthy, 2006). Since the beginning of the 1990s there are an increasing number of studies on alternative trends in Hungary, Romania and internationally. Carlgren (1994), Százdi (1999), Gáspár (1996), Dobos (2002), Kissné (2015), Albulescu & Catalano (2017), Langerné (2011). These studies are complemented by Bakonyi's (1995) work, which provides a comprehensive analysis of alternative kindergarten trends.

In the past years several research results have been published, which examined various segments of Hungarian minority education in the Hungarian regions neighboring Hungary. Significant results were obtained during a comprehensive kindergarten and school choice attitude survey conducted by the National Policy Research Institute and the Hungarian Educational Research and Development Institute in Transylvania, aimed at parents of children attending Hungarian-language kindergartens (Márton, 2018), as well as a study of secondary

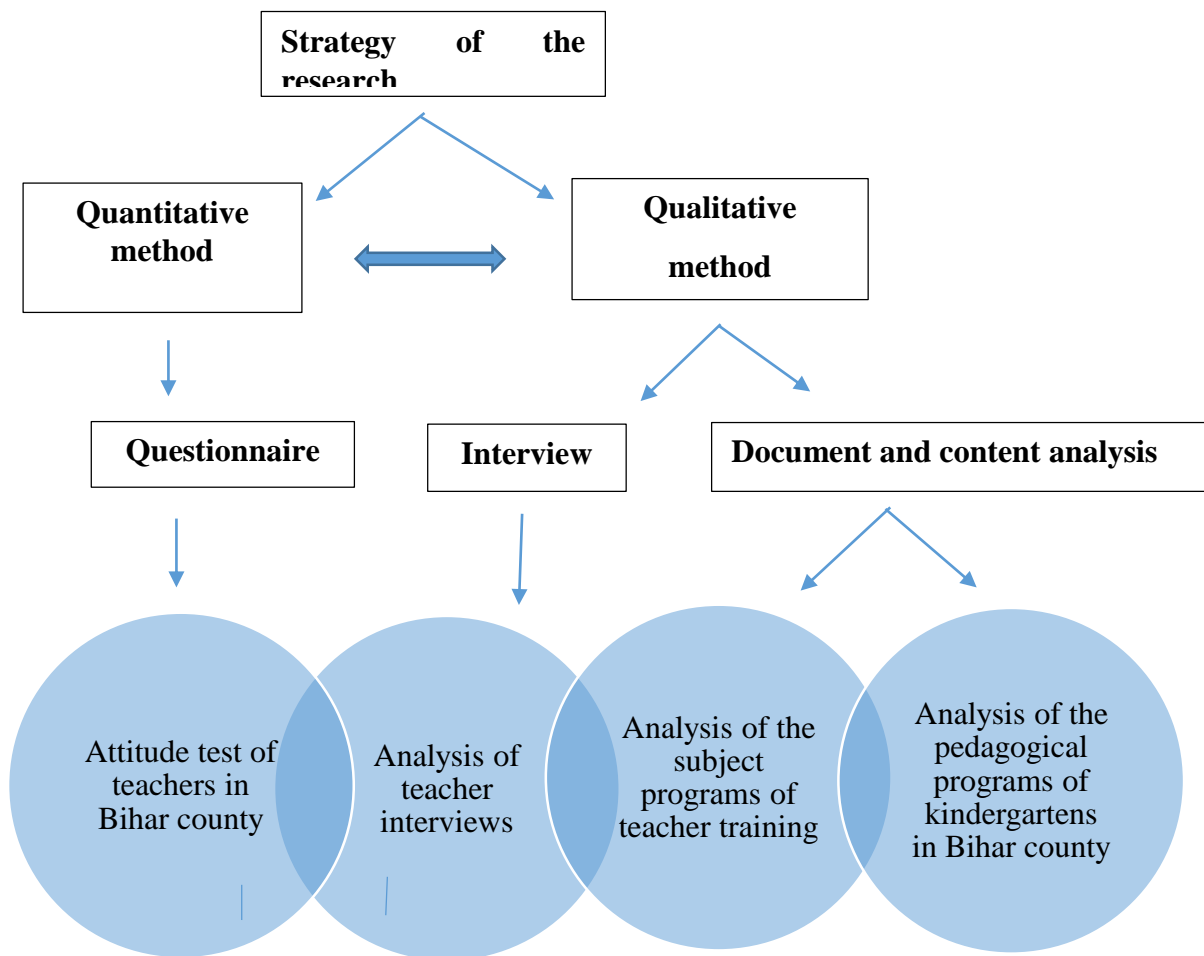
school university students participating in kindergarten and teacher training in Hungarian, regarding the students' career choice motivations and reviews of the training system (Márton, 2015). The works of Stark (2010; 2020) and the published studies of Szabó- Thalmeiner (2005; 2010; 2013) on the changes in teacher training in Transylvania have provided guidance on the regulations of kindergarten education and the changes in pedagogical programs.

I studied the work of international and Hungarian researchers during the literature review of the research methodology. In the interpretation of Bryman (2004) and Creswell (2009), we can observe a paradigm shift, they advocated the combined, mixed synergy of these two methods, moving beyond the traditionally separated qualitative and quantitative strategies. Following the publication of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), I incorporated the method into the dissertation. The multi-polar approach of Sántha (2006; 2009; 2020; 2022) helped in the selection and application of quantitative and qualitative strategies. Furthermore, the research methodology works of Szokolszky (2006), Kontra (2011), Boncz (2015), Hornyacsek (2014) and Csíkos (2020) formed the basis of my empirical research.

## 7. Research strategy and methods

In my research work, I used a combinative strategic approach, in which **quantitative and qualitative methods** work in synergy. For developing the strategy of the thesis, I used the approach of Bryman (2004) as a basis, suggesting that qualitative and quantitative strategies can be used in the research complementary ways, and these two strategies combined create a comprehensive picture. During the quantitative data collection, I used the questionnaire survey method, to measure the attitude of the Hungarian kindergarten teachers in Bihar County regarding alternative pedagogies. This was supplemented by qualitative data sources: the interviews with teachers and the analysis of the documents of the pedagogical programs used in kindergartens in Bihar County (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Research strategy (*Edited by me*)



This approach was complemented by triangulation, which allowed me to analyze researchers questions in multiple dimensions and to ensure the validity and authenticity and credibility of the results.

## 8. The hypotheses verification

I created four hypotheses based on literature and my own pedagogical experience, two of those were fully, the other two was partially confirmed.

H1. Alternative pedagogies are not included in the curricula of Bihar county’s kindergarten and teacher training curricula; however, the kindergarten teachers are aware of the characteristics of those and implement these methods and practices in their daily work.

In Bihar County, the kindergarten teacher training is carried out at two levels: secondary and higher education level. In the secondary level of the training, alternative methods are not

present, however, at university level they appear as optional units in the curricula. This partly verify my hypothesis. Based on the questionnaire, 74% of kindergarten teachers apply methods adapted from alternative pedagogies.

H2. I assume that according to the respondent's opinion, there was a large difference between urban and rural kindergarten education during the time of communism.

My second hypothesis was fully confirmed. The interview results with the teachers demonstrated the huge gap and significant difference between the urban and rural kindergartens. This difference appeared in the program, facilities and the use of language as well. In urban areas kindergartens and childcare facilities were mainly set up in the vicinity of factories and industrial plants, while the countryside kindergartens were near the schools and had spacious outdoor areas. The circulation of agricultural work shaped the academic year of the rural kindergartens, they had a long winter break between December and the beginning March, and they were open in the summer, providing supervision for small children. In Hungarian inhabited villages it was natural for the children to receive education in their mother tongue while most parents in Nagyvárad were forced to enroll their offsprings to Romanian kindergartens.

H3. During the decentralization process after the change of the regime little to no kindergartens in Bihar County introduced alternative pedagogical programs due to central regulations and the lack of trained human resources.

My third hypothesis was partially confirmed. The base of my suggestion happened to be correct, since only two kindergarten groups applied alternative pedagogical programs. While examining the laws implemented by the education department, I learned that central regulations from the mid 1990s allowed the introduction of alternative learning programs, however the lack of capital, appropriate human resources and motivation resulted in that very small number of kindergartens applied these methods. Furthermore, there was a lack of supply, because only a small number of kindergarten teachers had the opportunity to learn about alternative programs.

H4. The traditional program of Romanian kindergartens -the *Early Childhood education curriculum of 2019* contains significant elements originating from alternative pedagogies.

My fourth hypothesis was also confirmed, since it was proved that the developmental areas appearing Early Childhood have significant similarities to the educational areas of the Step-by-step pedagogical program, in some cases they only differ in their terminology. Further common

elements are the child-centered approach, the morning assembly, the offered centers as well as close contact and contribution with parents and family.

## **9. The research results summary**

The starting point of my research work was to gauge the overall situation of Kindergartens in Bihar county. Since I have not found data in the literature about the Hungarian minority kindergartens, or their development after the regime change ,therefore I undertook the challenge in my paper to reconstruct the case of kindergartens in Transylvania and Bihar county, I processed this in the light of historical events, using a combinative research method. This pioneering piece of work can lead the way for those who want to get to know the kindergarten education in Transylvania. To analyze and explore the subject from various points of views, I introduced a well-established ideological and historical background

The first part of the dissertation built like concentric circles, with the variables which impacted the Hungarian kindergarten education in Transylvania directly and indirectly. The periphery of my thesis goes back to the beginning of the 20th century regards back, where the Hungarian and Transylvanian kindergarten education merged. I arrived at the main nodes that remarkably influenced the educational policy and kindergarten education from this perspective following the thread of historical events and research questions. Taking the theoretical approach into account, my empirical research combines quantitative and qualitative methods. The remaining parts of my dissertation introduces the research results and the conclusions of novelty value for the field of education, following the line of the research questions.

Looking back to the roots, pre- and post-Trianon kindergarten education, we can observe the process of atrophy. The kindergarten network that was well built in Hungary regulated by law had extensive pedagogical vision, complemented by the tools of Fröbel, for a loving, child-centered education. The Romanian educational system “inherited” this network. The government owned Hungarian kindergartens affected by the imperial change were on Romanian territory and they experienced a radical change of direction, kindergarten groups ceased to exist, or they forced to assimilate into the Romanian nationalist public education system. They structured them like schools, and in many cases, they deprived the children from the use of their mother tongue. This process was aggravated when the communist regime came to power, they had total control over the education policy, and they were not afraid of using

brutal means of intimidation. Two parallel, contradictory points of view emerged: the increase in economic indicators and industrial production was in direct proportion to the rising results of demographic indicators, as opposed to the decrease of social welfare, the restriction of right to freedom and the development of the authoritarian regime. Under these circumstances, the most important goal of education policy is to strengthen the Romanian nation, depriving the Hungarian minority of the opportunity to be educated in their mother tongue.

The regime change of 1989 was a historical juncture that led to fundamental changes in politics, education and the life of the Hungarian minority. The changes in kindergarten education during the reform measures and decentralization process that took place after the regime change gave the line of my research. I took the kindergarten education in Bihar County as an example to illustrate the changes in kindergarten practice, highlighting where kindergarten education started 35 years ago and where it is today. In the light of the results, my assumption that the unfolding of educational reforms has made an impact in slow, cautious steps has been confirmed. The extent of change was measured by examining educational regulations, curriculum laws, kindergarten curricula and the recollections of kindergarten teachers. The theoretical approach and practice were often contradictory. Kindergarten practice was a rapid response to changing circumstances, while legislation took years to be enacted.

An analysis of the education plans shows that the central kindergarten curriculum has undergone constructive changes in terms of structure, content and concepts in the spirit of the reform attempts. In terms of the dynamics the change was slow, in which the central, framework and certain contents ensured continuity. The most important asset lies in the flexibility. The initial, strictly prescriptive and definitive nature has been replaced by the possibility of freedom of choice for the teachers. While maintaining the framework, the creativity of teachers and the introduction of alternative pedagogies have become more and more widespread. The school like context slowly disappeared with the emergence of child-centered elements.

Following the thread of the research I compared three types of kindergarten programs found in pedagogical practice in Bihar County: the traditional, centralized program, the Waldorf program and the Step-by-Step alternative program. In conclusion, all three programs are child-centered and support the harmonious development of the child. However, when looking deeper, we can discover slight differences. The Step-by-Step program highlights individual differences like precious, unpolished diamonds, and follows a strategy of individual development

influencing the child's senses and emotions rather than their intellect. In their opinion, diversity can be an advantage. Waldorf education also advocates individual difference. In contrast, the central program retains its prescriptive, uniform nature, based on active learning and the development of competences. The 2019 Early Childhood Education curriculum is like the Step-by-Step program in several aspects in terms of areas of development, activity centers and project design. The emphasis on daily routines is rooted in Waldorf pedagogy. A common feature of all three pedagogical programs is the morning assembly or morning circle and the close contact with parents and families. It is important to emphasize that while child-centered, individualized education and close contact with parents appeared in the alternative educational programs as early as the early 2000s, these features were not implemented more explicitly in the core curriculum until twenty years later.

A particular focus of my research has been on the spread of alternative educational programs. Even though educational legislation has provided the possibility of introducing alternative pedagogical programs since the mid-1990s, the number of such programs in practice has been very low. There were several reasons for this phenomenon. On the one hand, pre-school teachers were not given the opportunity to learn about alternative methods neither during their training nor during their teaching career, on the other hand, the uniform use of the central curriculum made it easier to ensure external, authoritative control, and the lack of financial resources also made it difficult to introduce alternative programs.

I consider the results of the interviews with teachers as one of the new scientific results of my thesis, which reveals the Hungarian kindergarten system in Bihar County from the point of view of pedagogical practice. The deductive and inductive analysis and coding of the data reveals that pre- and post-regime change kindergarten education was brought to life by changing social and society needs. Under the communism, urban and rural kindergarten education differed in several aspects. There were differences in terms of opening hours, language, control and facilities. The opening hours of kindergartens were adapted to parents' work schedules: in urban areas, especially in the vicinity of factories, children were admitted according to factory shifts, while in the villages the opening hours followed the calendar of the fieldwork.

There is also a significant difference in the use of mother tongue: in urban areas, kindergartens were mainly used Romanian, while in Hungarian villages, kindergarten children were educated in their mother tongue. The research confirmed that the change was more profound and more

noticeable in urban settings, as the post-revolutionary changes had a major impact on urban kindergarten education. Hungarian-language groups were gradually established, which resulted in the number of Hungarian kindergarten groups in Nagyvárad increasing from 5 to 24 within a short period of time.

I examined the changes in the educational content of teaching and learning in kindergartens through curriculum changes and the emergence of alternative programs. Due to the chaotic situation in the post-regime change years, only a small percentage of kindergarten teachers had the opportunity to learn about alternative pedagogical programs, let alone introduce them, which resulted in the fact that only two Hungarian kindergarten groups in Bihar County use alternative methods. Another line of the research has revealed that over the years, alongside traditional and alternative programs, social expectations have led to the emergence of 'hidden alternative' kindergartens in Bihar County, seemingly operating along the lines of the core curriculum, but have supplemented this with alternative activities and methods that have given them a distinctive pedagogical identity.

During my empirical research, I thought it was important to examine the curricula of the Hungarian kindergarten teacher training in Bihar County to determine the place of alternative pedagogies in the training content. The results of the content analysis show that alternative pedagogies do not appear in any form in the undergraduate curricula, while in the academic curricula of both universities in Nagyvárad, it is apparent as an optional unit. Based on these results, I conducted a questionnaire survey to investigate the alternative concepts, methods and their practical application and context among kindergarten teachers in Bihar County. In the light of the results, it is important to emphasize the willingness to apply alternative methods, as 74% of the kindergarten teachers included in the sample apply methods adopted from alternative pedagogical programs and 53% of them think that alternative methods can be effectively integrated into their everyday teaching work. The results of the correlation study show a highly significant relationship between time spent with teaching and knowledge of alternative pedagogies. All the teachers who are in their early careers learned about alternative pedagogies during their training, while the more senior teachers documented learning from other sources. There was moderate significance between participation in in-service training and use of alternative methods. The size of the preschool group also influenced the use of alternative methods, with teachers in bigger groups turning to alternative methods more often. It was confirmed that the perception of the effectiveness of alternative methods does not depend on the type of municipality where the kindergarten teachers work or on their highest level of



education. In conclusion, the use of alternative pedagogical methods and tools in kindergarten practice depends largely on the knowledge acquired during the years of professional training and the content of the on the work training.

The changes in society at the beginning of the third millennium require new challenges and new responses from education policymakers, from teachers who are responding to changing circumstances and from early childhood educators who are strengthening the foundations. I believe the roots of this can be found in alternative pedagogy. In my opinion, to compensate for the small number of kindergarten groups with an alternative pedagogical programs, alternative elements, concepts and methods should be introduced and used in groups with a traditional program.

I strongly believe that the case of kindergarten education in Transylvania presented in this thesis and the kindergarten education in Bihar County analyzed from several perspectives will add new value to the research in the field of educational science. It can be a reliable source for educators who would like to learn more about the Transylvanian kindergarten system and the kindergarten pedagogical practice in Bihar County from the educational history point of view, and it can become a starting point for further research.

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