

**IFTE-2017**  
**III International Forum on Teacher Education**

**EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AS THE FACTOR OF  
DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S SUBJECTIVITY**

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***Abstract***

In this article, the issues related to the interactions between an individual and the social environment are analysed. The educational environment is seen as a factor for the development of the personality of its subjects. Various approaches to understanding the educational environment as a system of opportunities for developing the subjectivity of preschool children are considered. The main components of the educational environment of early childhood in the conditions of transition to FSES PE (Federal State Education Standards of Preschool Education) are in the focus of the research.

The article contains a description of the results of a study on the influence of the educational environment on the child's mastery of a subjective position. It is proved that the child's subjective position in the activity can be successfully developed already at the preschool age, determining the integrity of his/her development, and the involvement of the preschool child into the surrounding reality and the opportunity to create in it.

Analysis of the results of the empirical study has demonstrated that studying the environment affects each subject of the educational process. Its quality affects the personal development of children, including its intellectual, social, and personal components. The educational environment of early childhood enhances the development of subjectivity in preschool children, being a systemic quality of personality and integrating such attributive characteristics as liberty, independence, creativity, constructive interaction with the environment, desire to acquire self-regulation through mastering the motivating, and activating and directing functions of subjectivity.

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**Keywords:** Educational environment; early childhood; child development; children's subjectivity; pre-school education.



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## 1. Introduction

In accordance with the federal state requirements for preschool education in Russia (the Federal Standard of 2013), we need to implement new approaches to the organization of the educational environment, to do away with the system of rigidly regulated activities and to find effective forms of working with children, which will enable us to attain our educational objectives. Pre-school education is the first link in a single system of life-long education, when the foundations of a child's personality are laid and commence development. This is the age of potential childhood opportunities and intense perception. A senior preschool age is inherently a stage of rapid mental development. It is at the age of 5-6 years that cardinal changes take place in all spheres, beginning with the improvement of psychophysiological functions and ending with the emergence of new complex personal formations. The key factor in the development of perception in senior preschool children is the transition from object images to sensory standards - generally accepted concepts of the main types of properties. Closer to six years, the child develops selective perception of social objects (Batyuta, 2013). The educational environment determines the realization of age possibilities for developing subjectivity in preschool children. By organizing a developing educational environment, we optimize the efficiency of developmental educational work with preschool children.

The educational environment becomes a developing one, if this environment provides opportunities: Firstly, for satisfying and developing the subject's needs at all hierarchical levels; Secondly, for the personality to acquire social values and partially to transform them into internal values. The entity of such opportunities, provided by a specific educational environment, makes up its developing psychological and pedagogical potential (Yasvin, 2001). The focus is on independence, intensification of the child's creative potential and the development of its active position. The main objective of modern education is the internal potential of the child's personality and the formation of its subjective nature.

A developing educational environment of preschool institutions includes the following components: interaction of participants in the pedagogical process; developing subject-spatial environment; and enhancing content of preschool education (Harms et al., 2005).

Thus, the educational space of the kindergarten acts as a developing educational environment in the process of interaction of its components and is characterized by certain properties:

- Flexibility, as the ability of educational structures to quickly change in accordance with the changing needs of the individual, environment, and society;
- Continuity, meaning interaction and consistency of the activities of its constituent elements;
- Variability, implying a change in the developing environment in accordance with the needs of the population for educational services;
- Integration, ensuring the solution of educational problems by means of strengthening interactions of its constituent structures;
- Openness, involving broad participation of all subjects of education in governance, democratization of education forms, upbringing and interaction;
- Orientation towards joint active communication of all subjects of the educational process, which is based on pedagogical support as a special position of the educator hidden from the eyes of children.

Currently, there are four types of “educative environments”, where the main categories are “freedom-dependence” and “activity-passivity” (Yasvin, 2001).

Therefore, the educational environment can be:

- ‘dogmatic’, characterized by dependence and passivity;
- ‘serene’ – meaning passivity and freedom;
- ‘career-making’ - characterized by activity and dependence;
- ‘creative’ - meaning freedom and activity.

The most optimal environment for developing a creative personality is a creative environment. The creative environment brings up people, characterized by their ability to actively master and transform the surrounding reality, their high self-esteem, openness and freedom of judgments and actions.

Analysis of educational activities in pre-school institutions indicates that the entire system is divided into two areas. In one of them, preschool children are given maximum freedom of action, in another, contrariwise, the actions of preschool children are significantly limited, they are expected to follow the instructions of adults. Both of these approaches have serious drawbacks. In the first case, children probably move within the space of their possibilities and develop creatively. However, this does not guarantee a high level of child development needed for schooling where children find themselves in a situation of maximum standardization, regulated by the rigid logic of the subject content structure. As an extreme way of solving this problem, school curriculum is widely inflicted on pre-school education. Otherwise, children lose the opportunity of self-realization and personal growth in the forms accessible to them. In this regard, we face a problem of the child’s personality development in the system of preschool education (Veraksa, 2008)..

## **2. Problem Statement**

In Russian psychology, one of the most important trends in the area of environmental psychology is the research into the development and formation of children’s psyche during their interaction with the environment. The environment and the immediate surroundings are a condition and source of child development.

Here, we mean the situation when the child interacts with its educational environment. In this case, the child manifests an appropriate activity to be able to use the opportunities of this environment, becoming a real subject of its own development. The child becomes a subject of the educational environment, but not an object, which is influenced by the conditions and factors of the educational environment (Laktionova, 2010).

In psychological and pedagogical studies, the concept “subject of activity” is interpreted on the basis of philosophical and psychological characteristics of the subject, the most important of which are activity and initiative. The subject acts as a realizer of activity. The individual’s subjectivity is manifested, first of all, in revealing one's own personal attitudes to an object, subject or other phenomena of the surrounding reality (the formulation of an evaluation and interest in it). Later, based on these prevailing attitudes, initiatives are formed, namely, the desire to be active in relation to a particular object. Initiative becomes the subject's own activity, which is identified autonomously and independently, based on independent choice. Consequently, there becomes a chain of manifestations of features of human

behavior as the subject of activity: emotional components can be seen as attitudes, interests and selectivity towards the subject of activity; an emotional and activity-based component is formed on the basis of initiative and represents the motive of the activity itself; an activity-based component becomes eminent in selectivity or freedom of choice, it is characterized by autonomy, independence, and creativity of a person.

Therefore, we can characterize the position of the subject of activity as the one without rigid stereotypes of activity realization and with manifestations of creativity, as there exists a possibility to choose ways and means of achieving the goal. Thus, the qualities, characterizing a person as the subject of activity, are: axiological attitude to activity (such activity acquires a key importance for a person), selective focus, initiative, freedom of choice, independence, autonomy, and creativity (Gogoberidze, 2009).

Consequently, the subjective position will manifest itself in the independence of goal-setting and motivation of activity, in finding ways and means for its implementation, self-control and self-esteem, and the ability to obtain a result.

The children's subjective position in the activity can develop successfully at preschool age already, determining the integrity of their development, their inclusion (integration) into the surrounding reality and the opportunity to create within it. This opportunity is conditioned by psychological characteristics of preschool children (Williams, 2016; Mashford-Scott and Church, 2011).

Taking into account Vygotsky's concept, we suggest that the development of the child as a subject of behavior in early and preschool age moves from unconscious to conscious behavior and further to the emergence of new subjective qualities and new ways of behavior. The transition from unconscious to conscious behavior occurs in the course of the child's acquisition of cultural and historical ways of behaviour, through organized training and activities. According to Vygotsky, the model of child development as a subject of behavior is realized from an unconscious subject to a conscious subject (Vygotsky, 2008).

Based on the concept of El'konin, we can single out the main development trends of the child as the subject of activity:

- The first year of life - the child acts as a subject of emotional communication;
- The second year of life - the child acts as a subject of objective activity (speech as an object);
- The third year of life - the child acts as a subject of independent activity;
- From the third to the fifth years of life - the child acts as a subject of social relations and game activities (the object of the activity is an adult); The child is a subject of comprehending and mastering the meanings of human actions;
- The fifth year of life - the child acts as a subject of public activity;
- The sixth and the seventh years of life - the child acts as a subject of one's inner life experience and learning (cognition). However, the manifestations of subjectivity by preschool children will be different in different types of activities (El'konin, 1995).

The process of mastering the position of the subject of activity by the child requires special pedagogical technology, the implementation of specific pedagogical conditions and, above all, the palette of diverse children's activities "displayed in front of the child"..

### **3. Research Questions**

Nevertheless, this understanding of pre-school educational practices has not yet acquired any conceptual framework. The possibilities for pre-schoolers to manifest their subjectivity are largely limited and the modern educational environment does not encourage the development of subjective qualities in preschool children.

Thus, the issue 'how the quality of educational environment will affect the development of children's subjectivity' remains under-researched, which made us address this issue and analyse the influence of educational environment features on the development of subjective qualities in preschool children.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The research is devoted to the problem of increasing the effectiveness of pre-schooler's educational activities by improving their educational environment, which would ensure each child's creativity and support children's initiatives, allowing them to be independent and active.

A child's developmental environment is inherently a space for its life. These are the conditions in which it lives in a pre-school educational institution. Such conditions should be considered as a foundation on which the construction of the child's personality is based.

The educational environment is a set of conditions that have both a direct and indirect influence on the child's comprehensive development in a pre-school institution, the state of physical and mental health, the success of subsequent education, and the activities of all participants of the educational process in the kindergarten.

One of the key condition for the development of the child's subjective position is associated with the development of independence and creativity in children, when they select the content of activities and the means for their implementation. This organization of activities depends on an emotionally positive oriented communication with preschool children, and their desire for interaction and cooperation. Consequently, the child acquires its subjective position largely due to the organization of the educational process by adults.

### **5. Research Methods**

Our research into the educational environment of pre-schoolers in the Republic of Tatarstan is based on the data collected in 16 pre-school educational institutions. Three of them were rated as the best kindergartens according to the results of the municipal rating of pre-school educational institutions of 2015. The rest are from among average kindergartens. Accordingly, the kindergartens are divided into two groups based on the results of the municipal rating of 2015. Group A includes the best kindergartens, while in group B there are average pre-school institutions.

In the study of the manifestation of attributive characteristics of subjectivity and the determination of the correspondence of the pre-schooler's behavior to the rules of the normative situation, 267 children of preschool age from 4 to 6 years old, 267 parents (mothers) of preschool children, respectively, and 33 kindergarteners were involved: a total of 566 people.

The study uses the following methods: theoretical methods of analytical studies, allowing us to make assumptions about the relationships of the studied phenomena, to build a logical chain of empirical evidence and interpret the data; empirical methods for measurements and comparisons; statistical methods for processing the results of the empirical research (ANOVA and correlation analysis).

For diagnostic purposes, the following procedures were used:

- Kudryavtseva's methods for researching preschool children's subjectivity (2006). The diagnostic technique is based on Alekseeva's theoretical approach (2003), which highlights six attributes of human subjectivity: liberty, integrity, self-worth, mediation, autonomy and creativity.

The degree of manifestation of the characteristics in a preschooler's subjectivity was assessed by the kindergarteners, who acted as experts.

Description of the scales of the observation map. The observation map "Subjective manifestations of the child" consists of 51 statements that are included in the six scales:

- activity (diagnoses the level of initiative and active participation in cognition and transformation of reality);
- integrity (characterizes the child's ability to function as a self-organized system and the ability to expand the boundaries of uniting himself/herself with the context in which his/her activity is carried out);
- inherent worth (diagnoses the child's value attitude to himself/herself);
- mediation (characterizes the possibility of manifesting activity using psychological means in cognitive processes and mental self-management based on social characteristics and values expressed through language);
- autonomy (diagnoses the level of independence);
- creativity (characterizes the ability to create something new, to transform reality).

These statements describe the features of the child's subjectivity, the features appropriate both for the conditions of the kindergarten and for his life as a whole.

- a methodology for examining the suitability of the preschool child to the rules of the normative situation (Bayanova and Mustafin, 2016).

The technique is made on the basis of the revealed range of rules of a child's and adult's interaction in a social situation. It provides the possibility to determine the child's compliance with the norms according to four scales, in combination they form the cultural congruence indicator. Scales of cultural congruence are correlated to a number of factors: 'compliance with adult's expectations, 'obedience', 'self-control', 'observance of safety rules', 'self-care'. The technique of cultural congruence determination is approved for the Russian sample of children living in the megalopolis with the population over one million people.

## 6. Findings

To evaluate the development of subjectivity in pre-schoolers, in the first phase of the study, we used Kudryavtseva's technique (2006), based on Alekseeva's theory of individual subjectivity (2003), which allowed us to explore the six attributes of pre-schoolers' subjectivity (liberty, integrity, self-worth, mediation, autonomy and creativity).

In her works, Alexeeva (2003) suggests that subjectivity is manifested as an integrated, hierarchically organized individual ability (a unity of vital, personal, social and individual human capabilities), each level of subjectivity being the basis and precondition for the emergence and existence of the next level. The possibilities of a higher level, as a system-forming one, determine the content of liberty. The psychological characteristics of the subject are revealed through the following theoretical models: the levels of individual subjectivity, as well as subject-object attributes, mental and subjective self-management and individual social subjective abilities. These attributes of individual subjectivity express its structure and make it possible to study the features of the subjectivity development in ontogeny.

The table and graphical form present an average profile of the features of the pre-schoolers' subjectivity development in groups A and B (see Table 01).

After studying the results of the diagnosis of 6 attributive characteristics of the subjectivity of preschool children, it was found that among the respondents, depending on the quality of the educational environment, the subjective qualities in children of preschool age differed.

With the help of a single-factor analysis of variance (Table 01), differences in attributive characteristics of subjectivity as "activity", "integrity" and "creativity" in groups of the respondents enrolled in the best and average pre-school educational institutions were established significantly. The respondents of A-group are characterized with distinctive attributive characteristics of subjectivity such as, initiative and active participation in cognition.

The testees of B-group are less active, passive in showing initiative, curiosity, rarely act as initiators of gaming and communication. The children of this group are distinguished by medium and low creative activity, rarely offer new ideas for individual and joint activities and are inclined to do everything on the model, or to repeat already familiar.

**Table 01.** The results of ANOVA in terms of the development of subjectivity preschool children

Developmental indicators of preschool children	Mean values in Group A	Mean values in Group B	F emp. (F cv = 3,89)
Liberty	20,70	18,17	<b>34,72</b>
Integrity	21,56	19,34	<b>28,3</b>
Self-worth	23,14	22,85	0,30
Mediation	21,57	21,05	0,65
Autonomy	23,03	22,60	0,74
Autonomy	19,53	17,82	<b>10,46</b>

Note: Values in bold are significant differences in the severity of developmental indicators of subjectivity of preschool children in groups of testees at a given level of confidence  $p \leq 0.05$ .

The analysis of the results showed that the higher the level of subjectivity of the pre-schooler, the better the quality of the educational environment. The quality of preschool education is determined by the following positions:

- the way a child in an institution realizes his/her right to individual development in accordance with age opportunities and abilities;
- the way the pedagogical process is organized in the kindergarten;

- conditions created in the Preschool Educational Institution (educational environment, focused on the inherent worth of pre-school childhood, a positive microclimate in the professional team);
- the system of stimulating qualitative work, creative orientation of the activity of the staff of the PEI and its headmaster.

We consider the social situation of development not so much as a general definition, but as a cultural situation of socialization, therefore, the study of a testee in the social development situation is understood as the study of a subject of culture. The subject of culture is understood as "a person interacting with culture as a system of normative situations, consciously reflecting them and demonstrating compliance with cultural norms in his/her behavior, communication, or activity" (Bayanova, 2012).

In domestic psychology, there is an independent line for studying the interaction of personality and culture, originating in the cultural and historical concept of Vygotsky. In cultural and historical psychology, the culture itself is interpreted by Vygotsky as a system of signs "growing into the psyche" as special psychic means (Vygotsky, 2007).

To study the features of the correspondence of the pre-schooler's behavior to a typical spectrum of rules characteristic of the subject's age and accepted in the given culture, the method of "Determination of the cultural congruity of the preschool child", based on the theoretical studies of Bayanova (2016), was constructed. In childhood, where the social situation of development is determined by the interaction with an adult, the cultural congruence was assessed by the parents, who acted as experts.

The level of cultural congruency of preschool children was higher in B-group (average statistical preschool institutions). After studying the diagnostic results of 4 indicators of cultural congruency of preschool children, it was found that among the testees, depending on the quality of the educational environment, there is a different degree of expression of cultural congruity in children of preschool age. With the help of a single-factor analysis of variance (Table 02), reliable differences were found in the indicators "Obedience, compliance with the expectations of adults", "Self-service, hygiene" and "Self-control". The children of this group are obedient and compliant, dependent on adults and other children and easily obey them; they are reasonable and serious, prudent and prefer not to take risks. This confirms the fact that a high level of cultural congruity implies that the child is limited in expressing his personal, subjective position.

It can be assumed that in B-group the focus is on discipline, preparation for school, rather than on the individual development of the child. While the strategy of the best preschool educational institutions is an orientation toward the inner potential of the child's personality, and the formation of its subjective component.

**Table 02.** The results of ANOVA to the indicators of cultural congruity

<b>Indicators of cultural congruity</b>	<b>Mean values in Group A</b>	<b>Mean values in Group B</b>	<b>F emp. (F cv = 3,89)</b>
Obedience, compliance with the expectations of adults	38,12	42,86	<b>36,14</b>
Safety	49,85	50,62	0,37
Self-service, hygiene	33,83	36,69	<b>12,19</b>
Self-control	27,20	29,52	<b>14,97</b>



Note: Values in bold are significant differences in the severity of developmental indicators of subjectivity of preschool children in groups of testees at a given level of confidence  $p \leq 0.05$ .

The analysis of the results of correlation analysis has demonstrated that with an increase in the level of cultural congruence, we can observe a decrease in the expression of subjective qualities in preschool children (for  $p \leq 0.01$ ), and conversely, with a decrease in the level of cultural congruity, a subjective position in the child's activity is manifested.

Thus, the main task of preschool education is to support the creative constituent of the child's personality and its subjective position, and is to find effective ways of working with children. As Veraksa points out, the cognitive activity of children is expressed in a specific cultural space, which is a system of norms prescribed by an adult. A child who finds himself in a normative situation can act both in accordance with a given norm, and in accordance with opportunities that are conditioned by external circumstances. The child's activity aimed at identifying the opportunities that exist at the moment under specific circumstances is characteristic of the creative personality. But the direct imitation and adherence to the norm set by the adult, creates a formal character of the child's behavior without going into the space of opportunities. One more kind of activity can be singled out in case the activity takes place in the space of opportunities, but is mediated by the cultural norm, in other words, it is realized in the context of the task set by the adult. In this case, the child himself/herself seeks the cultural norm as a special opportunity (Veraksa, 2008).

It is the mastery of the subjective position that ensures the success of the child's transition to the next age stage, ensures the integrity of the development of his personality. In its turn, integrity determines the selectivity and self-realization of the child as a subject in an activity significant to him. The position of the subject of activity and culture becomes a kind of core of integrity, ensuring the integration of the child with the world and the opportunity to create this world. Therefore, the creation of conditions for the development of the child as a subject of playful, artistic, elementary labor, and cultural activity can be regarded as the leading factor ensuring the integrity of his/her development in culture..

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, the learning environment affects each subject in educational processes. Its quality affects the personal development of children, including their intellectual, social, and personal components. The educational environment of early childhood enhances the development of subjectivity in preschool children, being a systemic quality of personality and integrating such attributive characteristics as liberty, independence, creativity, constructive interaction with the environment, desire to acquire self-regulation through mastering the motivating, and activating and directing functions of subjectivity.

In the best preschool institutions, the priority is to focus on enhancing the creative potential of the individual, developing the cognitive abilities of each child and the ability to transform life qualitatively. The strategy of the best preschool educational institutions is an orientation toward the internal potential of the child's personality, the formation of his subjective beginning, the development of creative thinking and the individual development of the child. The average statistical preschool institutions are more often oriented toward school preparation, discipline, and their educational process is characterized by strict regulations.

The data obtained indicate the need to develop and approbate a model of the modern educational environment of early childhood in the context of the innovative development of pre-school education in Russia. The effectiveness of the functioning of the model of the modern educational environment of early childhood will be determined.

1) ensuring the unity of educational, developmental and educational objectives, as well as the integrity of the educational process through the integration of content and the diversity of children's activities along with the continuous improvement of the educational environment;

2) improving the developing object-spatial environment, creating conditions for gaming, motor, cognitive, research and creative activities for preschool children, and organizing conditions for the formation of children's subjective personality: a thinking, active and creative person;

3) designing educational environment, focused on supporting children's initiatives that reveal individual and creative potential of the child;

4) organizing work, focused on the formation of multicultural identity that combines systemic knowledge of different cultures and the desire and willingness to conduct an intercultural dialogue.

## Acknowledgments

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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