

Improving preschooler conduct adaptation by using a social learning program based on motion games

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Abstract

Being aware of the changes which occur under the influence of environmental conditions, education, culture and social roles upon the child is indispensable with a view to build up a conduct adapted to the social environment. For any preschooler child, entering kindergarten is an important social event and getting adapted to the new situation is not easy. Broadening the relational framework with objects, other individuals, with one's own self, results in disciplining preschooler conducts and increasing the number of socially desirable conducts. Relying upon the above statements, this study is aimed at working out a social learning programme made up of motion games involving socialization/cooperation elements intended for inducing amelioration in terms of the child's conduct during the process of adaptation to the kindergarten environment. The experiment was conducted using a sample of "little group" preschoolers (children 3-4 years of age). As research methods, the following have been used: studying the reference literature, the method of pedagogical observation, the method of experiment and the method of playing. Further to the practical application of the programme worked out with a view to enhance the adaptation conduct in the said subjects, the experimental group proved to have undergone a significant positive evolution and each subject showed improvements considering the conduct of adaptation to kindergarten conditions, as highlighted by the change i.e. higher values in terms of the individual scores achieved at the final test. Preschool education is meant to provide all possible ways and means to enable any child's integration into groups of children of a peer age, to develop sociability in children and to create favorable conditions for building out inter-children networks.

Key words: adaptation, socialization, kindergarten, motion games, psychosocial development

Rezumat

Cunoașterea modificărilor produse sub influența condițiilor de mediu, a educației, a culturii și a rolurilor sociale exercitate asupra copilului este indispensabilă în vederea formării unui comportament adaptat la mediul social. Pentru copilul preșcolar, intrarea în grădiniță este un eveniment social important, iar adaptarea la noua situație nu este ușoară. Lărgirea cadrului relațional: cu obiectele, cu alții, cu sine conduce la disciplinarea conduitei preșcolarului, la înmulțirea numărului de conduite dezirabile din punct de vedere social. Pornind de la cele enunțate mai sus, studiul de față a avut ca scop: elaborarea unui program de învățare socială alcătuit din jocuri motrice, care prin elementele de socializare/cooperare, să determine ameliorarea comportamentului manifestat de-a lungul procesului de adaptare la mediul grădiniței. Experimentul s-a desfășurat pe un eșantion de preșcolari de grupă mică. Metodele de cercetare utilizate au fost: studiul literaturii de specialitate, metoda observației pedagogice, metoda experimentului și metoda jocului. În urma aplicării programului elaborat în vederea ameliorării comportamentului de adaptare al subiecților, grupa experimentală a prezentat o evoluție pozitivă semnificativă, fiecare subiect prezentând îmbunătățiri la nivelul comportamentului de adaptare la mediul grădiniței, fapt pus în evidență de modificarea, în sens de creștere, a punctajului individual obținut la testarea finală. Educația preșcolară trebuie să asigure toate căile și mijloacele de a facilita integrarea copiilor în grupuri de covârșnici, să le dezvolte sociabilitatea, creând condiții favorabile construirii unei rețele inter-copii.

Cuvinte cheie: adaptare, socializare, grădiniță, jocuri motrice, dezvoltare psihosocială

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1. Introduction

1.1 Kindergarten as a transitional stage between family and school

Early education is the first link of the national pre-university education system. It provides for the child's entry into the compulsory education system by building capacity to learn.

By virtue of Article 23 (a) of Act 1/2011, (1) early (0-6 years) education is made up of the ante-pre-school (0-3 years) level and the preschool (3-6 years) level education, this latter comprising the so-called little group, medium group and big group education. The national curriculum for early education focuses upon the physical, cognitive, emotional and social development in children, and, respectively, on the precocious remedies for any possible developmental deficiencies (Article 67 indent (1) of Act 1/2011. (1) In this regard, institutional preschool education pursues removing school failures and school dropout and, respectively, equalization of opportunities.

The preschool institution is a transitional stage between family and school: it plays an important role in the school entrance, since engages the child in task which are similar to the school tasks only that are given under the form of a game, enhances the child's intellectual availability, activates the child mentally and motivationally, brings the child into contact with the requirements preparing him/her for school, and contributes to creating the premises for starting school studies under the child's optimum psychological condition of readiness to learn.

In the light of various dimensions and contents, kindergarten offers for children a new framework, being, in the same time, the child's first new experience in society.

The child's integration in the preschool community presupposes a first effort of adaptation to the social life and, in the same time, an extension of the social environment accessible for the child. During the preschool period, the child acquires his/her social role in a community, learns to be subordinated to a schedule and to the joint activities of the community to which he/she belongs, establishes relationships with other children by learning how to overcome his/her eccentricity using collaborative relationships. The interrelationships system and the social-affective climate, which develop within the group, play a special role in the process of the child's integration into the community. (2)

The psychical ambience within the group, the experience acquired by the children, the affective climate, the competing or collaborating atmosphere within the group, make up a social-cultural environment which has a formative impact upon the members of the group.

1.2 Game as the preschool child's basic activity

"Man is complete only when playing." (Schiller) Schiller's statement leads us to the conclusion that game is such a way to know the child, which provides an overview as to the development level and the propensities thereof. In this regard, any child can be monitored by playing, in all aspects of his/her development, in terms of his/her entire sophistication: cognitive, motion, affective, social, moral.

"Preschool age is when the game reaches its highest peaks. The game is now the child's way of action, a specific and prevailing form of activity, the very context which substantiates the preschooler's life, a framework which enables his/her progress and evolution at a psychological level." (3)

Since the game takes place in a funny, entertaining way, within the family, it is a pleasant means for leisure activities. However, in kindergarten, it is replaced by didactic games and game elements, which favour the preschoolers' easy adaptation to the prevailing activity, i.e. learning.

Due to their practical content, didactic games are deemed to be the most efficient way to activate the entire group of preschoolers with a view to build out basic practical and organized labour skills, developing team spirit and mutual aid, in the same time.

Game rules "represent such internal of external regulations through which children's actions are organized and correlated among them." (4). Gradually, the child learns to be aware of the said rules and moreover learns to abide the same, which is a huge gain in terms of his/her social-affective and moral development.

It is of an utmost importance that educators create a playing atmosphere during the entire day by implementing enjoyable and interesting activities actively involving children in the learning process, by providing possible options for children so that they can initiate their own learning activities as well as by relaxing attitudes to be manifested in all their interactions with children. (5)

In brief, the effects of the game upon preschoolers, according to (6- 9), are as follows:

- stimulates the preschooler's interest and curiosity, favouring the acquirement of a large quantity of knowledge during a short time and apparently without effort;
- educates conduct, fantasy and imagination in children;
- stimulates and models the affective-emotional processes;
- forms attention, power of perception and rendering (narrative account), perseverance, skills, order, ability, perspicacity, promptitude, thus contributing to the development and training of physical and intellectual capacities as well as of the character traits;
- models personality traits, such as: respect towards others, responsibility, honesty, courage, fairness;
- meets the child's need for motion and action.

Due to all such effects produced, game represents the basic activity in kindergarten to accomplish the learning process in an attractive and engaging way, easily assimilated by the child. (10)

1.3 Adaptation

Adaptation lies in the adjustment to the individual's own environment, i.e., within the context of this study, in the child's accommodation with kindergarten. As a socialization and education institution, kindergarten establishes in fact the child's social adaptation, i.e. the process through which any person or social group becomes capable of living in a social environment, adjusting his/her/its conduct according to the specific environmental requirements. (11)

"Adaptation to school - is the process of accomplishing the equilibrium between the pupil's evolving personality during his/her formation and the ascending exigencies of his/her entourage, in terms of assimilating the informational content according to his/her own availabilities and tuning to those qualitative and quantitative changes of the norms and assets, as a whole, which are intrinsic to the educational system." (2)

Adaptation to kindergarten - presupposes the involvement of the child's entire psychic structure: perceptions, representations, memory, thinking, language and attentiveness as well as imagination dynamized by motivation with the participation of the

will, mediated by character, temperament and affectivity, as main dominant features of personality. Piaget believes that intelligence is a superior form of adaptation. (12) The relationship between intelligence and adaptation is given by the definitions according to which intelligence is construed as being "the capacity to adapt to new problematic situations", "an instrument of the success, knowledge, abstraction, combination and synthesis". (2)

Therefore, adaptation is subject to intelligence, since it lies in the capacity to acquire knowledge and understand quickly and thoroughly, to anticipate events and to evaluate the consequences thereof, and whoever behaves like this, gets easily adapted to situations.

Although intelligence plays a decisive role in the process of adaptation to kindergarten, a growing importance is prefigured in terms of the non-intellectual peculiarities weight: resistance to physical and intellectual effort, special aptitudes, affective-volitional peculiarities, perseverance in daily activities, motivation to learn, attitude towards kindergarten, cognitive interests, skills and abilities - as a subjective support of the adaptation to kindergarten.

With a view to act as appropriately as possible under social conditions, youngsters shall learn from other individuals or through interactions with the human environment, the capacity to train from a social viewpoint.

The aim of the educative activity exercised upon the child is to have eventually such a well-adapted adult, properly integrated in the society he/she is living in. (13)

There are at least three conduct aspects where preschooler adaptation is required in a different way: the service aspect, the aspect of compulsory activities available in kindergarten, and implicitly, the intensive demand for attention, memory, intellectual capacities and, through all these, the aspect of integration in the community, i.e. in the activities, which characterize it at a certain time moment.

Șchiopu (4) identifies in children six types of adaptation to the requirements, as a whole, which are expected from them.

- **Very good adaptation**, characterized by parting without hesitation from the person who brought the child to the kindergarten as well as conducts

saturated with curiosity and active investigation in the kindergarten environment. In addition, a rapid establishment of relations both with the educator and the children in the group.

- **Good adaptation**, characterized by parting without hesitation from the person who brought the child to the kindergarten as well as an easy establishment of verbal relations with the educator and with some of the group children and also by showing an expectative and an active investigation attitude.
- **Difficult and intermittently stressful adaptation**, manifested by nervousness, tacit retention (holding the hand) of the accompanying person, alternating mood, uncertainty however also curiosity towards the environment.
- **Continuously stressful adaptation**, manifested by background nervousness, persistent (verbally insisting - sometimes whimpering) retention of the accompanying person, establishing very few relations with the educator and with other children and an obvious abandonment behaviour.
- **Difficult adaptation**, manifested by the child's refusal to part from the accompanying person, a quasi-general refuse to establish verbal relations (muteness), blocked curiosity and investigation, as well as obviously and continuously stressful mood.
- **Non-adaptation**, manifested by the child's active refuse to part from the accompanying person, negativism, sometimes violence and refractory or aggressive conducts.

2. Applied experimental method

Starting from the abovementioned theoretical content, our research relies upon the following premises:

- Children represent the future society. The evolution of humanity is subject to the harmonious development thereof. In this respect, being aware of the changes under the influence of environmental conditions, education, culture and social roles exercised upon the child becomes indispensable since neglecting / ignoring the same can result in a disequilibrium and non-adaptation of the human conduct in terms of the relationships with the social environment.

- Kindergarten is the link between family and school. Educating children in a community is especially important since the entire education, i.e. the studies during their lifetime will take place within the framework of a community.
- For any preschooler child, entering kindergarten is an important social event and getting adapted to the new situation is not easy. From their place well established by parents, children find themselves moved more or less abruptly into a new environment and they do not know what to expect or how to react thereto. The first occurring phenomenon is a stressful mood generated by the child's effort to store an excessive quantity of new information commonly circulated by strangers. If kindergarten offers a feeling of safety and a world tailored to the child, he/she will gradually feel more free and stronger. Any good adaptation involves behaviours of curiosity and active investigation, rapidly established relationships in terms of those persons with whom the child will interact within the kindergarten environment.
- Game has its importance in building out the children community, forming the spirit of independence, forming a positive attitude towards work and correcting certain deviations noticed in some children's behaviour. All these educational effects rely - just as on an actual foundation - on the influence exercised by the game upon the child's psychical development, i.e. upon the child's personality.
- Game is an efficient way to fulfil the tasks of the child's moral education, contributing to the development of tempering oneself, self-control, spirit of independence, conscious discipline, perseverance, as well as several other qualities of will and character traits. The value of the game can also be noticed in the development of sociability, team spirit, mutual relations among children.
- Broadening the relational framework with objects, other individuals, with one's own self, results in disciplining preschooler conducts and increasing the number of socially desirable conducts.

The purpose of the research is working out a social learning programme made up of motion games involving socialization/cooperation elements

intended for inducing amelioration in terms of the child's conduct during the process of adaptation to the kindergarten environment.

The main objectives of the research are:

- defining specific behaviours/typical adaptations;
- working out a social learning programme based on motion games of socialization/cooperation and applying the same at a small group level (pre-primary education);
- processing data and interpreting the research results.

The research hypothesis is:

"Applying, at the beginning of the school-year, a social learning programme made up of motion games facilitates the degree of adaptation of pre-schoolers to kindergarten environment. This aspect is highlighted by the specific behavioural traits/adaptation types."

2.1 Subjects and methods

The experiment took place within the 2011-2012 school-year using a sample made up of 23 small group preschoolers at Kindergarten no. 31 in Brașov.

The overall duration of the experimental activity encompassed six weeks. During the first week and the last week, an initial test and, respectively, a final

test were organized as planned with a view to identify the changes produced by the independent variable subject to the dependent variable. During the adapted conduct evaluation period, mixed contents of motion games have been used however without being directed on purpose towards certain target micro-groups or/and subjects.

During the weeks in between these two tests, there has been applied the actual social learning program made up of motion games used as operational tools for ameliorating the conduct adapted by the group and by the individuals.

The programme covered 20 games divided into four different categories: games for knowing the group members, games of trust, games of cooperation and games for developing team spirit. The programme was conceived to pursue a logical sequence of the games as per the indicative breakdown scheme and to activate games acting on the micro-group or the individual behaviour subject to the level of adaptation, which was systematically monitored in terms of the conduct shown towards the group members during the lessons preceding the current activity (Figure 1) (see the initial test scores). Such games were used as transition activities within a 10-15 minutes allocated framework, at the beginning of the day.

Semester			Games Categories Breakdown																																		
Month			IX										X																								
Week			1					2					3					4					5					6									
Days of activity			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30					
Item	Games categories	Game code																																			
1	Games for knowing the group members	CG.	Initial Test																													Final test					
2	Games of trust	Jl.																																			
3	Games of cooperation	CO.																																			
4	Games fos developing the team spirit	SE.																																			

*Guidance note: there have been scheduled two games/activities

Figure 1. Breakdown scheme of game categories used within the period of the experimental activities

The independent variable of the research was the social learning programme included in the children's daily timetable for 1+4+1 weeks from the very beginning of the school year. The total average duration of applying motor games was 7.5 hours.

The dependent variable was the children's level of adaptation to the kindergarten environment, as highlighted by their ratings/the behaviours listed in the monitoring protocol.

For the purpose of the initial test (Week 1) and of the final test (Week 6), we have drawn up a monitoring protocol (Figure 2), where we provided the behavioural components selected in keeping with the criteria, relying upon which children can be included in one of the 6 types of adaptation to the kindergarten environment (Șchiopu, 1995, pp. 127-128). Also, the said behaviours have been formulated on grounds of the reference objectives included in the Curriculum for early education of children within the 3 years of age to 6/7 years of age period concerning the "Psychosocial development" sub-domain. (14)

With a view to assess the behaviours listed in the protocol, ratings have been used as recommended in the „Methodical Letter on Assessment in Preschool Education” of the year 2007, (15), i.e. A – for attained behaviour, D – for behaviour under development and S – for behaviour needing support. In interpreting the results provided by the conceived evaluation tool, we covered the following steps:

- For each type of rating (A, D, S), we set our own scores: A = 7 points; D = 5 points; S = 1 point. In establishing the points related to the 3 typical ratings, the obtained maximum score /rating (A, D or S) was wished to place the subject as follows:
 - at the upper limit of the interval established for *very good* adaptation – in the case of the maximum score of 84 points obtained for rating „A”;
 - at the lower limit of the interval established for *good* adaptation – in the case of the maximum score of 60 points obtained for rating

„D”;

- at the lower limit of the interval established for *non-adaptation* – in the case of the maximum score of 12 points obtained for rating „S”;

- the total number of ratings / behavioural components according to each type has been converted into points;

- on grounds of the final score, the subjects have been included in one of the 6 types of adaptation, as follows: the intervals according to types of adaptation have been calculated on grounds of the number of items (all in all 12 numbers) as set forth in the monitoring protocol and, respectively, on grounds of the established points /rating. Thus, the minimum possible score was 12 points, and the maximum possible score was 84 points. Dividing equally the 12-84 interval for the six adaptation categories, the following results:

- very good adaptation → 72-84 points;
- good adaptation → 60-71.99 points;
- difficult, intermittently stressful adaptation → 48-59.99 points;
- continuously stressful adaptation → 36-47.99 points;
- difficult adaptation → 24-35.99 points;
- non-adaptation → 12-23.99 points.

MONITORING PROTOCOL FOR THE CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR OF ADAPTATION TO THE KINDERGARTEN ENVIRONMENT

Family name and first name:

Group:

Kindergarten:

	Behavioural components	Ratings		
		A	D	S
1	Easily parts from adults with whom he/she is accustomed to, in cases where the motivation thereof is justified			
2	Follows indications given by adults concerning the appropriate behaviour in various situations			
3	Turns to adults who provide his/her care, for emotional support			
4	Helps adults on his/her own initiative in simple tasks			
5	Initiates activities with other children or with an other child			
6	Seeks the company of other children to play with			
7	Makes friends and keeps on being friends with at least one child			
8	Exchanges objects in the game			
9	Admits mistakes as to other children and tries to make amends, apologizing and suggesting other solutions			
10	Uses the game for exploring and exercising purposes and understands the social roles			
11	Puts questions in order to obtain information			
12	Anticipates what's next in the daily schedule			

A - attained behaviour

D - behaviour under development

S - behaviour needing support

Figure 2. Monitoring protocol for the child's behaviour of adaptation to the kindergarten environment

Further to processing the acquired information, behaviours manifested by children at the beginning of the experimental activity were compared with the ones recorded at the end there of.

3. Results and discussions

By processing the data acquired further to the initial test, we had the possibility to see the level at which the research activity started.

The group profile (Table I. and Figure 3) showed the following layout:

- very good adaptation – 3 subjects, i.e. 13.04% of the group;

- good adaptation – 5 subjects, i.e. 21.74% of the total number of the research subject;
- difficult, intermittently stressful adaptation – 9 subjects, i.e. 39.13% of the group;
- continuously stressful adaptation – 4 subjects, i.e. 17.39% of the group;
- difficult adaptation – 2 subjects, i.e. 8.70% of the group;
- non-adaptation – 0 subjects.

Table I. Distribution of subjects /types of adaptation to kindergarten environment – initial test

Type of adaptation	Total number of subjects	List of subjects	Expressed in percentage
Very good adaptation	3	3,5,9	13.04
Good adaptation	5	11,15,16,22,23	21.74
Difficult, intermittently stressful adaptation	9	1,4,7,12,13,17,18,20,21	39.13
Continuously stressful adaptation	4	2,6,8,10	17.39
Difficile adaptation	2	14,19	8.70
Non-adaptation	0		0.00

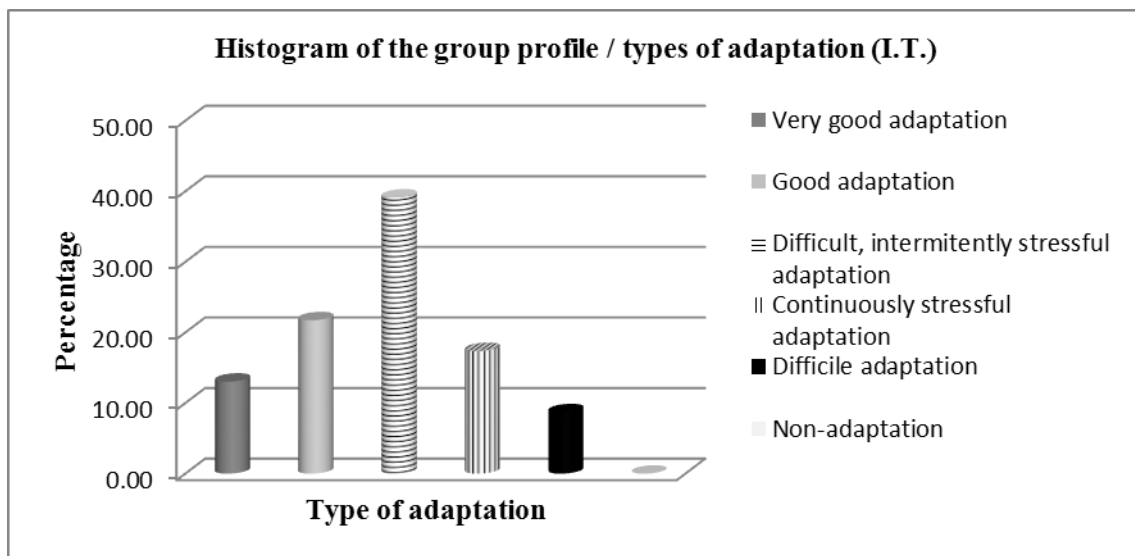


Figure 3. Group profile / types of adaptation - initial test

At the end of the experimental activity, the group profile (Table II. and Figure 4.) is as shown below:

- very good adaptation – 4 subjects, i.e. 17.39% of the group;

- good adaptation – 11 subjects, i.e. 47.83% of the group;
- difficult, intermittently stressful adaptation – 5 subjects, i.e. 21.74% of the group;

- continuously stressful adaptation – 2 subjects, i.e. 8.70% of the group;
- difficult adaptation – 1 subject, i.e. 4.35% of the group;
- non-adaptation – 0 subjects.

Table II. Distribution of subjects / types of adaptation to kindergarten environment – final test

Type of adaptation	Total number of subjects	List of subjects	Expressed in percentage
Very good adaptation	4	3,5,9,16	17.39
Good adaptation	11	1,4,7,11,13,15,17,18,20,22,23	47.83
Difficult, intermitently stressful adaptatipon	5	2,6,8,12,21	21.74
Continuously stressful adaptation	2	10,19	8.70
Difficile adaptation	1	14	4.35
Non-adaptation	0		0.00

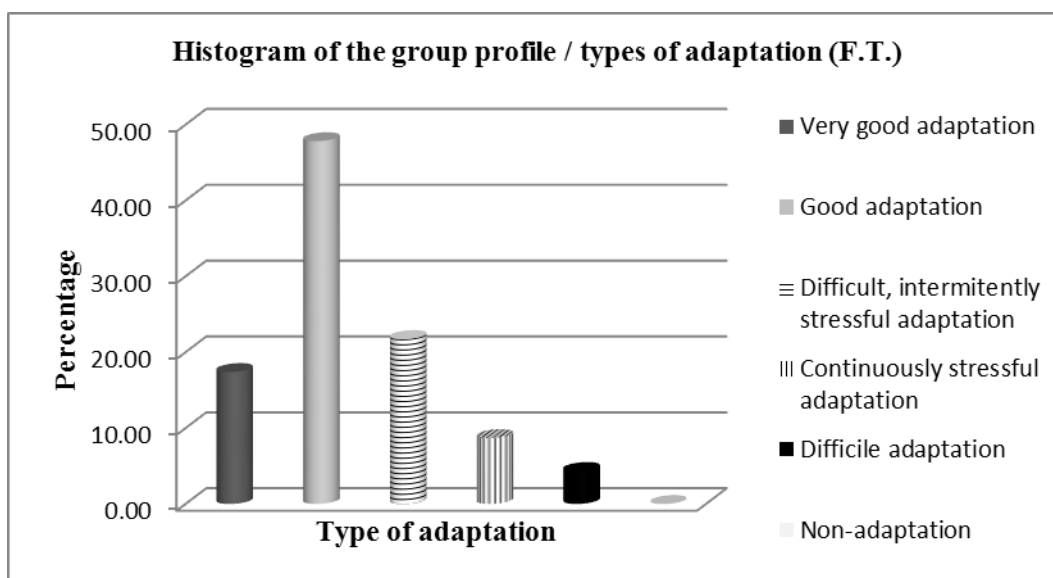


Figure 4. Group profile / types of adaptation - final test

Further to the completion of the experimental activity, the breakdown scheme of each category underwent changes since after the final test, on grounds of the acquired individual scores, certain subjects have been included in a higher category while lower category subjects took their place. However, there were also subjects who after the final test have not been included in any different category as compared to the initial test. They showed improvements in terms of the behavioural components, as highlighted by the differences in terms of the scores obtained for the said two tests.

According to the scores calculated at the end of the experimental activity, they progressed from the lower limit of the current category interval towards the upper limit thereof. For the future, there is the possibility to include such subjects in a higher category than the one to which they belong for the time being (see subject no. 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 21, 22 and 23).

The highest score was achieved by subject no. 3 who obtained a total number of 78 points, while the lowest score was achieved by subject no. 14 who obtained a total number of 24 points. (Figure 5)

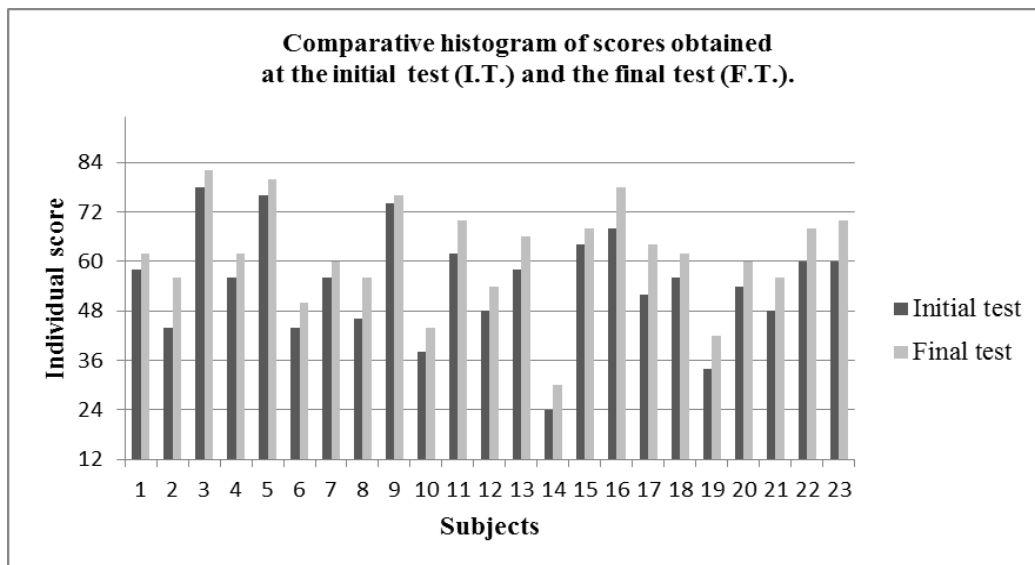


Figure 5. Individual scores of subjects, obtained at the initial and final test

Data interpretation reveals the following major changes in terms of the group profile (Figure 6.):

- the number of subjects included in the „very good adaptation” category increases from 3 to 4, i.e. from 13.04%, to 17.39%, which means a 4.35 percentage points increase rate;
- the number of subjects included in the „good adaptation” category increases from 5 to 11, i.e. from 21.74%, to 47.83 %, which means a 26.09 percentage points increase rate;
- the number of subjects included in the „difficult, intermittently stressful adaptation” category decreases from 9 to 5 subjects;

- the number of subjects included in the „continuously stressful adaptation” category decreases from 4 to 2 subjects;
- the number of subjects included in the „difficult adaptation” category decreases from 2 subjects to 1 subject;
- no cases of non-adaptation have been encountered.

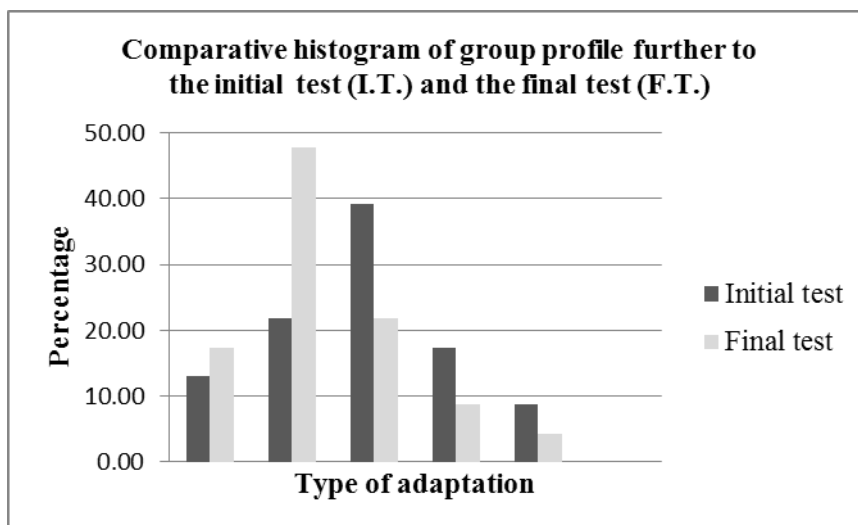


Figure 6. Comparison of the group profiles further to the initial test and the final test

The value of the t-Student indicator for the experimental group is 11.47, i.e. a value higher than 2.62 at a 0.01 threshold for $n-1$ subjects = 22 subjects (Table according to Fischer S.). The difference is significant and therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the working hypothesis. This highlights the implications produced by the independent variable upon the dependent one, further to the experimental activity. Thus, one can ascertain at a 99.9% probability that the level of adaptation in terms of those preschooler's behaviour who were involved in the research activity has significantly improved due to the applied methodology.

Conclusions

- Applying a methodology based on collaborative and cooperative motion games significantly improves the behaviour of adaptation to kindergarten environment in children. The experimental group had a positive evolution and each subject showed improvements in the behaviour of adaptation to the kindergarten environment, as highlighted by the change, namely the increase of the individual scores calculated further to the final test.
- In working out such a programme, framework and reference objectives shall be taken into account as formulated for the involved sub-domains in building out the adaptation behaviour in children.
- Socializing-collaboration games result in the formation of certain behaviours such as learning together, arriving at joint decisions, team spirit, spirit of sacrifice etc., which, in their turn, positively influence the subsequent didactic process.
- Forming and normalizing behaviours of adaptation to kindergarten environment result in an increase of the autonomy manifested in the child's various conducts.
- Preschool education shall ensure all possible ways and means for facilitating the children's integration in groups of peer age and for developing their sociability, by creating favourable conditions for building an inter-children network.
- Kindergarten shall provide children the opportunity to experience positive emotions and satisfactions generated by participating in joint success and shall build out such actual ambiances where they

can express social attitudes. This is possible by applying a social learning programme based on motion games.

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