

**BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA**  
**FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES**  
**„EDUCATION, REFLECTION, DEVELOPMENT” DOCTORAL SCHOOL**

## **DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**

**A STUDY ON THE RELEVANCE OF THE  
INTEGRATIVE OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES IN THE  
PROCESS OF DIDACTIC DESIGN  
IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION.  
INVESTIGATIONS IN THE N.W. REGION OF  
ROMANIA**

### **RESUME**

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***Keywords and phrases:***

Early education, outcomes of education, outcomes of early education, curriculum for early education, preschool education, domains of development, dimensions of development, operational objectives, integrative operational objective, integrated activities, improvement of teaching activity, intensive training course, kindergarten, educators.

The doctoral dissertation entitled **A Study on the Relevance of Integrative Operational Objectives in the Process of Didactic Design in Preschool Education. Investigations in the NW Region of Romania** is organised in two parts.

**PART A.**, entitled **THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS**, contains **chapters I and II** and, through the analyses performed, offers an objective perspective on the evolution of preschool education in Romania. Herein are detailed the curricular and organizational changes in the Romanian education system, in general, and preschool in particular, including implications on the health status of teachers (occupational stress), but also the concept of integrative operational objective, specific to the integrated activities performed in kindergarten.

**PART B.**, entitled **INVESTIGATIONS OF THE THEORETICAL, EXPLORATORY, ASCERTAINING, PRACTICAL-APPLICATIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN REGARDING THE PSYCHO PEDAGOGICAL ISSUES AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF USING THE INTEGRATIVE OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION**, contains **chapters III, IV and V**, containing the investigations carried out in the period 2012 / 2013-2018 and further developed in the period 2018-2021 regarding the usefulness of formulating and pursuing the integrated operational objectives used for the integrated activities carried out in kindergarten, studies carried out in Sălaj County and extended in the NW Region of Romania.

**Chapter VI** formulates the **conclusions** of our research, general conclusions, research limits and subsequent research directions, while the **Annexes** of the thesis present various tools used in the research, respectively the data collected, centralised and used in the analyses performed.

The paper addresses a unique issue that is based on a series of investigations of experimental, ascertaining-ameliorating and practical-applicative design of the investigated phenomenon. Thus, we are talking about a scientific research of a particular type that covers multiple plans related to the level of intentionality (action research), the issues addressed (practical-applicative research), the proposed outcome (ameliorating research), the research

tools and methodology used (experimental research) and the direction of action (longitudinally directed, long-term research).

In Chapter I entitled **Preschool Education in Romania. Didactic Incursions in the Educational Dynamics**, we present the curricular changes occurred in the post-Decembrist democratic education system that took place in successive stages, the preschool segment being included each time. The transition from *content-focused programmes to operational programmes, focused on objectives*, respectively *to the programmes that aim towards the creation of the premises for competence-based education*, was achieved in accordance with the changes highlighted by the educational policies promoted at national and international level. The analyses performed on the school curricula issued in the period 1990-2020 reveal the aspects of continuity, of novelty, but also those demonstrating the hierarchical trend of communicating changes, respectively the way in which the changes were perceived and implemented by the educators.

Valuing the type of traditional culture, after repeated attempts to make educational changes that have been implement over thirty years, reality reveals that they were mainly superficial, applied sporadically, they have failed to be generalized at national level and moreover, old practices are still preserved in contradiction with the renewal trends promoted by national educational policies. As part of the Romanian education system, preschool education faces the same problems.

([https://www.unicef.org/situatia\\_invata\\_prescolar\\_Rom.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/situatia_invata_prescolar_Rom.pdf))

The success of the educational reforms depends, implicitly, on one of the most important variables, which is the human resource directly involved in the instructive-educational processes, respectively the teachers. The profile of the contemporary teacher must include social responsibility and awareness of the need for continuous professional training in order to carry out a quality professional activity. International and national legislation in the field of education requires the attainment of high professional standards in the context of the implementation of various curricular changes. The new requirements regarding the design and development of professional activity often appear in the absence of national training programs. When the teachers perceive the changes as overwhelming and the requirements for practising the teaching profession are high, it is necessary to focus on the issue of occupational stress and the impact it has on the health of teachers. Being one of the professional categories affected by occupational stress owing to the high responsibilities and strong negative emotions, teachers in education are at the forefront of statistics. Therefore, in our experimental investigations, we aim

to identify ways to reduce occupational stress and improve the health of educators facing curricular changes and those brought on by online activity, in pandemic conditions.

In **Chapter II**, entitled **The Outcomes of Education and their Qualitative Evolution. Analyses at the Level of Preschool Education**, we analyse and explain **education**, as a complex process that involves the impact of educators on learners, in terms of the intentions and strategic orientations pursued, foreshadowed at the level of education policy, that is, through the **outcomes** of education/ educational-outcomes/ instructive-educational. Educational outcomes represent a fundamental structural component of the curriculum and, implicitly, of the educational process, which ensures the orientation, meaning and strategic directions of the educational/ instructive-educational activities.

**Early education** is a stage and an integral part of education, a level of the Romanian national pre-university education system, which aims at educating children aged between 0 and 6 years of age. **The outcomes of early education** are directed towards a series of behavioral aspects of preschoolers, which are the premises of the key competences formed, developed and diversified, later on in their educational path. Among the researchers in the field of education who have made valuable contributions to understanding the complexity of educational taxonomies, we mention: P. Bloom, R. Marzano, E.J. Simpson, R.D. Krathwohl etc. We can identify conceptual clarifications regarding the educational outcomes in Romania both in the specific legislation and with various authors, among which we mention the following: Muşata Bocoş, Vasile Chiş, Dana Jucan, Ramona Răduţ-Taciu, Cornelia Stan etc.

The term **education** is immediately associated with the one for **curriculum** (school/ educational), including the **values** it promotes, that “give concrete foresight to education and guide school life: the vision and mission of the school, the teaching-learning-assessment activity, the attitude of young people in and out of school.” (Guidelines for the design, updating and evaluation of the National Curriculum. Educational policy document, 2019, p. 14).

From a pragmatic perspective, it is important for the teacher to make the transition from the taxonomies of educational objectives to the formulation of appropriate educational objectives in the didactic design and, subsequently, to their effective use as core landmarks in organising and carrying out activities. The school programmes of the disciplines function along an axis that is comprised of: *the general competences - the specific competences - the content units* that are capitalized by the teacher. Between them, mutual determinations, dynamic and functional relationships and interrelationships are established. In general, a general competency is constructed when several specific competencies are formed and developed, while a specific competency may be polyvalent or may contribute, to a greater or lesser extent, to the

accomplishment of several general competencies. Capitalizing on this axis, through pedagogical derivation, starting from the specific competences in the school programmes, the teacher formulates, for the didactic activities carried out at micro-educational level, **operational objectives**; In order to formulate the operational objectives, the teacher will identify the set of behaviors expected from students during and at the end of teaching activities.

**The operational objective** is “very concrete, formulated in terms of behavioral change, an educational outcome with the lowest degree of generality, which is obtained by deriving the intermediate ones, with a higher degree of generality. The formulation of objectives in terms of behavior is justified and necessary, as behaviors can be directly observed, analysed, grouped, classified and evaluated objectively. The operational objectives are formulated for the educational activities carried out at the pedagogical micro level, in a concrete, precise, univocal way, by specifying the observable and measurable behaviors that are expected from the learners during and at the end of the didactic activities. The clear and concrete formulation of the operational objectives makes them constitute the didactic landmarks of the instructive-educational activities carried out at the educational micro level; It is according to them that the design, organization, management, evaluation and regulation of determined and concrete instructive-educational activities are performed. The operational objectives contribute to the achievement of the educational objectives of the topic/ chapter/ learning unit; the achievement of the latter determines the achievement of the intended educational outcomes and the general objectives of education.” (M.-D. Bocoş, (coord.), R. Răduţ-Taciu, C. Stan, 2018, p. 348).

In our theoretical and practical research, we started from the premise that the operationalisation of the objectives is an absolutely necessary condition for the educational objectives to be used in the design, implementation and evaluation of educational activities.

In early education, given the particularities of the child's development up to 6 years of age, it is not appropriate to use the concept of **competence**, understood as an integrated set of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Therefore, the axis of the Programme for early education consists of: *development domains-dimensions of development-behaviours, as premises of subsequent competences.*

„By capitalizing on this axis, the educators will make the necessary pedagogical derivations and, starting from the development domains covered in the Curriculum for early education and detailed in the Fundamental guidelines for the learning and development of the child from birth to 7 years of age:

- they are to select the dimensions of development, for each domain of development, specific to the age level and related behaviors, to be followed,



- will transfer to teaching practice and,
- will "operationalize" the selected behaviors, by designing appropriate learning activities. " (Curriculum for early education, 2019, p. 15).

By using the term "to operationalize" we mean the transition from general objectives to objectives formulated by reference indicators, which allow the concrete identification, quantification and evaluation of early learning outcomes through objectives. "In the case of integrated activities, the means of accomplishment follow one another and alternate according to the objectives to be achieved, the topic, of other variables or determinants, such as: the age and potential of the children." (Curriculum for early education, 2019, p. 9). For integrated learning contexts, specific to the integrated teaching activities, we propose to use the concept of *integrative operational objective (of the integrated teaching activity)*. It represents a "Type of operational objective formulated so as to make explicit the level/ area of integration of the contents that are integrated within some sequences/ integrated teaching activities and that are to be transmitted, processed and assimilated during the process." (M.-D. Bocoș, (coord.), R. Răduț-Taciu, C. Stan, 2018, p. 348).

The need for the integrative operational objective lies in defining the approach and the ways in which the projected objectives can be identified in the effective results of the educational process. **The technique of elaborating the integrative operational objective** consists in anticipating the empirical operations necessary in the act of transition from the objectives defined at the level of the teacher's action (for integrated activities) to the learning outcomes described in terms of pre-school acquisitions. The relationship between the objectives defined at the level of the teacher's action and the actual results is not deterministic, in a full and linear correspondence, but a complex, probabilistic one. Thus, the same objective can be operationalized by different empirical indicators, and, on the other hand, the learning outcomes can be rather varied.

A possible graphic scheme of the way in which the relationship between the educational outcomes involved in the activities on experiential fields is reflected, in accordance with the changes to the Curriculum for early education, starting with the school year 2019-2020, is presented in Figure no. 1.II. (self-devised):

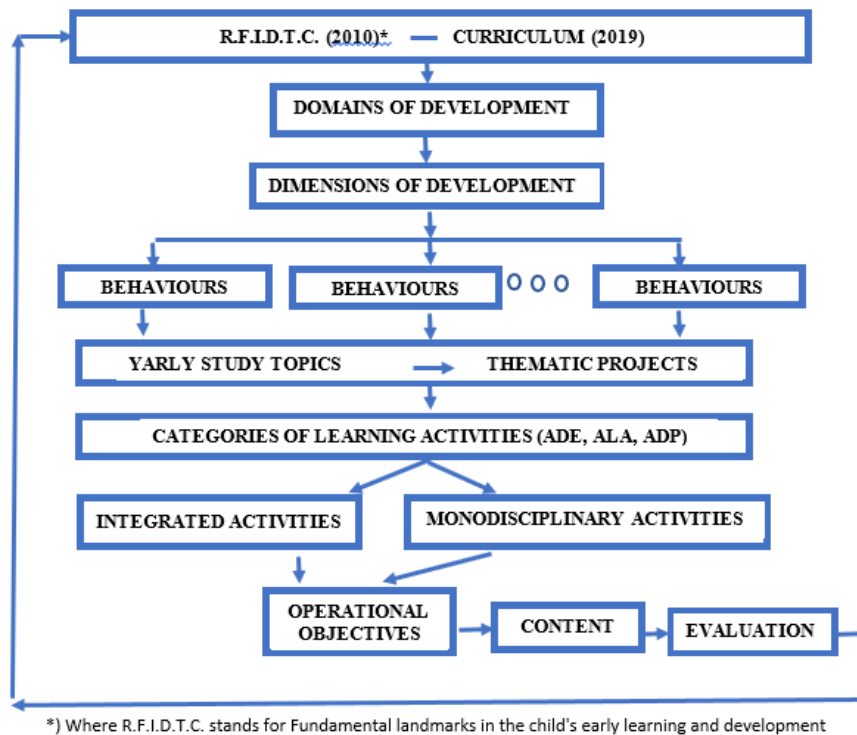


Figure no. 1.II. *The relationship between the educational outcomes involved in the activities on experiential fields (self-devised):*

If the integrated activity involves a combination of content from different disciplines/ fields, then the integrative operational objective, as a general objective of the integrated activity, involves "integrating" the operational objectives pursued in the integrated disciplines/ fields so as to explain the level/ area of integration of the contents that are integrated within some sequences/ didactic activities of integrated type, which are then to be transmitted, processed and assimilated during the aforementioned activities (M.-D. Bocoş (coord.), Răduţ-Taciu, R., Stan, C., 2018).

In order to highlight the place of the integrative operational objective in relation to the educational outcomes that can be applied in the integrated activities, the graphic representation could take the following form (self-devised):

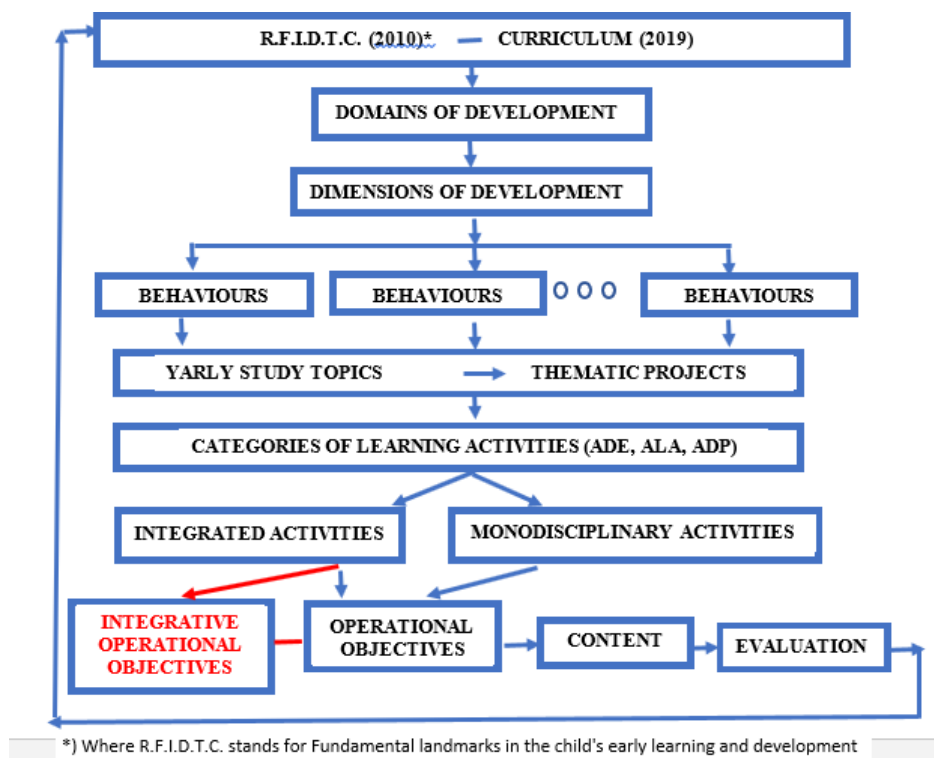


Figure no. 2.II. The place of integrative operational objectives in relation to the educational outcomes that can be involved in the integrated activities (self-devised)

We understand from this scheme that the integrative operational objectives coexist with the operational objectives used so far in the design of teaching activities, they do not replace them, but complement them in that area that reflects the integration of content in the integrated activity designed and carried out.

**The operationalization model** of this type of objective could be (*self-devised*):

Operational objective (experiential field 1/ discipline 1) +  
Operational objective (experiential field 2/ discipline)

### **integrative operational objective**

in which, in some cases, a gerund verb may appear.

By starting from the pedagogical premise according to which this type of operational objective must be precisely corroborated with the type of activity carried out with the children (teaching-learning, respectively consolidation), but also with the predominant didactic events specific to the activities carried out with preschoolers in kindergarten (directing learning or retention and transfer, for example). In other words, the formulation and use of integrative operational objectives respects the systemic vision of the didactic activities in kindergarten, the

systemic connections and the reciprocal modeling interrelationships existing between the didactic components of these activities and, of course, the interdependencies between them.

We specify that **the integrative operational objective** preserves the structure of the operational objectives (it is formulated in terms of observable and measurable behaviors). Together with the operational objectives aiming at the final outcome we want to achieve in the integrated activity (for each discipline / experiential field), we can combine those that **specify the area in which the respective disciplines / fields have a common ground (or several)** in the concrete activity carried out with the preschoolers. This area can be correlated with the integration core.

We consider that the formulation of the integrative operational objective is necessary because **if the integrated activity implies a combination of contents, then the integrative operational objective, as a specific objective of integrated activities, implies the "integration" of operational objectives, respectively, the integration of observable and measurable behaviors.**

In Sălaj County, the practical investigations regarding the opportunity and formulation of the integrative operational objectives for the integrated didactic activities in kindergarten started in the school year 2012-2013, prompted by the need to effectively design and carry out the integrated activities, to pursue within the operational objectives so as to better reflect the expected results of this type of activity. It was considered that, **in order to support the process of designing the integrated activities**, at least one of the operational objectives **can be formulated** so as to reflect the level/ area of integration of the contents from different disciplines of the experiential fields.

Our efforts to investigate the formulation of integrative operational objectives within the integrated activities, carried out in kindergartens in Sălaj County, intensified in the period 2013-2018, including by conducting scientific ascertaining-ameliorative, respectively exploratory research, which allowed us to obtain important data on the impact of this type of objective on the design and development of integrated activities, but also to provide clarifications on its formulation.

In **Chapter III**, entitled **Exploratory and ascertaining investigations on the psychopedagogical issue of integrative operational objectives in preschool education. Case study - Sălaj County**, we review the ascertaining-ameliorative, respectively, exploratory research conducted during the years 2016-2018, which allowed us to obtain important data on the impact of integrative operational objectives on the design and development of integrated activities, but also to bring clarifications on their formulation.

Among our investigative approaches from the aforementioned period, we specify:

**a. Ascertaining research:** *Investigating the perceptions and opinions of teachers in preschool education in relation to integrated activities directed by integrative operational objectives (school year 2016-2017).* The results were presented at the County Conference "Critical aspects in carrying out integrated teaching activities" - December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016, organised by the Sălaj County School Inspectorate, in collaboration with the University "Babeş-Bolyai" Cluj-Napoca and the Sălaj Teaching Staff House.

**b. Statistical survey based on a Google Questionnaire:** Problems encountered by novice educators in Sălaj County in designing and conducting integrated activities (2017). The results were presented at the national conference "Integrated curricular approaches and their teaching efficiency", organised in Zalău, on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017, by the Sălaj County School Inspectorate in partnership with the Ministry of National Education and "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca. The results obtained from this investigation can be found in the article "*A study on integrated activities in kindergarten using integrative operational objectives*", authors Clapa (Souca) Valentina-Lucia, Bocoş Muşata (2019), in *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioral Sciences EpSBS*, ISSN: 2357-1330.

**c. Ascertaining-ameliorating research:** A study on the opinions of educators from Sălaj County regarding the formulation of integrative operational objectives in the didactic design and development of integrated activities (2017-2018).

d. Analysis of the didactic planning documents from 21 educators, performed during school inspections for obtaining didactic degrees (2017-2018).

**e. Experimental research:** Experimenting with integrative operational objectives in integrated activities in the kindergartens from Sălaj County (2017 - 2018), the results obtained from this investigation were published in the article "*Experimenting with the integrative operational objectives formulated in integrated activities performed in kindergartens from Sălaj County*", authors Clapa (Souca) Valentina, Muşata Bocoş and Bogdan Neculau, in the publication *Educația 21*, no. 17, pp. 165-169 (doi: 10.24193/ ed21.2019.17.17).

**f. Experimental research:** Experimenting with the integrative operational objectives in the integrated activities from kindergartens in Sălaj County (carried out in the school year 2017-2018), after the training session regarding the explanatory model for formulating the integrative operational objectives.

The subchapters of this chapter detail two of the studies performed:

**a. Ascertaining research: Investigating the perceptions and opinions of teachers in preschool education in relation to the use of integrative operational objectives (school year**

**2016-2017**) aimed to explore, by simple statistical means, how problems related to the design and implementation of integrated activities are perceived in the kindergartens from Sălaj, with focus on the formulation of the integrative operational objective. A total of 10 educators were selected from each methodical center in Sălaj County, in approximately equal number of novices, with final grade, teaching grade II and teaching grade I, also respecting the proportion of teachers working in the Romanian and Hungarian classes in the county (80% and 20%, respectively). Each educator received for completion a questionnaire with 13 questions (4 - personal data; 9 - design / implementation of integrated activities). Out of 120 selected educators, 111 completed the questionnaire.

The data showed that the majority of respondents consider that **the integrative operational objective should be formulated for each integrated activity (54%)**. There were **opinions that** the impact of its use on didactic design should be researched (30%) or that it should not be formulated at all, but **the majority (85%) consider that its formulation was useful to them** (the benefits were perceived at the level of selection of the techniques, integration of contents or the evaluation of the integrated activity carried out).

**b. An ascertaining-ameliorating research: A study on the opinions of teachers in preschool education on the formulation of integrative operational objectives (school year 2017-2018)** aimed at establishing whether the formulation and pursuit of the integrative operational objective supports the design and development of integrated kindergarten activities. During the research we relied on the experience and counsel of educators in Sălaj County undertaken between 2015-2017 and continued **between January and May of 2018**, regarding the formulation / use of the integrative operational objective within the integrated activities. The research took place in Sălaj County, through:

- ✓ analysing activity projects and methodological-scientific reports compiled for the local pedagogical meetings that took place in the first and second semesters of the 2017-2018 school year;
- ✓ conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers who led specialized school inspections during January-May 2018, in order to study their perceptions and opinions in relation to the design and development of integrated activities oriented by integrative operational objectives;
- ✓ analysing and interpreting the personal impressions of the teachers involved in the experiment regarding the impact that the formulation and pursuit of the integrative operational objective has on the design components for each type of integrated activity (benefits / difficulties encountered).

**The results** obtained allow us to appreciate that:

- ✓ the number of integrated activities designed and carried out, every week, by the educators from Sălaj increased compared to 2013, from 1-2 activities per week, to 3-4 activities / week;
- ✓ the integrative operational objective is perceived as useful in the design and development of integrated activities by most educators in Sălaj;
- ✓ in the design of integrated activities, integrative operational objectives are formulated for most integrated teaching activities;
- ✓ **most of the participating educators consider that the formulation of the integrative operational objective was useful to them**, the benefits being perceived at the level of selecting the strategies, integrating the contents or for assessing the integrated activity carried out with the children;
- ✓ the positive reactions of the educators who participated in training courses in which the formulation of the integrative operational objective was explained, determines us to consider that, in the future, steps need to be undertaken to conduct intensive training courses for all educators, in which to practise both the formulation and pursuit of the integrative operational objective within the integrated activities;
- ✓ there are educators for whom its formulation is difficult, they tend to look for pretentious wording that distort and unnecessarily complicate the designing process;
- ✓ there are educators who do not formulate it for different reasons (fear of making mistakes, resistance to change, habit of formulating operational objectives specific to each discipline).

The data obtained allowed us to appreciate the evolution, over time, of the perceptions of educators in Sălaj County regarding the importance and usefulness of formulating integrative operational objectives for integrated activities carried out in kindergartens, as well as the identification of new research directions.

In **Chapter IV**, entitled **Experimental research on psycho-pedagogical and didactic issues of the integrative operational objectives in preschool education**. Case study - Sălaj County, presents a detailed investigation undertaken to study the impact that the training course "Innovative approaches in specific didactics of primary and preschool education" had on the formulation of the integrative operational objectives by the participating teachers. We mention the fact that this course was provided by the extension from Năsăud of the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, between November and December 2017, and also included a

training sequence in order to explain and formulate the integrative operational objective. After graduating the course, 81 didactic projects were collected and analysed, as well as the methodological-scientific reports prepared by the educators who carried out activities during the methodical meetings organised in the first and second semester of the 2017-2018 school year. During the same period, January-May 2018, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 of the educators who underwent school inspections to obtain teaching grades.

Following the analysis of the didactic activity projects and the methodological-scientific reports, we concluded that it is still necessary to take some measures to improve the teaching activity. We detail herein those related to i.o.o.:

- ✓ drafting a methodical letter, at county/ country level, specifying aspects related to the formulation of objectives (a list of verbs that target observable behaviors), stages of activity, correct identification of assessment types, how to sequentially record teaching strategies, with examples of activity projects (integrated activities);
- ✓ practicing, during the methodical meetings, the formulation of the operational objectives by using the Mager Model and the integrative operational objectives;
- ✓ in order to correctly formulate the integrative operational objective, many examples are needed to present combinations of objectives from different disciplines / experiential fields and to promote them among educators.

Following the interviews with the educators who underwent the school inspections, some needs are identified:

- ✓ the organisation of meetings with mentors to explain and practise writing the integrative operational objective (i.o.o.);
- ✓ the need to stimulate teachers to constantly study and formulate integrative operational objectives;
- ✓ the difficulty of educators to find colleagues who can offer them advice and guidance, both for the design of integrated activities and for the formulation and pursuit of integrative operational objectives.

**Chapter V, entitled A Practical-Applicative Research on Psycho-Pedagogical and Didactic Issues of Integrative Operational Objectives. Case study - counties from the North-West Region,** presents the research carried out in the period 2018-2020 on the formulation and pursuit of the integrative operational objective in the integrated activities carried out in kindergarten. Given the new contexts in which the teaching activity takes place, we observed in the research, not only the changes brought on by the 2019 Curriculum for early education, but also those that appeared with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.



In our investigative approach we followed both the qualitative research (as data are obtained that facilitate the shaping of a holistic picture of individual representations of the phenomenon studied) and the quantitative research (which provides statistical data that can clarify and nuance the qualitative data), permanently taking into account the connection between the research topic, the methods used and the conclusions of the study, as well as the contextual factors and other explanatory factors captured during the study.

### **Research Purpose**

1. To determine whether the formulation and pursuit of the integrative operational objective supports the design and development of integrated activities in kindergarten.
2. To study the effectiveness of intensive training courses for educators in the directions:
  - ✓ reaching curricular competency in the implementation of the didactic changes brought on by the 2019 Curriculum for Early Education,
  - ✓ reducing occupational stress and
  - ✓ improving teachers' health.

### **Research objectives**

- O1. Investigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the transfer in the online environment of all teaching activities, on the process of teaching-learning-evaluation at the preschool level, in Sălaj County.
- O2. The design, implementation and testing of the effectiveness of an intensive professional teaching training program to explain the changes brought on by the 2019 Curriculum for early education, to enable educators to reach curricular competency in order to correctly apply the curriculum and the innovations in designing and carrying out integrated activities in kindergarten (formulating and pursuing the integrative operational objective).
- O3. The participation in the intensive teaching training course of at least 50 educators who carry out their teaching activity in the North-West Region in order to enable them to reach curricular competency, and enable them to apply the changes brought on by the 2019 Curriculum for early education and to become familiar with the formulation and pursuit of the integrative operational objective (i.o.o) for integrated activities.
- O4. Counseling the teachers involved in the study to correctly formulate the integrative operational objective for at least 2 integrated activities carried out at the time of the study;
- O5. Analysing and interpreting the personal impressions of the teachers involved in the experiment regarding the impact of formulating and pursuing the integrative operational

objective on the design components for each type of integrated activity (benefits/ difficulties encountered) and the effects of stress caused by changes in their health status.

O6. Analysing the curricular documents designed by the educators participating in the study (qualitative and quantitative);

O7. Investigating the perceptions regarding the occupational stress of the educators participating in the study, but also the stress felt before and after participating in intensive training courses (with reference to aspects of designing and developing teaching activities based on the 2019 Curriculum for Early Education, and the formulation and pursuit of i.o.o for integrated activities) and changes in their health.

### **Research questions**

- 1) To what extent is it useful for educators to formulate and pursue the integrative operational objectives in the integrated activities?
- 2) To what extent do the educators participating in the study accept the innovative idea of integrative operational objectives and use them in integrated teaching activities?
- 3) What are the pros and cons of using integrative operational objectives in integrated teaching activities?
- 4) Is there a connection between the perceived occupational stress and the changes in professional life?
- 5) Can intensive teaching training courses enable educators to reach curricular competency in order to implement the curricular changes and innovations? How about reducing the occupational stress generated by the curricular changes?

### **Research hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1:** In the integrated activities of kindergarten, the formulation and pursuit of the integrative operational objective (i.o.o.) facilitates the curricular design approaches and curricular integration, respectively: the selection and integration of instructive-educational contents belonging to different experiential fields, establishing didactic strategies, establishing evaluation strategies.

**Hypothesis 2:** The completion, by educators, of an intensive teaching training course, based on the teleological approach of the preschool education outcomes, contributes significantly to them reaching a curricular competency which allows for the implementation of the 2019 Curriculum for early education, reduces the occupational stress generated by changes brought on by the 2019 Curriculum for early education and improves their health status.

### **Research variables**

Independent variables:

V.I.1. Formulation and pursuit of the i.o.o. in the integrated activities in kindergarten.

V.I.2. Completing an intensive teaching training course.

Dependent variables:

V.D.1. The quality of the curricular teaching design and curricular integration approaches, respectively:

- the selection and integration of instructive-educational contents belonging to different experiential fields
- establishing teaching strategies
- establishing evaluation strategies.

V.D.2. The extent to which the educators detain the curricular competency in order to apply the didactic changes brought on by the 2019 Curriculum for Early Education.

V.D.3. The degree of occupational stress generated by the change brought on by the 2019 Curriculum for early education.

V.D.4. The health status of the educators participating in the study.

**The system of research methods**

Table no. 1.V. *Table containing the system of research methods*

<b>Research methods</b>	<b>Research instruments</b>	<b>Type of instrument</b>
The psycho-pedagogical experiment	Research project	Self-devised
Questionnaire-based survey	Questionnaires (Self-devised)	<a href="https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ADyp6Wuh6nMehIIdehAQZPJXvRngRr4kE4riCxpMgnI/edit">https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ADyp6Wuh6nMehIIdehAQZPJXvRngRr4kE4riCxpMgnI/edit</a> (before the intensive teaching training course) <a href="https://docs.google.com/forms/d/16IGgGiNnfY-up_EoMCSSPCM3QxOsojgxt5qzrTBUbUU/edit">https://docs.google.com/forms/d/16IGgGiNnfY-up_EoMCSSPCM3QxOsojgxt5qzrTBUbUU/edit</a> (after the intensive teaching training course) <a href="https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1FO8XqUUScjWmawbwtJMAenZdnE0bX4BBjVf4t9fTu9w/edit">https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1FO8XqUUScjWmawbwtJMAenZdnE0bX4BBjVf4t9fTu9w/edit</a> (quality of life)
	Stress Measurement Scale - Perceived Stress Questionnaire	Validated tool (Levenstein & colab. 2003) <a href="https://cjraehd.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Scala_stress.pdf">https://cjraehd.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Scala_stress.pdf</a> <a href="https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1nEi6kM3aacYukW64GoUMS1813ifwSee6d4LivGMdZ5I/edit">https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1nEi6kM3aacYukW64GoUMS1813ifwSee6d4LivGMdZ5I/edit</a>

Method of researching the curricular documents	Analysis grid of the didactic activities designs. Analysis grid of the reflection sheets.	Self-devised
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The research was carried out in two stages:

**a. the first stage, during March-April 2020**, *Study on the impact of the suspension of teaching activities in preschool education in Sălaj County during the COVID-19 pandemic*, which investigated the impact of suspending classes, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, on preschool activities in Sălaj County (transition to online learning);

**b. the second stage, during October-December 2020**, *Study on the efficiency of an intensive teaching training course on the ability to formulate and pursue the integrative operational objective*, by conducting an intensive training course for educators in the North-West Region.

a. The study on the impact of the suspension of teaching activities in preschool education in Sălaj County during the COVID-19 pandemic was presented at the *Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Society* Conference organized by the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca together with its partners, on July 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, in Cluj-Napoca (article due to appear in the conference publication).

A major difficulty for the health system, but also for the education system, was managing the coronavirus epidemic in Romania. Starting with March 2020, the pandemic has brought new challenges in the lives of professionals working in early education services, the greatest being the suspension of face-to-face courses and their transfer to online mediums. In this context, conducting the documentation and data collection process, based on an online questionnaire, which would identify the main challenges, difficulties, but also benefits brought on by these changes in the teaching-learning-assessment process, proved absolutely necessary.

It was considered of importance investigating how teacher-mentors (kindergarten principals, methodist teachers, methodical-centre coordinators) face these challenges in order to identify the most important problems faced by this category of educators, considered specialists of preschool education in Sălaj, in the context of transferring the teaching-learning-assessment process online.

Between April 10<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020, a questionnaire was developed and applied in Google Forms on Google Drive, entitled **Questionnaire on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the activity carried out by educators with preschoolers in Sălaj County, during the**

**suspension of classes.** The purpose of applying the questionnaire was to identify how the teaching-learning-assessment process took place at preschool level in Sălaj County between March 11<sup>th</sup> and April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020, during which the courses were suspended, in order to improve online activity with the children.

From the data collected, it is evident that in the first weeks after the suspension of classes, the lack of regulations and information on conducting the online classes led each kindergarten management to look for solutions, to fill in the gaps through various measures.

The applications that were used most by mentor educators to communicate were the private groups on WhatsApp (51.51%) and Facebook (42.42%), and the least used were the applications for video calls (Zoom, Meet, Skype, Webex) which emphasizes the fact that no activities were conducted in which the educator and the children communicated in real time, through video calls, but were transmitted only information and suggestions of activities that the parents could make with the children.

The respondents appreciate that the most used ways of organising the online or distance learning activities for children, during the period for which the investigative steps were carried out, were mainly the transmission of worksheets, activity suggestions, links (45.45%) and suggestions for activities that can be done at home, with family members (36.36%), while the organisation of online activities, synchronously, was the least used.

The free educational resources existing in the online environment were the most used (54.54%) together with those created by educators (42.42%), and the least used were the resources created at kindergarten level (39.39%), respectively those created at county level (51.51%). These data show that neither the school organisation nor the school inspectorate were prepared to provide educators with the educational resources useful for carrying out online activities.

The percentage of legal guardians' participation in online activities varied, in all groups there were children who did not participate in online activities at all: 15.2% of educators consider that less than 25% of children participated; 36.4% of educators consider that between 25% and 49% of children participated in activities; 33.3% of educators mention a participation of children between 50% and 74%, and 15.2% of educators consider that the participation of children was between 75% and 99%. We find that even in urban areas we have from 1% to over 75% of children who were not guaranteed the right to education during the period for which the data were collected, they did not benefit from the education provided by the schools.

The most common benefits of online activities for children, mentioned by the mentor educators, were: quality time with the family, awareness by parents of the complexity of

activities performed in the kindergarten, flexible schedule, involvement of the child in building healthy relationships with parents and in practising the skills to use online means of communication, getting acquainted with a different kind of learning (online), etc.

Among the benefits for parents we mention: "a better knowledge of children's skills, awareness of the importance of the education act in kindergarten, more quality time spent with their children", "they have more time to know their children, to see them grow, to enjoy the unique moments that the child offers", "involvement in carrying out unique activities", etc.

For the teachers, the benefits were perceived in relation to experimenting with new ways of teaching, with the time spent participating in online and family courses, individual study, research and design of online educational resources for working with children, exchanges of experience with other colleagues, re-evaluating personal values, development of digital competences, flexible work schedule, but also mental discomfort due to the sudden interruption of activity with children.

There have also been opinions that there are no such benefits of online learning, especially when we refer to preschool children, but also to parents and teachers. ("No benefit, just that they had to be isolated for such a long time. They tried to fill their time with what they could.").

In line with the difficulties reported, the educators participating in the study draw attention to the need to participate in IT courses in order to learn how to use different learning platforms, the need for access to educational resources appropriate to the preschool age level, as well as a need for the creation of platforms for communicating with professionals in the field of early education, as well as with parents and children. One has to mention the availability shown by educator-mentors to get involved in building a learning community at preschool level, but also educators who consider that online activity is not beneficial for children.

The data collected substantiated the amelioration measures taken at county level, for preschool education, in order to organise the activity as efficiently as possible, for the benefit of the children.

**b. The study on the efficiency of an intensive teaching training course on the ability to formulate and pursue the integrative operational objective** started in September 2020 when school inspectors for early education in the counties of the NW Region were approached to select educators to participate in the research, as follows:

- ✓ 10 educators with a job in rural areas: 1 novice, 3 final grade, 3 didactic grade II, 3 didactic grade I;

- ✓ 10 educators with a job in the urban areas: 1 novice, 3 final grade, 3 didactic grade II, 3 didactic grade I.

Contact data were received from 20 educators from Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Satu-Mare and Cluj counties. Until the beginning of the course, no contact data were received from Maramureș County, thus, for this county, no data had been collected. The educators were informed about the purpose and objectives of the research, the duration and the requirements formulated for data collection by e-mail correspondence. Participation in the research involved:

1. Completing some questionnaires (at the beginning of the training program, at the end of the training program);

2. Participation in the intensive training course "Planning of integrated activities in kindergarten - continuity and innovation", with a duration of 24 hours and the following activities:

- ✓ 5 webinars on the ZOOM platform, lasting 2 hours each, which, with the consent of the participants, will be registered;
- ✓ the design of two didactic projects for the planned integrated activities;
- ✓ carrying out two integrated activities, according to the planning of the respective week;
- ✓ formulating at least one integrative operational objective (Mager model) for each integrated activity;
- ✓ recording some reflections (according to the received reflection sheet);

3. At the end of the research, the training program provider will issue a certificate attesting the participation in the research and the completion of the course, but only if all the required materials are provided and the absences from the course will not exceed a maximum of 10% of the hours established.

All questionnaires were developed in Google Docs Forms, and all measures were undertaken for the participants' answers to be anonymous. Of the 80 educators whom the questionnaires were sent to, the number of those who completed each questionnaire was different (between 54 and 67 questionnaires). In what the correctness of the data collected is concerned, only 49 questionnaires from each were taken into consideration, those with common respondents. From the discussions with the educators participating in the study, two major causes were identified for which the number of those who completed the questionnaires and participated in the course was lower than the selected target group:

- ✓ some of the educators, although they initially enrolled, withdrew after the requirements were detailed,

- ✓ there were educators who reported that they had received only some of the questionnaires or that they failed to open some of the questionnaires received, the identified causes were either limitations of the application the questionnaires were sent to, or the type of e-mail address given as contact.

### **Research tools used:**

**1. Planning, in kindergarten, of the integrated activities directed by integrative operational objectives (pre and post experimental).**

**2. Standardized stress scale**

**3. Quality of life**

### **Sample structure**

The data collected were analysed through the statistical program SPSS version 20.0 generating descriptive analyses, tests: Anova, T-test, Chi square, correlational and regression analyses. The sample is composed of 49 teachers, 55% of educators work in urban areas, and 45% of them come from kindergartens in rural areas. Most of the educators (94%) have higher education (bachelor's or master's degrees) and only 6% of the respondents have completed a secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (high school or post-high school).

From the point of view of the county of origin, most educators (32.7%) are from Bistrița-Năsăud County, followed by educators from Cluj County (28.6%) and those from Bihor County (26.5%). The fewest answers came from educators in Satu-Mare County (12.2%).

Most educators (56%) have over 10 years experience in the educational field, 38% have a seniority between 1 year and 10 years and only 4% of them are in the first year of teaching. Depending on seniority, most educators, 62%, have obtained at least Grade II, 33% of them have obtained the Final Grade and only 6% are classified as novice.

**1. Planning, in kindergarten, of the integrated activities conducted by integrative operational objectives (pre and post experimental).**

The questionnaire, the planning in kindergarten of the integrated activities directed by the integrative operational objectives, is self-devised, being subjected to the validation analysis.

**a. Self-assessment scale** (Cronbach Alpha 0.948 > 0.7) 18 items in 4 constructs: Didactic planning, Formulation/ Development of objectives, Online activity, Complex teaching;

**b. Activity-planning scale** (Cronbach Alpha 0.956 > 0.7) 9 items in a single construct called Activity design;



**c. Scale of importance of training courses** (Cronbach Alpha  $0.980 > 0.7$ ) 18 items in 2 constructs: Design and formulation of objectives, online adaptation.

Regarding the design of the activity, in the pre-testing stage there was a higher average score (15.79) than in the post-testing stage (14.97), a sign that the objective of the training course did not focus on the improvement of this aspect.

Following the course, the average score of planning and formulating objectives increased from 52.83 to 57.75 bringing improvements on this activity, and most likely, one of the main objectives of the course was achieved.

The score of online adaptation increased from 15.32 to 17.24 so that significant improvements are identified in the online teaching process either by familiarizing educators with the online environment or by discovering new online tools and applications.

There is a statistically significant, positive, directly proportional and of medium intensity connection between the aspects of activity design, planning and formulation of objectives as well as the online adaptation between the two time periods, pre and post testing (Sig  $< 0.05$ , rho is between 0.3 and 0.7).

According to the results of the T test, there is a significant difference between the average scores on planning and formulation of objectives (Sig = 0.019  $< 0.05$ ) and online adaptation (Sig = 0.001  $< 0.05$ ), at a 95% confidence threshold. Due to the value of Sig = 0.445  $> 0.05$  no statistically significant changes are observed in the design of the activity, so there are no improvements from one stage to the other.

## **2. Standardized stress scale**

Validating the stress scale implies the inclusion in the analysis of the 30 items that characterize it. The coefficient of Cronbach Alpha (0.733) exceeds the accepted level of 0.7, meaning that the scale is valid and can still be used with all the items.

There are seven values that meet the condition Initial Eigenvalues  $> 1$ , thus, the items of the self-assessment scale will form 7 constructs as follows: S1-Tense situations (6,16), S2-Insecurity / fear (9,20,22,26,27), S3-Occupation / Responsibilities (2,4,8,11,30), S4- Overwork (14,15,23,25,28), S5- Dissatisfaction (3,12,19,24), S6- Fulfillment (1 , 7,10,13,17,21,29) and S7- Loneliness (5,18).

- ✓ The increase in the level of insecurity / fear leads to a decrease in the capacity of the educators to plan the didactic activity, to formulate / elaborate the objectives and to teach the activity as well as adapting it to the online environment.
- ✓ If the level of stress load on teachers increases, the difficulties of formulating / elaborating the objectives are accentuated.

- ✓ A higher level of teacher dissatisfaction leads to decreased focus on formulating/ developing objectives, difficulties in performing online activities and complex teaching, and also, on increasing the interest in designing the activity leading to continuous improvement and adaptation.
- ✓ The higher the level of fulfillment and satisfaction of the educators, the greater the interest for planning teaching activities, for formulating/ developing objectives, getting involved in online activities and improving the complex teaching process. On the other hand, the increase of the fulfillment level entails the decrease of the enthusiasm on the design of the activity, on the principle of overestimating one's own capacities, which leads to the accentuation of the superficiality with which the educators treat this activity.
- ✓ The lonelier or more introverted teachers are, the more difficulties they will encounter in formulating and developing objectives and develop problems in online activities with children.

More than half of the educators (31 / 63.3%) feel a moderate level of stress while 18/ 36.7% of the teachers have a low level of stress. Thus, in 82% of situations it is necessary to adopt a stress-prevention strategy. The higher the stress level, the more problematic the concentration becomes in terms of formulating and developing objectives ( $p = 0.025$ ).

### 3. Quality of life

The research tool regarding the evaluation of the quality of life of educators is divided into three subscales as follows: the well-being scale characterized by question no. 1 is attained through the analysis of the reliability of the scale.

**a. The well-being scale** (Cronbach Alpha  $0.937 > 0.7$ ) 5 items that will form a single construct.

**b. The manifestation scale** (Cronbach Alpha  $0.917 > 0.7$ ) 8 items that will form a single construct.

**c. The health scale** (Cronbach Alpha  $0.810 > 0.7$ ) 3 items that will form a single construct.

More than half of the educators (59%) admit that they felt active and strong, and in their lives, they experienced interesting things, just under half (49%) were happy and well-disposed in everyday life, fresh and rested in the early hours of the morning. A smaller number of teachers (45%) stated that they kept their calm and sense of relaxation for longer periods of time. In other words, most of the educators who answered the questionnaire had a state of well-being and a dose of optimism in daily life.

For most educators (over 90%) their health state allows moderate to high-level physical activities such as bathing or dressing (95.9%), walking short distances (93.9%) and very short distances (93.9%), lifting or transporting food or climbing a step (91.8%), but demanding physical activities (53.1%), walking more than 1 km (18.4%) and bending or kneeling (14.3%) are less accessible for some teachers. In other words, most educators can carry out their daily activities without too much extra effort.

Most educators are optimistic about recent events, but their well-being and health have been moderately affected due to the current situation caused by the pandemic.

The more the events are perceived as positive, the more people have a feeling of well-being. The better the health status, the more accentuated the well-being and the more the level of health changes, the way the teachers feel as a result of the events they are subjected to grows in optimism. The better the mood, the more open and optimistic the educators feel after events and the raised level of health has as their main impact the reduction in stress levels.

Increasing by one unit the scale of reactions following an event leads to an increase in the scale of well-being. A high level of stress has a negative impact on well-being and worsens as it increases. The higher the level of health, the better and more optimistic the educators feel and have a better mood. If educators perceive events in a positive and optimistic way, the level of health will improve considerably. Stress has a negative impact on health, and as it increases, it worsens. If educators have a relaxed and optimistic attitude regarding how they relate to the events in their lives, the level of stress decreases in proportion to their perception.

Improving well-being has a positive impact on online activity. Thus, if the educators are in a good and pleasant mood, they can transmit the desired information more easily, even if the teaching is done online. The way in which educators feel about events influences the formulation / elaboration of objectives and online activity, so the negative perception of an event in the daily life of teachers leads to difficulties in formulating and developing objectives and less attention in terms of performing the online activity.

The mood of teachers has a positive impact in the conduct of online teaching-learning. If, after certain more recent events, they develop a more positive attitude, then the formulation and elaboration of the objectives has been done with more ease. If the way they feel after the events is positive, then the online activity only has something to gain.

**The analysis of the didactic designs**, elaborated after completing the intensive training course, allowed for **examples/ details regarding the impact of i.o.o** on the selection and integration of instructive-educational contents belonging to different experiential fields,

establishing didactic strategies and evaluation strategies from a practical-applicative perspective.

A number of 126 didactic designs were received from the educators participating in the study, i.e., from 63 educators, but, in order for the research data to relate to the same respondents, only the designs received from 49 of them were analysed (98 projects), i.e. from the educators who solved all the work tasks proposed through the study. Seeing that the analysis of the data in the entire research referred to the number of subjects ( $N = 49$ ), not to the number of answers (98 projects), we will do the same in this case.

The results of the analysis of the didactic designs are detailed below and can also be found in the annexes:

- ✓ the structure of the didactic project is in accordance with the specifications from the official documents in a percentage of 91.83%;
- ✓ in formulating the operational objectives capitalizing on Mager's Model, all three conditions are present in 28.57% of cases, only two of the conditions in 63.3% of cases, and 6.15% specified only one condition;
- ✓ in formulating the operational objectives from the perspective of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy, the objectives aimed at reproducing knowledge are present in 24.48% of cases, understanding and application in 48.97% of cases, analysis in 14.28% of cases and evaluation in 10.20% of cases;
- ✓ in formulating the integrative operational objective 26.53% of the educators formulated at least one correct i.o.o. **in each didactic project submitted**, 42.85% of them had correctly formulated an i.o.o. **in at least one of the projects**, and in 30.61% of cases it **was either not formulated correctly** (some were formulated using the conjunction “and” linking two distinct operational objectives) or, in fact, it was an operational objective that was formulated in which the Mager model was correctly applied and confused with an i.o.o.;
- ✓ there are integrative operational objectives formulated in a very complicated manner, the topic of the sentence or expression being sometimes cumbersome or even strange;
- ✓ regarding the didactic methods used, in 14.28% of cases the traditional ones predominated, in 18.36% of the cases the modern ones predominated, and in 67.34% of the cases the proportion was relatively balanced;
- ✓ the teaching resources created by educators were mentioned mainly in 73.46% of cases, those purchased were mentioned mainly in 26.53% of cases, and 12.24% mentioned teaching resources created with the help of children;

- ✓ 63.26% of the respondents design activities predominantly for teams or small groups, in 22.44% of the cases the activities are predominantly frontal, 16.32% predominate the independent activities; in 85.71% of cases all three forms of organisation are present;
- ✓ the selection of learning contents was in accordance with the particularities of the group in 91.83% of cases, for the rest of the cases the group or the age level of the children was not specified in the project, the contents being presented in an attractive way, with alternating play and movement elements, with static moments in 79.59% of cases;
- ✓ in a few cases some forms of evaluation are mentioned (16.32%), in 34.69% of cases some evaluation tools are contained in the teaching resources (worksheets, posters), and in 53.06% of cases the activity is evaluated or ends by analysing the products of the activity (usually the gallery tour), relating to the beauty of the works made (“which work is more beautiful”), not to the operational objectives formulated, respectively by offering material rewards.
- ✓ the activity scenario designed in more detail and presented in a unitary manner in 65.30% of cases (32 educators) allowed for a better understanding of the projected didactic approach, the global approach was more obvious as the boundaries between categories of activities and the contents of different disciplines have disappeared. Thus, optimal learning situations were created, structured from a logical, psychological and pedagogical point of view, determining more complex learning experiences;
- ✓ there are activity scenarios (22.44%) that detail (repeat) the stages of the activity as they are specified in the project for monodisciplinary activities, which entitles us to appreciate that there are educators who officially declare that they carry out integrated activities, but in practice, they are dependent on the design and development of activities by disciplines.
- ✓ there are brief scenarios for the one-day integrated activities followed by the tabular detailing of each activity category, according to the model of monodisciplinary activities (8.16%).
- ✓ the language used indicates a high degree of mastery of specialised terminology, in all projects, no spelling mistakes or serious errors of expression were noticed.

**The analysis of the reflection sheets** highlights the opinions of the educators participating in the study on the importance of the training course for their good preparation in applying the curricular changes brought on by the 2019 Curriculum for early education, but also the impact of the integrative operational objective on the selection and integration of instructive-

educational contents belonging to experiential domains/ different disciplines, establishing teaching strategies and establishing evaluation strategies.

The reflection sheets help educators, after completing the intensive training course, during the elaboration of the didactic projects and after carrying out integrated activities for which they have formulated integrative operational objectives, to carry out a self-analysis and, based on the conclusions drawn, to identify positive aspects. and those to be improved in order to make the best decisions regarding the design and development of the activity with preschoolers.

A number of 67 reflection sheets were completed by the educators participating in the study, but, in order for the research data to relate to the same respondents, only the worksheets received from 49 of them were analysed, i.e. from the educators who solved all work tasks proposed through the study.

Regarding the aspects they reflected on, we can appreciate that:

- ✓ **THEY KNEW** about the changes brought on by the 2019 Curriculum for early education, some of the educators had heard about the integrative operational objective, they wanted to participate in the research to benefit from new information, to update their knowledge in the domain;
- ✓ **THEY LEARNED**, during the course, about the integrative operational objective, how to integrate the operational objectives, that i.o.o. overlaps exactly on the integrated activities and renders more concretely the way of integration, that it is formulated relatively easily by observing the known principles, through i.o.o. it is possible to capitalize on the integration of learning activities/ sequences much easier, because if we have an integrated activity there can be objectives that suit it, i.e. the integrative operational objectives, which they seem to be very suggestive, allow for the proper understanding of what to choose to integrate and how to weave the entire didactic activity, etc.
- ✓ **THEY ARE WILLING TO APPLY** new knowledge and this concept, to introduce integrative operational objectives in the design of integrated activities, to formulate for each activity carried out with the children an integrative operational objective, to use the knowledge acquired in the course in designing activities, etc., but there are educators who say that they will stick to the way they have worked successfully over the years.
- ✓ **THEY WILL APPLY** the integrative operational objectives, but also other information they consider useful such as: Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, Mager's Model, Curriculum

for early education, RFIDTC, as many teaching strategies as possible, so that the activities be as attractive as possible for the children etc.

- ✓ **THEY AIM TO CONTINUE** to practise, by their own effort, the new knowledge, studying the information received from the course, to practise the formulation of i.o.o. and designing integrated activities that integrate experiential fields that they did not capitalize enough on, to initiate discussions/ debates with colleagues, to disseminate information in the educational unit etc.

**The educators' options are located on a continuum from** "I will apply i.o.o. weekly, in integrated activities, at least twice a week", to "I will apply step by step", to "I will apply according to the curriculum.", respectively "I will continue to apply what I knew from high school."

**Most educators are very interested in applying the new concept** in the teaching activities carried out with children in kindergarten. There is a desire of some of the educators to disseminate the information from the course among their colleagues, to initiate discussions and debates on this topic.

- ✓ **THE MEANS OF APPLICATION** identified by the educators are, in general, similar, with a focus on the global development of the children, the integration of the contents, the use of i.o.o. in the design of integrated activities, the emphasis on critical thinking and positive feedback etc.
- ✓ **IT WILL BE EASY** for them to design and carry out integrated activities, to formulate integrative operational objectives, to design integrated activities using integrative operational objectives, to capture children's attention through active-participatory methods in which they have a very important role, to think about the integrated activity and use the integrative operational objectives, if necessary etc.
- ✓ **IT WILL BE HARD** to carry out integrated activities daily; until this goal will become automatic, just like the operational goals; to organise and carry out the activity according to the integrative objective, the tendency being to do things as before; some of the educators appreciate that it has always been more difficult for them to design the integrated activities, because in the pedagogical high school they learned to design the activities by disciplines, and in the faculty there was no emphasis on the integrated activities etc.
- ✓ **The educators PROPOSE**  
- for the micro-educational level (group activity) to formulate integrative operational objectives, as an exercise, in the design of teaching activities; to conduct workshops for the

dissemination of information about the integrative operational objective; to structure the designed contents, appreciating that this ensures the success of the integrated teaching of the contents in a unitary vision, aiming at certain outcomes; to elaborate the “Educator's Manual”, to discuss within the school Curriculum Commission or in the methodical meetings about the existence, in the phase of experimental research, of the notion of integrative operational objective etc.

- for the macro-educational level (at county, national level) to implement the integrative operational objectives at county, national level, in the beginning these proposals can be made within the methodological county meetings; to ensure that the integrative operational objective is accepted as an alternative in formulating the objectives of an integrated activity; to introduce this integrative operational objective, due to its role, i.e. it would provide real support to teachers in preschool education, better understanding the design and development of integrated teaching activities etc.

Other recorded aspects reveal the favorable opinions of the educators participating in the study, both in terms of the usefulness of the integrative operational objective in the design of integrated activities, and the benefits felt by completing the intensive training course. Here are some of the opinions expressed by educators:

"Personally, it seems an innovative idea, an idea that makes our work easier, helps us a lot in evaluation, understanding those important aspects that we follow each day and also helps us to easily identify the teaching strategies that we could use. It is certain that this I.O.O. helps, it does not confuse. "

"I believe that integrated activities leave more freedom of expression, because the child is offered a wide range of opportunities to practise active learning. Participating in this course brought me many benefits, because thanks to it I have updated important knowledge about the operationalization of objectives, such as the operationalization procedure specific to Robert Mager, I formulated objectives for various activities specific to experiential fields, making a review of the verbs specific to Bloom's Taxonomy”.

It is noted that the educators who completed the proposals section appreciate the usefulness of formulating and pursuing the integrative operational objective for integrated activities and the need to implement it in the design of integrated activities at preschool level.

### **Conclusions**

The conclusions **of the study regarding the online activity**, in which teacher-mentors from Sălaj County participated, bring to attention the lack of thorough preparation of this moment, the improvised manner in which the teaching-learning-evaluation took place during



the investigated period, the lack of specific educational resources, the abilities of the educators to adapt the educational approaches for online teaching, children who did not benefit from formal educational interventions during the mentioned period and the need to participate in professional training courses.

**The participation in the intensive teaching training course** was perceived as beneficial for educators in the NW Region, most understood and formulated correctly the integrative operational objective for integrated activities. After graduating from the intensive training course, most educators appreciate that the integrative operational objective should be formulated for each integrated activity, in their opinion it facilitates the curricular design and curricular integration. The effects of the pandemic have been felt negatively by many educators, isolation from friends and accumulated mental fatigue, physical fatigue and more and more frequent sleep problems are most often mentioned. The stress generated by curricular changes is much diminished, in some cases not at all felt, compared to that generated by the risk of COVID-19 disease.

**Chapter VI** presents the conclusions of the research, the general conclusions, the limits of the research as well as the directions for future research, as follows:

**Research conclusions:**

Following the application of the T test it is observed that the participation in the teacher training course does not bring an improvement in the case of teaching design (average scale decreases from 15.79 to 14.97), but brings an improvement in the planning and formulation of objectives (average scale increases from 52.8367 to 57.7551) and in the adaptation to the online environment.

Pearson's coefficient CONFIRMS that, in the integrated activities performed in kindergarten, the formulation and pursuit of the integrative operational objective (i.o.o.) facilitates the curricular design and curricular integration, respectively: the selection and integration of instructive-educational contents belonging to different experiential fields, the establishment of teaching strategies and INVALIDATES the formation of evaluation strategies.

**HYPOTHESIS 1 IS PARTIALLY CONFIRMED!**

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data collected from the investigations carried out shows that:

- ✓ the participation of educators in intensive teaching training courses **provides them with the curricular knowledge so as to apply the novelties brought on by the 2019 Curriculum for Early Education;**

- ✓ **the stress level** generated by the pandemic and the current uncertain situation is well above the level of stress generated by the changes in the 2019 Curriculum for Early Education;
- ✓ the health condition declared by the educators is good and very good, the participation in intensive training courses does not have a significant contribution on it.

**HYPOTHESIS 2 IS PARTIALLY CONFIRMED!**

**General conclusions:**

- ✓ The long-term studies (9 years) carried out in Sălaj County in which the 500 educators were involved, together with the almost 70 educators from the NW Region, demonstrate that the educators have a **favorable disposition towards the formulation and pursuit of the integrative operational objectives for integrated activities**.
- ✓ Most educators appreciate that, for the design and development of integrated activities, i.o.o. **bring important clarifications, support the integration of content, the selection of teaching-learning strategies, the design of teaching tasks and, in many cases, those of assessment**;
- ✓ **Intensive professional training courses prove to be very useful for the educators to reach curricular competency** in order to apply the curricular changes and are also appreciated in terms of clarifications on some aspects of design and development of activities in kindergarten;
- ✓ The fact that after participating in an intensive training course most educators who had little (or no) information about this concept can formulate the integrative operational objective, in the teaching activities developed for each or most of the integrated activities, **shows its usefulness and the efficiency of these courses**;
- ✓ In pandemic conditions, **curricular changes** are perceived by educators as **less threatening**, and the **professional stress felt by curricular changes is greatly diminished**, in some cases not felt at all, **compared to the risk of illness** (for close relatives or of one's own person).

**Research limits:**

- ✓ reduced possibilities to keep the structure of the sample of selected respondents;
- ✓ the sample size from the NW Region (49 subjects) does not allow us to extrapolate the results on the entire population of this region, but it gives us a starting point for future research;
- ✓ the different working scenarios of the educational institutions during the research (red, yellow, green) influenced the level of understanding, at a practical-applicative level, of

the usefulness and efficiency of formulating the integrative operational objective for the activities carried out in kindergarten;

- ✓ difficulties in providing tutoring for educators from other counties interested in formulating and following i.o.o. in the teaching activity;
- ✓ the lack, at the level of the education system, of a structure that promotes and makes available, to those interested, the information regarding the innovations and the results of some specialized research studies.
- ✓ major risks in the field of public health (COVID-19 pandemic), discussed in the research, influence the way other aspects of private or professional life are perceived and can distort the results.

#### **Future research directions:**

- ✓ **informing the Ministry of Education and popularising in the academic environment** the results obtained from the research;
- ✓ **the extension at national level of the investigations** regarding the usefulness of the formulation and pursuit of the integrative operational objectives in the didactic design at the level of preschool education;
- ✓ studying the applicability of the formulation and pursuit of the integrative operational objective for the design and development of lessons at primary, secondary and / or high school level.

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