

Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology

PhD Thesis Statements

**International kindergartens' organizational culture and
intercultural teacher community**

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The subject, the objectives and the structure of the thesis

Subject definition

The thesis explores the organizational culture of six international kindergartens in Hungary with a special focus on the challenges and benefits of the group processes of the culturally diverse teacher community. In this context, the term 'international' was used for those institutions where a multicultural teacher community educates heterogeneous children groups with children from all over the world. The research is built around two interrelated groups of questions:

- (1) What kind of organizational culture can be identified in these schools? What are the values that shape the culture? How collaborative is the teacher community? What kind of leadership strategies can be observed?
- (2) What kind of attitude do they possess towards interculturalism? Do they provide intercultural education or is it only a slogan to decorate the website or is it a goal to reach in the future?

Objectives of the research

The research has been aroused both by the aim of exploration and the intention of utility along with the definite goal of filling a research gap. The discussions during the data collection did set in motion thinking processes in the kindergartens that can inspire and guide organizational development. The picture about these institutions provides information on a segment of the educational palette that has been uncovered by the experts, so far. The analysis of the inner operation of private kindergartens can be used in the organizational development of kindergartens. The groundbreaking analysis of the organizational culture of kindergartens could be followed by explorations in similar topics. The collected data about the operation of intercultural teacher communities – which is a novelty in Hungary and in kindergarten context also worldwide –, contribute to the development of teacher training. The teachers in the future – regardless of the type of institutions – will need to face more and more intercultural challenges. The systematic training and the targeted preparation for these challenges will not only increase their self-efficacy and effectivity but will result in more harmonious organizational climate and a higher level of education.

The structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of four larger parts. The first, built on literature analysis, deals with the theoretical background. It is followed by a review of the research process. The third part contains the elaborated analysis of six cases and the fourth part gives an overall analysis of the institutions and the teachers working in them.

The theoretical background part discusses the four most relevant scientific areas related to the thesis. It opens by an overview of the most significant issues of early childhood education in Hungary and worldwide, including the national legislation of Hungary – in relation to the education of foreign children. It briefly explains the differences between the Hungarian and the British educational system, with a glimpse into the background of certain specialties of the pedagogical programs that aim to meet the requirements of the families planning to continue their studies in international schools. The second part discusses transmigration because transmigrant families are the primary target group of the international kindergartens and their pedagogical programs are developed to meet their demands. The values of transmigrant children and teachers might strongly influence the organizational culture of these schools. The next part is devoted to the topic of organizational culture: defines the concept, presents its elements, models, and most significant issues with greater emphasis on the element of values and beliefs. The theory of national characteristics and cultural dimensions are also discussed here to understand how it might influence the group dynamics and the organizational culture of intercultural kindergartens. The fourth scientific area is intercultural education. The overview of its various interpretations, types, and features helps to comprehend the ways how the attitude towards diversity can shape the organizational culture.

The second chapter reveals the details of the research process and the applied methods. It discusses the characteristics of its case-study design and the methods used during the mixed-method research: the process of the data collection, the difficulties, and the limitations.

The six cases are presented via the same train of thought and along with the research questions. After the presentation of the individual cases, the data analysis explores the similarities and differences among the institutions. Even though it avoids generalization, some statements can be formulated regarding the totality of the teachers, for example regarding their cultural intelligence.

The research

The research questions

1. What kind of organizational culture can be detected in these international kindergartens according to the typology of Gruenert and Valentine (2006)?
2. What kind of mission do these institutions declare?
 - 2.a What are the most important features of the pedagogical program?
 - 2.b Is there coherence between the values of the teachers and the mission of the school?
3. What are the characteristics of the organizational structure and the day-to-day operation of these institutions?
 - 3.a What is the structure of the organization?
 - 3.b What type of communicational channels do they use?
 - 3.c How do they arrange their partnership with the parents?
 - 3.d What are the decision-making processes?
4. How collaborative is the teacher community?
5. What are the features of the leadership strategy?
6. Do teachers experience professional learning in the workplace?
7. What kind of intercultural attitude can be detected in the 'values and beliefs' element of the organizational culture? Do these teachers notice benefits or challenges in the multicultural group processes?
8. What characterizes the cultural intelligence of the teachers working in these multicultural institutions?

The research process

A holistic case study design with multiple cases was conducted with mixed methods research (Babbie, 1996; Falus, 2000; Golnhofer, 2001; Szokolszky, 2004; Dörnyei, 2007; Yin, 2011, 2014). The quantitative and qualitative research methods were built on and complemented each other (see Figure 1), although the research primarily held qualitative orientation.

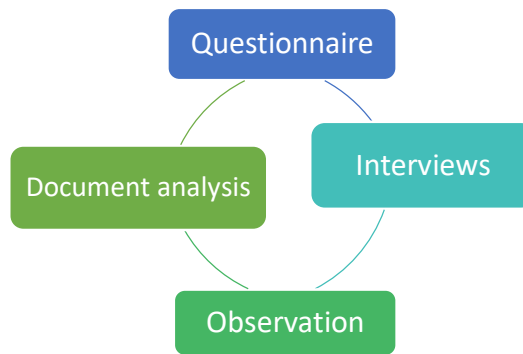


Figure 1.: The research methods

As a consequence of the stronger emphasis of the qualitative approach and methods *qualitative dominant mixed method* research (Dörnyei, 2007; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner; 2007 Sántha, 2015) was used with *explanatory sequential design* (Creswell, 2012). The sequence of the methods was the following: the questionnaire was developed based on a literature review and was finalized following a test filling by a pilot group of eight kindergarten teachers. Then the teachers of the sample were asked to fill the questionnaire, which was followed by a data analyzing phase. Based on the results, both individual and group semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding. The non-participant observations manifested during the visits to the kindergartens. By gathering data on different occasions and via different method both *between-methods and within-methods triangulation* were realized. In addition to the *triangulation of the data sources*, the *time dimension* and the *personal dimension* of triangulation were also addressed (Sántha, 2015, p. 101).

The sample

With convenience sampling based on accessibility, the research process was conducted in six kindergartens that resulted in six case-analysis. The number of the participants of the group interviews varied in each the kindergartens (2-9 persons) (see Table 1)

Table 1.: The number of participants of the research per institutions

Data source	Institution					
	'Little England'	'Sunshine'	'Pagoda'	'Wind harp'	'Rainbow petal'	'Birdnest'
Number of teachers	30 + 4 students	14	10	13	15	6

Document analysis	Website, Pedagogical program	Website, Pedagogical program	Website, Pedagogical program	Website, Pedagogical program	Website, Pedagogical program	Website, Pedagogical program
Survey	33	14	9	9	15	5
Individual interview	3	-	-	1	1	1
Group interview	-	(1): 2 prs (2): 9 prs	2 prs	3 prs	7 prs	2 prs
Observation	3 visits	3 visits	3 visits	3 visits	3 visits	2 visits

The research methods

The method of *document analysis* was used in the first phase of the research to define the sample and also during the data collection to explore the documentation of the kindergartens (website, Pedagogical program).

The *questionnaire* consisted of closed questions of numeric rating scale and also open-ended questions. After the introduction part, the main part of 85 items was placed, that was followed by a short demographical section of seven items. The majority of the items of the main part were grouped based on the school culture survey of Gruenert and Valentine (1998). The items were categorized into seven subscales (see Table 2). The seventh group containing the short version of Ang and Van Dyne's (2007) Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) was analyzed only on the whole sample.

Table 2: Subscales of the questionnaire

Subscale	Number of items
1. Unity of purpose	9
2. Structure, hierarchy, flexibility	12
3. The teacher community	14
4. The leader(s)	11
5. Professional development	9
6. Intercultural elements – organizational and individual level	21
7. Intercultural intelligence	9

The questions of the *semi-structured interviews* were developed after the data analysis of the survey to clarify and interpret the data collected via the questionnaire. The *non-participant*

observation primarily focused on gaining knowledge about the following specificities of the institutions: the environment of the kindergarten, the characteristics of the building, the common spaces, the decoration of the walls and the setting, the accessibility of the management, the signs and symbols.

The kindergartens were given a name based on one of their characteristics in the case studies. The case studies are built up of the analyzed data collected through the four data sources and follow the same pattern (see Table 3).

Table 3: The structure of the case study

1. The research process
2. The main features and services of the kindergartens
3. The pedagogical program
4. Unity of purpose
5. Structure, hierarchy, flexibility
6. The teacher community
7. The leader(s)
8. Professional development
9. Intercultural elements: organizational and individual level
10. Summary

The results

Demographic characteristics

The teachers working in the sample kindergartens are generally from younger age groups, in accordance with earlier research on private kindergartens (Tomasz, 2009). 62% of the teachers are under 30 years of age and there is only one institution out of the six with a teacher who is older than 50. Arguments of Tomasz (2009) proved to be true also on our sample: to meet the requirements of these workplaces, flexibility, openness, and language knowledge are needed, which is a more frequent characteristic of the younger generation.

59% of the respondents who filled in the demographical items, do not possess the qualification of working with children in the early years – despite the requirements of their position. Many answers mentioned English as a foreign language teacher certificate (14%), others simply mentioned many years of experience of working with children. 23% of the respondents who filled in the qualification item didn't have any kind of teaching qualification.

The research results confirm the high fluctuation of the teachers working in international educational institutions (Hardman, 2001; Odland, Ruzicka, 2009; Mancuso, Roberts, White, 2010) (Figure 2).

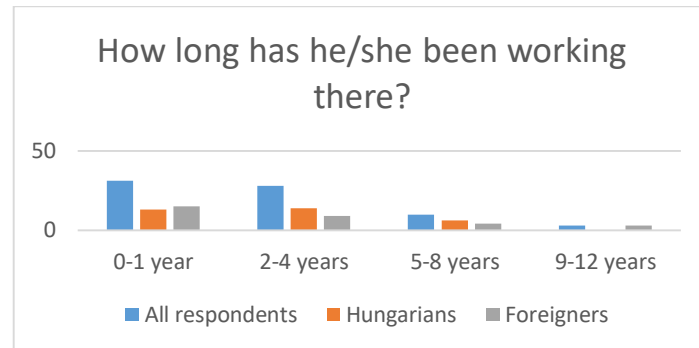


Figure 2.: The number of years has been spent at the current workplace

43% of the respondents who filled in the item, was spending the first year in the kindergarten, and 39% had been working there between two and four years. Only 4% of them had been an employee at the same place for more than nine years (and less than 12). Looking at the results we need to be aware of the young age of the institutions (they had been opened 6-12 years before), and also the fact that the growing number of children attending the schools had also been an urge to increase also the teacher community.

50% of the respondents who revealed their nationality, was Hungarian. The second biggest groups with the same nationality came from the USA (12%) and GB (12%), which is easy to understand in the context of English language acquisition. Other respondents came from different parts of the world in the year of the data collection; Iran, the Philippines, Greece, and Canada were countries from where more than one teacher arrived.

What kind of organizational culture can be detected in these international kindergartens according to the typology of Gruenert and Valentine (2006)?

After exploring the elements of the organizational culture (Schein, 1985; Serfözö, 2005; Hofstede, 2008; Bakacsi, 2010; Alvesson, 2011) using the categories of the model of Gruenert and Valentine (2006) out of the six kindergartens four *collaborative* culture, one *comfortable* and one *fragmented* culture were detected. The results in accord with the literature proved the determinative role of the leader(s) in shaping the culture (Schein, 1985, Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1993; Barkdoll, 2006; Karácsonyi, 2006; Driskill and Brenton, 2011; Heidrich, 2013) In the *collaborative cultures* teachers who trust each other work in collaboration under

supportive leadership and the cooperation is partly also top-down inspired by the management. The teachers know and understand the mission of the school that is in harmony with the individual values, but there are different methods of maintaining effective collaboration.

In the *comfortable culture*, the leader divides his working hours between two buildings and gives absolute autonomy to the teachers – that is welcomed by them and they enjoy the freedom of choosing methods and experimenting. The innovations affecting the whole organization are hindered though, by the possibility of the new ideas set back autonomy. The good relationship and collegiality is a priority over the possible intentions of organization development.

In the *fragmented culture*, the organization has been growing too fast for the organizational development to keep up with it. The leader is not easily accessible during working hours, the groups are located in different buildings, there is no overall leading strategy and unity of mission – that results in splits in the teacher community.

What kind of mission do these institutions declare?

What are the most important features of the pedagogical program?

The kindergartens developed their pedagogical program following the National Core Program (ONOAP, 2012) along with the national legislation, including local characteristics to a different extent. Apart from two exceptions, the Pedagogical Program is rather just an official document that does not reflect the everyday practice. The multicultural community and the celebration of cultural diversity is mentioned in the programs, but the national legislation does not give ground to indicate the English language as the language of instruction. To meet the demands of transmigrant families (Glick Schiller, Bash and Szanton Blanc, 1992; 1995; Bash, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc, 1994; Portes, Guarzino and Landolt, 1999; Mügge, 2016; Rizvi, 2011) – education in one of the world languages, to develop competencies necessary to perform well in international space –, is a central element of the everyday practice (Kitzinger, 2015; Kovács, 2017; Kovács, I. Czachesz, Kovács, J. and Vámos, 2017; Barrs and Martin, 2008; Gardner-McTaggart, 2018).

Is there coherence between the values of the teachers and the mission of the school?

In these institutions, the majority of the respondents (68%) understand the mission and the goals of the school, which provides clear guidance to the teachers (72%). The majority of the respondents (76%) claim that the school mission reflects the values and beliefs of the teachers.

According to the reflections of the teachers, the kindergartens aim to provide a warm, friendly, home-like environment to develop children's skills holistically – including English language acquisition. Learning tolerance and acceptance is also an important aspect of these multicultural environments. Data analysis revealed the trend, that in those organizations where the mission and aims of the school reflected the values of the teachers, there the community worked in collaboration and with enthusiasm.

What are the characteristics of the organizational structure and the day-to-day operation in these institutions?

Even though the institutions at the time of the research varied in size, in the number of the teaching staff and also were in a different stage of their organizational development – still they show features in common regarding their structure. The owner leads and operates the kindergarten regardless of who is administered as the leader in the official documentation. In the bigger organizations, an intention can be detected to build up a system of subleaders – but there seems to be only one school where this works effectively.

According to the data, communicational channels work effectively in those schools, where the forms of communication are adjusted to the size of the institution. Teachers are the most satisfied with the information sharing in those organizations where they have personal, everyday relationship with the easily accessible leader. Regular weekly or monthly meetings are demanded from both sides, and where there is no system set up for them, communication sharing seemed to be stalled.

The consequences of the marketization of kindergartens can be seen in the answers: the parents as paying clients play important role in the everyday life of the schools (Codrington, 2004; Török, 2005; MacDonald, 2006; Naumann, 2011). In those organizations where the leader considers the pedagogical mission of the school and the professional arguments of the teachers as a priority over the contradictory parental wishes, the teachers feel secure „under the protective net of the shared values”. However, teachers showed greater insecurity in solving conflicts in those organizations, where the business approach and the goal of satisfying parents have priority over the professional values.

The decision-making processes varied to some extent in the kindergartens, and only half of the respondents (49%) claimed to be asked for her/his opinion before top-down decisions. The schools generally demonstrate an innovative approach, and the majority of teachers feels their new ideas to be welcomed in the organization – but the innovations stay on group level and do

not influence the whole institution. The majority of the respondents feel that they can positively contribute to the operation of the school.

How collaborative is the teacher community?

In the kindergartens, the majority of the teachers feels that the teachers work well together (77%), as a team (80%) and they value each other’s ideas and opinion (80%). Most of the teachers feel that they trust each other (71%), they ask help from their colleagues (84%) and work cooperatively in groups (86%). Even though the data applied to the individual organizations and therefore it cannot be generalized – the high percentages indicate collaborative communities.

Differences could be detected in the degree of collaboration between the Hungarian and the foreigner respondents’ answers: more Hungarians feel the community very collaborative (88% - 81%) and helpful (82% - 74%) than foreigners do. Higher differences could be seen regarding the extent of how much colleagues value new ideas and innovations: 91% of Hungarian teachers feel that their ideas are valued by the community while only 73% of the foreigner claims to feel the same.

Five categories could be developed of the answers on barriers of collaboration: (1) personality clashes, (2) cultural differences, (3) communicational difficulties, (4) different professional beliefs, (5) other. Most answers mentioned personality clash as the cause of conflicts: they have no time to get to know each other, their interest/intentions might be clashing and they would need more flexibility and/or more determination to solve the conflicts. The category of different professional beliefs proved to be the second most important barrier by mentioning many aspects of professional work (see 4. table).

4. table: The barriers to collaboration in the category of professional beliefs

Aspects of professional work
qualification
pedagogical methods
teaching style
understanding of praise
discipline
professional experiences
educational beliefs
professional expectations
work ethics

The interviews revealed that the teachers did notice the difficulties caused by differences in the cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980; Sagiv and Schwartz, 2007; Bakacsi, 2010). They consider them as part of life in the school and do not try to find strategies to solve them.

What are the features of the leadership strategy?

Two-third of the respondents (67%) said that the management was highly respected and felt that leaders 'practiced what they preached' (68%). In accordance with the research of Serfőző (2005), one of the most problematic aspects is professional feedback – less than half of the teachers claims to be satisfied with it and one-third of them finds it insufficient.

Five categories were developed of the answers asking about problems related to leadership: (1) communicational problems, (2) lack of trust, (3) organization, (4) problematic professional guidelines, (5) business-orientation. Most of the answers mentioned problems with the professional guidelines and they mainly expected more assessment and feedback on their work, and also more consistency and help. They expect more support from the leaders regarding communication with parents: help in dealing with complaints, advice for parent meetings, and more information about the families. Teachers would require more effective communication and problem-solving, and also involvement in decision-making. The data confirmed the literature: the extension of the institution, on the one hand, gives an opportunity to provide more services and better work conditions, but, on the other hand, it might have a negative influence on the quality and reduces the frequency of the personal contact between leaders and teachers and also leaders and parents (Maxwell, Aggleton, 2016, p. 55).

Do teachers experience professional learning in the workplace?

The majority of respondents (69%) claimed that professional development was valued in the community, but half of the teachers did not notice being rewarded for experimenting with new ideas and methods. This number was even less in the case of the foreign teachers (39%) which could be the result of the differences from their Hungarian colleagues regarding their opportunities for innovation.

The answers about professional workplace learning were grouped into three categories: (1) professional development, (2) professional work, (3) intercultural knowledge. In the personal development category answers mentioned: patience, communication, flexibility, openness, self-confidence, creativity. The second category included leadership skills, collaboration,

communication with parents or planning – and specific pedagogical methods were also mentioned, like methods of discipline or teaching English as a foreign language. Intercultural issues consisted of knowledge and skills to overcome language barriers and also the collaboration with colleagues, children and parents coming from a different culture.

What kind of intercultural attitude can be detected in the 'values and beliefs' element of the organizational culture? Do these teachers notice benefits or challenges in the multicultural group processes?

Colleagues coming from another country are welcomed in the kindergartens (95%), different cultures are celebrated in the community (91%), and multiculturalism contributes to the everyday work (87%). The majority of the respondents think that intercultural competence (Ang and Van Dyne, 2007, 2008; Thomas and Inkson, 2009) can be easily developed during collaborative work, and colleagues can learn it from each other. This is in accordance with the fact that leaders also feel unnecessary to provide trainings on the topic of intercultural education (Banks, 1993; Nieto, 1994; Czachesz, 2007; Castagno, 2009; Schoorman and Bogots, 2010; Casinader, 2015, 2016). The majority of respondents (73%) think that they have the knowledge to deal with the consequences of cultural differences.

Considering the organizations' attitude towards diversity, they generally look at staff as a heterogeneous community but they split them into two groups: Hungarians and foreigners – that reflects earlier research in the topic (Garton, 2000; Hardman; 2001; Bailey, 2015). Their approach celebrates openness and equality, but the establishment of the organization frequently pushes foreign teachers' ideas aside as a consequence of the unequal involvement in decision-making (Heindrich, 2001).

Teachers do not notice the intercultural aspect among the causes of difficulties or challenges, and intercultural issues are mainly considered as their positive attitude towards interactions with different cultures. Answers in the questionnaire mentioned the communicational difficulties with the parents: mainly language barriers and individual expectations. Different parenting styles were also brought up – sometimes in a judicious way –, as something the teachers need to teach to the parents from different cultures. Prejudices of parents were also an issue both in the survey and during the interviews.

The data showed a strong influence of the primary and secondary value embedding mechanisms of leaders (Schneider, Ehrhart and Macey, 2013) on shaping the style and methods of intercultural interactions in the organization. The attitude towards other cultures is

determined by these mechanisms mainly because but also because it is within their competency to set up the parameters of the decision making processes, the channels and styles of communication. Teachers identified as intercultural challenges the different views on methods of discipline (Manik, Maharaj és Sookrajh, 2006), on gender roles and the goals and priorities of education.

What characterizes the cultural intelligence of the teachers working in these multicultural institutions?

The empirical research reinforced the picture traced by the literature, that in the communities of the international educational institutions intercultural competency is exceptionally valued, even though they have little knowledge of neither its actual meaning nor of the possibilities of teachers' and leaders' professional development in relation with it (Gay, 2001; Swindler Boutte, Lopez-Robertson and Powers-Costello, 2011; Stier, Tryggvason, Sandström and Sandberg, 2012; Savva, 2013).

The data analysis revealed that the educators considered themselves performing better at the items incorporating motivational and metacognitive elements. That shows a higher level of conscious cultural awareness during cross-cultural interactions and reflects better capability to direct attention and energy toward learning about and functioning in situations characterized by cultural differences. They claimed the lowest performance at the behavioral and cognitive elements, that reflects a weaker capability to exhibit appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures and shows less knowledge of norms, practices, and conventions in different cultures (Ang és Van Dyne, 2008).

Conclusion

The case-study fulfilled an in-depth and extensive investigation of six kindergartens. It explored the elements and defined the types of organizational culture and also examined the teacher community's beliefs related to interculturalism. Identified the influencing factors in shaping the values of the culture in a diverse environment. Besides presenting the results gave insight into the limits of the results and the possibilities to further extend the research. In addition to the results presented in the previous chapters the most important novel results are listed below:

1. The topic of the thesis highlights the importance of the extended and thorough research on the specificities and the practice of the Hungarian kindergarten education.
2. The extension of the research on school culture to kindergarten context is a novelty in Hungary.
3. The research on the organizational culture of kindergartens in Hungary can be considered as new findings.
4. The scientific exploration of the features of private kindergartens in Hungary – where the language of instruction is English – can be considered as new findings.
5. It is a novelty, that empirical data were collected and analyzed on intercultural teacher communities in kindergarten context.
6. It is a novelty, that empirical data were collected and analyzed on the intercultural dimensions of the pedagogical program and day-to-day practice of Hungarian kindergartens.
7. It is a novelty, that empirical data were collected and analyzed on the beliefs about intercultural issues of teachers working in Hungarian kindergartens.

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