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LEVEL OF EMPATHY DEVELOPMENT IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN AND ITS STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS

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ABSTRACT

Preschool age is considered a crucial period in a child's physical and emotional development, as well as in the formation and development of communication skills with others. The social environment influences the child's recognition of emotions and their development. This article analyzes the levels of empathy development in preschool children and their structural components. The article examines the theories of M. Hoffman, D. Goleman, J. Piaget, and L. Vygotsky regarding emotional processes, stages of empathy development, and the importance of the social environment in the formation of empathy. Additionally, the results of a practical study conducted using K.B. Bryant's "Empathy Index for Children" methodology are analyzed. The article has theoretical and practical significance for educators, teachers, and psychologists of preschool educational organizations.

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Keywords: Empathy, emotional intelligence, social environment, preschool age, antipathy, emotional processes.

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized modern world, the socio-psychological relationship between people in society is changing significantly compared to previous years. In social life, misunderstandings in many interpersonal relationships, crimes that leave an indelible mark on the lives of young people who cannot control themselves, and an increase in the number of divorces from 14% to 20% due to the inability to achieve harmony and mutual respect in family relations are being observed [6]. Emotional intelligence, empathy, as one of the individual psychological characteristics of a person, plays an important role in this. D. Goleman emphasized that not only intellectual ability (IQ) but also the ability to understand and manage emotions (EQ) has at least as much, if not more, significant impact on success in human life [5]. In the development of a person, in becoming a mature specialist in their field, their skills, the level of their intellectual potential in the field, their ability to correctly express and control their own emotions, to correctly understand the emotions of others and to respond appropriately to their mental state certainly have an influence. We can notice that when the ability to express feelings and correctly understand the feelings of others is taught from childhood, the process of observing the above problems in a person decreases. The development of empathy components in preschool children certainly plays an important role in solving this problem. Research shows that developing empathy and compassion at an early age helps children:

- Establish strong friendships;
- Resolve conflicts peacefully;
- Develop resilience and self-confidence;
- Succeed in a cooperation-based learning environment.

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Among local researchers, such as V. Karimova, S. Omonova, P. Ergashev, A. Mu'minov, have studied the types of empathy in modern conditions and the problem of empathy in contemporary psychological research. The purpose of this study is also to study the development of empathy components in preschool children and to prove its importance in the child's social life.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Empathy is the ability to understand the mental state of other people and sympathize with them [1]. It differs from sympathy. Sympathy is showing goodwill, agreement towards another person's feelings, thoughts, i.e., approving another person's feelings, thoughts. Empathy is understanding another person's feelings, putting oneself in their place. Empathy is not only understanding another person's feelings but also giving a cognitive assessment of them and behaviorally providing help or creating a desire to help.

Empathy is considered the main driving force of moral development. According to him, empathy is an emotional response that corresponds to the emotional state of another person and is more consistent with what they are experiencing than with what they have experienced. Hoffman interprets empathy as a complex psychological phenomenon that includes not only emotional but also cognitive components. The most important approaches to the development of empathy and its components are given below.

Theory of Developmental Moral Empathy.

M.L. Hoffman defines empathy as a multidimensional structure that includes an emotional arousal, cognitive processing of others' emotional states, and a motivational component that produces social behavior, and proposed a 3-component model of empathy. Namely, affective component, cognitive component, and motivational component. These components suggest that empathy is a complex process and that when a child understands what others feel

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through peer relationships and play, they internalize moral norms with intrinsic motivation. Based on Hoffman's theory, he advises parents and educators to develop moral principles such as justice, equality, and care together with empathy in children. He concluded that through this, the child learns to form empathy correctly and use it correctly [3].

Theory of Cognitive Development.

J. Piaget emphasized that the child is not a passive recipient in social relationships but an active subject who actively acquires knowledge. He determined that the child responds to the processes happening around them depending on their age and understands them at the level of their thinking. In the preoperational stage (2-7 years) of Piaget's cognitive development stage, during the process of decentration, the child gradually reduces egocentrism and can see a situation from several sides at once. When making decisions, the child takes into account several details. It is during this process that their ability to understand the feelings of others and give cognitive assessment increases. Empathy is formed towards others by understanding the situation of the people around them at the level of their thinking. And he learned that in a child's development, making friends with other children develops the ability to see from another person's point of view and, based on this, empathy [4].

Cultural-Historical Theory of Development.

L. Vygotsky did not in vain propose the idea that a child's mental development is first formed in social communication, and then in individual consciousness [5]. This theory, which has proven itself over the years, occupies an important place in the process of a child becoming a person. That is, the child forms their own behavioral model based on the attitude of the educator, parents towards them and other people. Here, adults perform the role of a mediator.

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In general, a person's socio-emotional development, which occurs in harmony with their intellectual potential, creates a basis for adaptation to their constructive interpersonal system and moral competence. In this process, the level of development of empathic abilities manifests itself as an important psychological mechanism.

RESEARCH RESULTS

In order to determine the level of empathy development in preschool children, K.B. Bryant's "Empathy Index for Children" methodology was conducted. Boys and girls from the preparatory group of a preschool educational organization participated. They were shown a pictorial version of the questionnaire, asked questions corresponding to these pictures, asked to give the answer that was correct for themselves, and the results were analyzed.

Table 1

Indicators	Result
Mean	11.8
Standard Deviation	1.9
Minimum Score	8
Maximum Score	15

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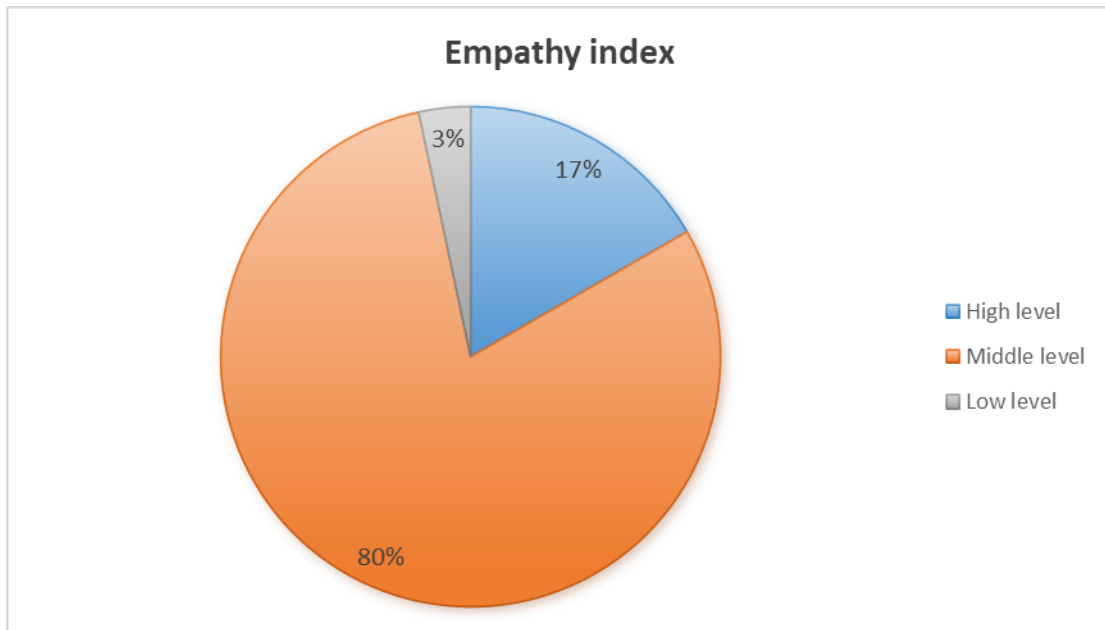


Table 2

As can be seen in Table 1, the range of scores for K. Bryant's empathy index questionnaire ranged from 7 to 19 (difference of 12 points). The group's mean empathy score is 11.8. This indicator is slightly more than half of the maximum possible score (22). The standard deviation (1.9) is small relative to the mean, indicating that the empathy scores of the children within the group are close to each other, i.e., the sample is relatively homogeneous. The score range (7 to 19) is 12 points. This indicates that there are individual differences in the development of empathy among preschool children, but these differences are not sharp.

According to the results in Table 2, 17% of the 6-year-old children participating in the study showed high empathy results, 80% showed medium empathy results, and 3% showed low empathy results. These results are consistent with the results of a study conducted by Lucas-Molina and colleagues (2016) among Spanish children. Their study also found that 75-85% of 6-year-old children were at a medium level of empathy, and the low empathy indicator was less than 5%. The

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fact that 97% of 6-year-old children have medium and high levels of empathy confirms that stage 4 of Hoffman's theory (empathy towards the general condition of others) is actively forming in children of this age.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical analysis conducted shows that empathy is a complex, multi-component psychological phenomenon that includes affective (emotional), cognitive, and motivational components. M.L. Hoffman's theory of empathy systematically explains its stages of development, mechanisms of arousal, and connection with moral behavior. J. Piaget's theory of cognitive development reveals the mechanisms of empathy formation in preschool children (preoperational stage) in connection with the process of decentration and the reduction of egocentrism. L. Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory emphasizes the importance of social communication and the mediating role of adults in the child's mental development, substantiating the importance of the family and preschool educational organization in the formation of empathy.

The empirical results allowed drawing the following important conclusions:

According to the Bryant Empathy Index, the mean empathy score of 6-year-old children is 11.8 (maximum score 22). The small value of the standard deviation (1.9) indicates that the empathy scores of the children in the group are close to each other, i.e., the sample is relatively homogeneous. The score range (7 to 19, difference of 12 points) indicates that there are individual differences in the development of empathy among preschool children, but these differences are not sharp.

The results of this study serve as a basis for developing the following practical recommendations:

It is advisable to introduce special programs aimed at developing children's empathic abilities in preschool educational organizations. These programs should

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include methods such as role-playing games, dramatization, analysis of fairy tales and stories.

Parents and educators need to teach children to correctly express emotions and understand the emotional state of others. Being a model of empathy is the most effective way to develop this quality in a child.

It is recommended to conduct individual psychological-pedagogical work with the 3% of children who have a low level of empathy, paying special attention to their emotional development.

In future research, it is advisable to study the gender and age differences of empathy more deeply, as well as to experimentally test the effectiveness of correctional programs that develop empathy.

In conclusion, developing empathy in preschool children not only improves their interpersonal relationships but also lays the foundation for them to grow into healthy, harmonious, and morally well-rounded individuals in society in the future. Empathy is an ability that can be taught and developed. Therefore, paying special attention to its development starting from preschool age is an important factor in the harmonious development of the child's personality.

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