

# Changes in Lithuanian Pre-school and Pre-primary Education Quality Over the Last Decade

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Over the last decade, the changes in Lithuanian pre-school and pre-primary education have been predetermined by changes in paradigms of children's education and strategic education documents that provided for guidelines of high quality children's (self-)education, an increasing attention of society to the quality of children's education, training and professional development of educators oriented to the development of professional competences and other factors. The article aims to identify the changes in pre-school and pre-primary children's education, i.e., to reveal changes observed by service providers: educators, and service receivers: parents.

*Keywords:* pre-school and pre-primary education, quality indicators, changes in quality of education

## Introduction

Over the last decade, one of the priority trends for Lithuanian pre-school and pre-primary education development has been striving for the quality of children's education (The conception of formal education quality assurance, 2008). The strategic documents provide for a necessity to identify and agree on quality indicators since the conception of education quality is contextual and changing. Lambert and Capizzano (2005) emphasized that the definition of quality of children's education is defined differently from the point of view of parents, educators and researchers.

Following the analysis of the education scientists' works, the system of quality criteria of the pre-school and pre-primary education may be established.

High quality of children's education conditions, good quality of children's life, children's well-being, safety, self-esteem, self-confidence and trust in others, their activities and involvements in an interesting, resourceful, creative activity, good-natured relations with other children and adults as well as acquisition of new experience (Parkay & Hass, 2000, pp. 334-337; VanderVen, 2008, pp. 68-70).

High quality of children's education results in satisfaction of their educational needs, care, corresponds to individual style of experience accumulation and possibilities for (self-)education (Mantle, 2001; Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002; Sylva, Siraj, & Taggart, 2006).

Implementing the content of various education opportunities for (self-)education are created: a possibility for a well-rounded self-education, a possibility for a child to initiate own activities or choose the activities, places, time, activity partners; to develop and get educated in the most appropriate way, through own experience; to act in a resourceful "micro" and "macro" environment; to develop according to the individual programme,

through involvement in project activity, etc. (Espinosa, 2002; Lansbergienė & Jankauskienė, 2004).

High quality of children's education is ensured by a two-direction positive democratic interaction between an educator and a child, i.e., a dialogue between a learner and an educator, which is based on personal respect, acknowledgement of child's uniqueness, key values and positive emotions. A child expresses own wishes, chooses, consults, acts alone or in cooperation, asks for assistance, solves problems, etc.. An educator observes, stimulates, suggests, supports, acts together, mediates, provides information, creates favourable environment, organises daily life, purposefully enriches child's experience, applies positive strategies of child's behaviour management and reflects on interaction with a child (Are preschool program standards enough to ensure quality?, 2008; Monkevičienė, Glebuviienė, & Tarasonienė, 2006).

The quality of (self-)education process is conditioned by the harmony between self-education, creation of learning/teaching situations and objective, planned and organised children education. The content of (self-)education is adopted during children's play, acting independently as well as getting involved into activity suggested by educators and organising education in a well-thought and purposive way. Constant feedback is provided during children's activities, and the processes of (self-)education is reflected on (Teaching methods at preschools, 2009; Iowa early learning standards, 2006; Monkevičienė, 2005, p. 188).

The quality of (self-)education process is guaranteed when "appropriate agenda" (daily routine plan) for child's (self-)education (daily, weekly, annual) is devised, "dynamic and appropriately structured environment", which is favourable for implementation of (self-)education is created and "(self-)education means and material" are purposefully selected (Dodge & Colker, 1992).

The quality of (self-)education process is conditioned by its openness to parents, social partners and community. Efficiency of children's (self-)education is pre-determined by teamwork of educators, other specialists working in an institution and social partners (Blandford & Knowles, 2009, p. 42).

Changes in the quality of pre-school and pre-primary education over the last decade have been conditioned by a big number of factors.

The first factor is: a change in paradigms of children education. In the last ten years, there has been a radical shift from teacher-oriented to child-oriented education. According to Bitinas (2000), Bruzgelevičienė (2008) and other theoreticians, the change in Lithuanian education occurred through the transfer from classical normative paradigm to free education paradigm. Defining the paradigms of classical and free education theoretically, Bitinas (2000) pointed to their link with the human nature as one of the main differences between these two paradigms: in the context of classical paradigm, the children's nature is operated upon, i.e., an educator decides what, how much and how to teach, the process of education is centralised, autocratic; while in the paradigm of free education, there is a cooperation with children's nature, i.e., an educator makes an attempt to create as favourable democratic conditions as possible for the development of learners' inner powers, their self-expression and self-development aiming at education of a free creative personality. Thus, there is a transition from educator-centred teaching to a learner-centred (self-)education. The following international projects contributed to implementation of the aforesaid ideas in Lithuania: "Egmont's Project Method" focusing on application of the project method for achievement of quality of education (Artyn vaiko. 1.2., 1998); "Healthy kindergarten", which emphasises the importance of systemic change of an institution ensuring children's safety and health (Bulotaitė & Gudžinskienė, 2003); "Head start", which focuses on the importance of education centred on children's needs and involvement of family into the process of education (Coughlin, Hansen, Heller, Kaufmann, Stolberg, & Walch, 1997); "Zippy's friends", which offers strategies and

techniques for coping with children's daily difficulties (Zippy's friends, 2001) and others.

Pre-school education and pre-primary education in this country are in the transitional phase from the paradigm of interaction to the learning paradigm, i.e., they have features of these two paradigms.

The second factor comprises strategic education documents, which provide for guidelines of quality (self-)education of children. According to Article 7 of The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2003), the goal of pre-school education is to assist children in satisfying their natural, cultural as well as ethnic, social and cognitive needs. According to the Order of the Minister of Education and Science No. ISAK-627 of April 18, 2005, "On the Descriptor of Criteria for Pre-school Education Programmes", pre-school education providers assume responsibility for the quality of children education, i.e., formation of pre-school education content is decentralised. On the other hand, the published "Metodinės rekomendacijos ikimokyklinio ugdymo programai rengti" (Methodological recommendations for development of pre-school education programme) (2006) contains fields of ideas for creation of high quality (self-)education programmes. The programmes created by education institutions have been implemented in Lithuania since 2007.

Responsibility for pre-primary education is assumed by the state (the prepared national "Bendroji priešmokyklinio ugdymo ir ugdymosi programa" (General Programme of Pre-primary Education and Self-education) focuses on the development of children's competences) and by education institutions (pre-primary (self-)education content is concretised and implemented in institutions). The national pre-primary (self-)education programme has been realised in education institutions since 2003.

The third factor is a constantly increasing attention of the society to the quality of children's education. Strategic documents underline an increasing role of parents'/caretakers' involvement in pre-school and pre-primary education. For example, "The Law on Education of the Republic" (2003) stated parents' rights to participate in children's education, "Ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokyklų vidaus audito metodika" (Methodology of Internal Audit of Pre-school Education) (2005) emphasised high quality collaboration between education institutions and parents, etc., "Metodinės rekomendacijos ikimokyklinio ugdymo programai rengti" (Methodological Recommendations for Development of Pre-school Education Programme) (2006) and "Bendroji priešmokyklinio ugdymo ir ugdymosi programa" (General Programme of Pre-primary Education and Self-education) (2003) highlighted parents' involvement into development and improvement of education programmes as well as into the process of children's (self-)education, assessment of their achievements and evaluation of education quality.

The fourth factor includes educators' training, which is oriented to educators' competence and professional development. As it is pointed out in the strategic principles of "Lietuvos švietimo plėtotės strategija 2003-2012 m" (National Education Strategy for the Years 2003-2012), the role of an educator is considerably changing in the modern knowledge society. An educator, a former source of knowledge and its conveyer, is replaced by an educator—a learning assistant, organiser, moderator and partner. Moreover, educational scientists discuss the educators' competences needed to perform the newly assigned roles. The programmes, oriented to educators' competence development are being created (Monkevičienė et al., 2006).

Other factors also conditioned pre-school and pre-primary education; however, the above-mentioned ones are the most vivid.

Since a number of factors have had an effect on the quality of pre-school and pre-primary education, it is necessary to identify how the quality of pre-school and pre-primary education is understood and what changes in children's education are noticed by its providers (educators) and clients (parents).

### The Aim of the Research

The aim of the research is to clarify educators' and parents' opinion regarding the quality and its changes in Lithuanian pre-school and pre-primary education that have occurred in the last decade.

### The Research Methods and the Sample

The following qualitative research methods were applied: focus groups method (four groups: 26 educators; 44 parents/caregivers) and a deep, semi-structural interview (25 educator). The educators and parents were purposefully chosen from the same education institutions. The research in the opinions of educators and parents was conducted in pre-school institutions of four different Lithuanian regions: in a small state institution in the country, a state institution in town, in a private education institution and in a pre-primary group. The institutions providing pre-school and pre-primary education services and representing different education models as well as possessing different experience in education were selected for the quality research.

Quantitative research methods were also applied: educators' opinion survey via Internet (501 respondents) and contact survey of parents whose children attended pre-school and pre-primary education groups (463 respondents). The representative probability sampling was used.

### The Research Results

#### Opinions of Educators and Parents About the Features of Quality Pre-school and Pre-primary Education (Quantitative Research)

An attempt was made to identify if parents whose children attend pre-school and pre-primary education groups, and educators who work in these groups and share the same attitude to the quality of education.

The data of quantitative research (see Table 1) reveal a considerable difference in the attitudes of parents and educators: parents relate the quality of education to good care of children, whereas educators emphasise children's education.

Table 1

*Distribution of the Opinion of Parents Whose Children Attend Pre-school and Pre-primary Education Groups, and Educators Working in These Groups About the Quality of Education*

Statements defining the quality pre-school and pre-primary education	Opinion of parents whose children attend/attended different groups		Opinion of educators working in different groups	
	Pre-school education (%)	Pre-primary education (%)	Pre-school education (%)	Pre-primary education (%)
Good care for children	66.40	65.40	36.46	36.62
Children's well-being	57.80	59.50	74.37	78.17
Loving, kind and attentive educator	51.20	48.80	51.26	42.96
High achievements of children	30.60	32.20	50.90	60.56
Well-established environment of education institution	25.60	27.30	70.40	66.90
Interesting and various life of children in groups	23.70	21.50	68.59	76.06
Friendly relationship between kindergarten staff and parents	22.70	22.40	49.82	48.59
An place for each child in the kindergarten guaranteed by the state	8.30	7.80	11.19	16.90
Professional work with gifted and special need children	7.60	8.30	24.19	38.03

Parents want their child to not be hungry, to sleep well, to feel well and to be taken care by a loving, kind

and responsible educator (from 48.80% to 65.40% of parents). From 30.60% to 32.20% of the parents in the survey link the quality of education with children's achievements and only from 21.50% to 23.70% of them relate it with an interesting and varied life of their child in a group. It can be stated that parents insufficiently perceive the functions of institutional education and the effect of quality education on their children. Such parents' attitude may be conditioned by an insufficient volume of educative activity implemented by education institutions. The opinion of parents whose children attend pre-school groups and pre-primary groups, regarding the quality of education does not differ substantially. Statistically, significant difference in attitudes has not been established.

The educators (74.37%-78.17% of the respondents), similar to parents, think that good well-being of a child is a feature of quality education. However, they also emphasise other quality features related to children's education: an interesting and varied life of children in groups (from 68.59% to 76.06% of the respondents); a well-established environment of education institution (from 66.90% to 70.40% of the educators); high achievements of children (from 50.90% to 60.56% of the respondents).

Moreover, pre-school educators prioritise education environment and a kind communication of an educator with children, whereas pre-primary educators see resourceful education environment, high achievements of children and education of gifted and special need children as more important factors contributing to the quality of children education. The differences are statistically significant ( $p < 0.005$ ).

According to the data of the quantitative research, there is no clear agreement among professional educators and society on the accepted definition of a quality education. Parents do not know what kind of education to expect; therefore, their expectations are limited only to a proper care about their children. The conception regarding the quality education among professional educators working with children of different ages has not been finally defined yet.

### **Changes in the Quality of Pre-school and Pre-primary Education Over the Last Decade: Opinion of Educators and Parents (Qualitative Research)**

The results of the qualitative research are presented in Table 2. Sub-categories and categories were distinguished during the content analysis of texts; the number of statements substantiated the sub-categories and their valency was established.

According to the opinion of educational scientists and education strategists, the quality of pre-school and pre-primary (self-)education have been mainly affected by the philosophy of modern free humanistic (child-centred) education. However, the analysis of educators and parents opinion shows that pre-school and pre-primary education is only partially based on this philosophy.

Parents observe features of free humanistic paradigm of children education in pre-school and pre-primary education institutions. According to them, a child is approached as a personality in education institutions: "They communicate with a child saying: you are a personality, you are a human being, etc.. They talk to a child" and "A child is able to feel that he/she is also very important". Ten statements regarding this issue were provided by parents and the valency of all of them was positive. Pre-school and pre-primary educators did not emphasise this principle. Pre-primary educators did not provide any statements, whereas pre-school educators pointed out only a small number of them, one being of particularly negative valency. The educators stated that a particular focus on children's rights hinders maturity of their personalities: "The attitude to a child has changed: his/her rights without duties are underlined". Thus, educators do not highlight this attitude to children as

personalities, though they implement this principle in their practical work. This is clearly noticed by parents.

Table 2

*Changes in Quality of Pre-school and Pre-primary Education in 2001-2010 (According to Educators and Parents)*

No.	Category	Subcategory	Educators number of supported statements. Valency of subcategory: + positive; – negative		Parents number of supported statements. Valency of subcategory: + positive; – negative
			Pre-school education	Pre-primary education	Pre-school and pre-primary education
1.	Gradually better-defined features of humanistic children's education paradigm	Each child is seen as a personality in an education institution	2+; 1–	0	10+
		An increasing attention to children and their individuality; children are free to express own opinions and choose activities	9+; 7–	9+; 1–	6+; 2–
		Striving for children's well-being, safety, positive relations with educators and group children	4+; 1–	3+	20+; 6–
		Striving for children's successful start of learning at school	0	2+	14+
2.	Improving satisfaction of children's needs and development of their competences	Improving satisfaction of children's needs	8+	0	8+; 2–
		(Self-)development of children's competences	8+; 2–	11+; 2–	36+; 10–
		Process of education that ensures satisfaction of children's needs and development of their competences	4+; 3–	5+; 4–	1+; 7–
3.	Increasing openness of pre-school and pre-primary education to community	More considerable attention of parents and society to children's (self-)education	4+; 15–	3+	6+; 9–
		Improvement in collaboration with parents	11+; 5–	1+; 1–	8+; 6–
		Expansion of social partnership	11+	0	0
		Better relations of pre-primary education groups and school	0	11+; 2–	0
4.	Improving educators' competence	Educators' vocation and personality	3+	0	2+
		New roles performed by educators	14+	13+	0
		High qualification, competence	5+; 4–	7+	8+; 1–
		Increasing educators' flexibility, informality and openness to innovations	9+; 1–	2+; 1+	0
		Improving experiential learning of educators	0	5+	0

Another feature of free humanistic paradigm of children education in pre-school and pre-primary education institutions is an increasing attention to children and their personalities, empowerment of children to become active subject of self-education, to be able to freely express own opinions, to choose and act. Parents see that educators have become more attentive to a child and take into account their individuality, children have become freer, and are encouraged to express their opinion regarding all the issues related with their life in an education institution: "A considerably increasing attention is paid to a child himself/herself, he/she is approached, asked, educators talk to him/her and discuss with him/her. However, situations when children are disciplined, autocratic decisions are made and children are forced to take afternoon naps still occur in education institutions". Parents said, "Discipline slightly grips their mind. In this way, they are here accustomed... to lessons". "My pre-primary child... never has an afternoon nap at home... He does not want to go to kindergarten just because he has to take a nap". Thus, a child does not feel a full-fledged subject of (self-)education.

The opinion of the educators in the research is varied and not unanimous: out 15% statements, nine are of

positive and seven are of negative valency; positive statements prevail only in the responses of pre-primary educators. The same tendencies were also revealed by the quantitative research. About 11%-14% of educators aim at children's discipline and obedience, their calm activities, i.e., they guide themselves by autocratic principles and this is a feature of low-quality (self-)education organisation. It was established that the discipline is prioritised by educators of lower qualification ( $p < 0.05$ ). However, there are educators, who offer agenda which does not ensure high quality education of children. They work according to the fixed plan, which does not change (13%-14%) or without any agenda (2%-4%). Not changing and fixed daily routine plan is more frequently practiced among elderly educators ( $p < 0.05$ ), whereas educators working in groups with a small number of children usually do not apply any guidelines ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, a child does not feel as a full-fledged subject of (self-)education.

Introducing principles of humanism and democracy into pre-school and pre-primary education, an attempt is made to ensure children's well-being, safety, positive relations with educators and children in the group. This feature of education is of particular importance to parents: 26 statements were received regarding this issue. The majority of them are positive; however, as many as six are of negative valency. The parents in the research state that their children feel good and safe in education institutions, they feel love and care of educators and learn skills of nice communication with each other: "When you take your child to that kindergarten and get him/her back happily, I think, it is self-explanatory and you do not need to ask", "I see that the majority of educators are good and nice" and "Daily consistent work according to systematic programmes liberates children and they eagerly communicate with people". On the other hand, parents notice that in some education institutions children are sad and bored, they lack interesting activities: "There are kindergartens where children are 'shepherded' and there are ones where children are educated. I had a feeling that they were shepherded there: I used to come there and see children play cards with pictures and when I used to come in the evening, children used to do the same". Pre-school and pre-primary educators expressed a positive opinion regarding children's well-being in education institutions. It may be concluded that education institutions do not ensure children's well-being; however, educators are not attentive enough to a child and fail to penetrate into problems of this important aspect of education.

Strategic education documents underline satisfaction of children's needs and development of their competences. Parents and educators pointed out eight statements showing that children's needs are satisfied in education institutions. According to parents, children's needs of nutrition, sleep, safety as well as common and specific education needs are properly met: "When you take a child there for the whole day, you can be calm and sure that he/she will be taken proper care of and not hungry, will have what to do and everything will be ok with him/her". Educators emphasise that children's wishes, their interests and individual education needs are considered: "You have to pay more attention to each child, to learn more about him/her, to penetrate into his growth, to notice his/her strengths and problematic areas, to take into account his/her proposals and identify his/her interests". Negative valency is characteristic of only two statements. Parents notice that children feel unsafe when educators change and the daily routine plan is not adapted to children's needs: "Educators changed. One stayed and the other came from a different group and I cannot say that at this moment, unwillingness to go to kindergarten started, but the enthusiasm to go there decreased dramatically". It can be stated that children's need are met in education institutions.

Educators and parents, in particular, pointed out a big number of statements which emphasise development of child's competences. Nineteen educators and 36 parents positively evaluate this area of children education:

statements of positive valency prevail. Parents stress that children's education is well-rounded and that they acquire and develop health, social, communicative, artistic and cognitive competences. Pre-school educators also emphasise development of all the competences, whereas pre-primary educators are more concentrated on the development of competences that ensure more successful learning at school: "In a pre-primary group, a goal is set to empower a child with all the key competences needed for learning at school". The statements of only four educators and ten parents are negative. Pre-school educators point out that they fail to achieve the appropriate level of competence quality, whereas pre-primary educators refer to insufficient development of children's social competence, i.e., poor solving of children's behavioural problems: "... educational and behavioural problems of some children cannot be solved and additional support is needed here". Parents lack development of children's abilities most: "Apparently, according to certain qualities of a child or his/her needs, as many circles could be organised as needed to develop their certain abilities". It can be concluded that children's competences are developed in a qualitative way; however, not all the expectations of parents are met so far.

The process of education that ensures satisfaction of children's needs and (self-)development of their competences is seen as the most problematic by educators and parents. Educators give the same number of positive and negative statements. According to educators, education is more objective-based and systematic, modern methods of children's competence development are applied: "A child brings certain abilities and knowledge at birth. You notice it, record and see what he/she needs. It is extremely important to improve content of education and methods of its implementation to achieve what a child needs". However, educators lack competences to develop certain abilities of children: "... the problem of gifted children's education remains unsolved. We lack time, possibilities and sometimes elementary knowledge". The qualitative opinion survey of educators revealed slightly different tendencies: 18-20 percent of educators not always orient to the development of child's competences and prioritise conveyance of the planned knowledge. Almost all the statements of parents contain negative valency. Parents agree that competence development is carried out purposefully in an institution; however, conditions for development of children's abilities are not created: "It would be nice if 'after-class' activities could be organised: singing, dancing, etc., because there is an obvious demand for that".

An increasing openness of pre-school and pre-primary education to the community is a precondition to satisfy parents' need, to increase their involvement in children's education and to meet community's challenges for children's education. Negative valency statements regarding parents' and society's attention to (self-)development of children prevail. Educators state that parents lack pedagogical education, they are passive and do not tend to get interested in children's (self-)education and involve in this process: "Lately I have noticed one problem: parents' self-education... Parents express such weird expectations and desires that you start to think is it you, who has to change or is that parents' attitude that needs changing". However, they also state that parents have become freer and are particularly interested in pre-primary (self-)education and they see it as important: "There occurs more informality in communication with parents, we communicate more and are able to make jokes already". Parents point to a negative attitude of the society to (self-)education of young children and educator's profession is unfavourable: "Society's opinion is unfavourable as well as that of mass media, which moulds such opinion".

Collaboration of education institution with parents only partially satisfies educators and parents. Educators positively evaluate collaboration with parents: "Parents already understand how they can contribute to child's life in kindergarten"; however, they also point to inadequate needs or requirements of parents: "... parents think that their children may become genius and are extremely gifted. But reality shows different things". Parents

positively evaluate educators' communication with them, their support and consultations, but they would like to receive more information about children's achievements and communicate more informally or via Internet: "Some parents ask for communication via e-mail". The same tendencies were confirmed by the quantitative research. Educators insufficiently consider cultural, national and material employment and family situation of children's family (only 20%-26% educators), children's bilingualism (12%-15% educators), gender differences between boys and girls (8%-14% educators). Family situation was more frequently taken into account by senior educators ( $p < 0.01$ ) and educators of higher qualification ( $p < 0.005$ ).

Pre-school educators emphasise expansive social partnership. According to educators, communities of institutions have rallied, communication among institutions has become more intensive and many of them have found social partners: "Thinking of ways how to improve children's education, we've come to conclusions that such conditions have to be established for the whole community of the institution" and "... we've found more social partners and have established more contacts. Our gain is a collaboration among institutions". Educators provided 11 statements of positive valency. Pre-primary educators positively evaluated relations between pre-primary education groups and schools: "We cooperate with the school near us" and "Teachers are very happy when they get the portfolio of children's achievements. They do not need much time to learn a child".

For evaluating educators' qualification and competence that ensure the quality of pre-school and pre-primary education, the valency of statements was positive. Parents emphasised educators' vocation, their personal qualities favourable for children's education as well as educators' qualification and competences. The educators themselves mentioned new roles (those of observer, helper, creator of educational environment, etc.), an increasing degree of own liberation and informality, openness to innovations and experiential learning. Thus, parents are confident with educators' competences, and educators themselves give their positive evaluation as well.

Striving for identification of the influence of pre-school education programmes created by education institutions and the national pre-primary education programme on the quality of children's (self-)education, a representative survey of educators was carried out and its results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Key Changes Working According to Pre-school Education Programme Prepared by Institutions and the National Pre-primary Education Programme (Number of Educators, Percentage)*

Key changes working according to pre-school education programme prepared by institutions and national pre-primary education programme	Pre-school group (%)	Pre-primary group (%)
Education is more adapted to children's needs, developmental possibilities and learning styles	65.34	70.71
Development on the programme allowed for penetration into a modern approach to children's education	50.90	55.00
Children's (self-)education has gained more diversity and variety	45.85	53.57
Appearance of new, more varied and more innovative forms and techniques of education organisation	42.96	57.14
Parents' needs and expectations are better met	30.69	39.29
Parents are more actively involved in the process of (self-)education in an institution	27.44	32.14
Quality of children's life in groups has increased	26.35	29.29
Enlivenment has been changed for implementing the content of education	21.66	36.43
Improvement of children's achievements	19.86	35.00
Establishment and straitening of democratic-liberal style of communication with children	19.13	18.57
Children's maturity for school has improved	9.03	50.00
Nothing has changed	3.25	2.86

It is worth mentioning that working on the pre-school education programme in their institution enabled educators to better penetrate into the modern approach to children's education (50.9% of pre-school and 55.0% pre-primary educators). The statement that education has become better adapted to children's needs, their developmental possibilities and individual learning styles, is supported by 65.34% of pre-school and 70.71% of pre-primary educators. About 42.96% of pre-school and 57.14% of pre-primary educators think that new more varied and innovative forms and methods of education organisation have appeared, whereas about 45.85% of pre-school and 53.57% of pre-primary educators see education as more diverse. According to the opinion of 50.0% of pre-primary educators, children's maturity for school has increased working according to pre-primary education programme. Thus, the programmed had an effect on the (self-)development of children's competences and innovativeness of education process organisation. The qualitative research of educators and parents revealed similar tendencies.

A considerably smaller influence of the programmes was observed on strengthening of democratic-liberal style of communication with children (19.13%-18.57% of educators) and on the quality of children's life in the groups (26.35%-29.29% of educators). It can be concluded that these aspects of children's education were of high quality prior to creation of the new education programmes since the results of qualitative research show that parents are satisfied with the quality of these aspects of children's education.

Slightly more than one third of educators (30.69%-39.29%) think that working according to pre-primary education programme, parents' needs and expectations are better met, and only 27.44%-32.14% of educators point out that parents involve into the process of their children's (self-)education in an institution more actively. This also corresponds to the results of qualitative research, which show that neither parents nor educators are satisfied with mutual collaboration.

Thus, qualitative and quantitative research on parents' and educators' opinion allowed for identification of the most important changes in quality of pre-school and pre-primary education over the last decade.

### **Conclusions**

The conception and criteria of education quality are arbitrary in terms of contemporary educational theories. All the participants in the process of children education are both providers and receivers of pre-school and pre-primary education services. Meanwhile, the data of the quantitative research allow for a conclusion that there is no clearly determined agreement of professional educators and society on the accepted definition of quality education. The attitude of parents to the quality of education is different from that of the educators: Children's well-being and proper care are of importance to parents, whereas the educators' emphasis is not only on children's well-being, but also on the quality of their education. The conception regarding the quality education among professional educators working with children of different ages has not been finally defined yet.

Following the data of the qualitative research, educators and parents notice the following features of liberal humanistic paradigm of children's education in pre-school and pre-primary education institutions: attitude to children as personalities, which is noticed by parents but not emphasised by educators though realised by them in the process of children's education; an increasing attention to children and their individuality and problems faced realising this approach; striving for children's well-being in children's (self-)education institutions, whose achievement is hindered by the failure of educators to identify children's bad mood, emotional condition and reasons for them; empowerment of children with a possibility for free expression of own opinion, for choice and actions, which is realised only partially.

Following opinion of parents and educators, which was revealed by the qualitative research, education institutions realise the principles of the most important strategic documents of education: Children's needs are met in a qualitative way; development of children's competences is guaranteed, except for development of children's abilities which does not meet parents' needs and insufficient coping with children's behavioural problems; the process of education sufficiently ensures satisfaction of children's needs and (self-)development of children's competences; however, its improvement is necessary

According to the results of qualitative research data, educators negatively evaluate parents' attention to children's (self-)education, parents are unsatisfied with society's consideration for young children's (self-)education and educators' professions; collaboration of education institution with parents is seen as partially meeting their needs by both parents and educators; according to educators, development of pre-school education programmes stimulated social partnership; working according to pre-primary education programme resulted in closer links between pre-primary education groups and schools.

Evaluating educators' qualification and competence, parents emphasised educator's vocation, their personal qualities favourable for children's education as well as qualification and competences; educators themselves pointed to new roles that they perform, their increasing informality, flexibility, openness to innovations and experiential learning.

The quantitative research revealed similar tendencies. According to the data of this research, more than half of pre-school educators state that work on the development of the programme enabled them to better perceive a modern approach to children's (self-)education; (self-)education has become more tailored to children's needs and learning styles; two fifths of educators state that (self-)education has become more diverse and varied, new forms and techniques of education organisation have appeared. Pre-primary educators, working according to pre-primary education programme, pointed out practically the same positive changes and an improved children's maturity for school.

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