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Mislitchi V.

ORCID 0000-0001-7868-4439

Ph.D. in Pedagogical Sciences,

Associate Professor at Department of Psycho-Pedagogy and Preschool Education,

Tiraspol State University,

(Chişinău, Republic of Moldova) E-mail: mislitchi.valentina@ust.md

EVALUATION OF CHILDREN'S LINGUISTIC COMPETENCES – DESIDERATUM OF PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

The evaluation of children's linguistic competences is a desideratum of the teachers from the pre-school and primary education institution, concerned with ensuring the formal, non-formal, informal contexts that lead to the increase of the linguistic education quality.

The purpose of the research. *In the problem research of ensuring continuity in the process of training children's linguistic competences, the purpose of the stage of the pedagogical experiment carried out by us was to evaluate the level of preschool and young children's linguistic competence, based on a special type of language proficiency - that of the use of the Roumanian noun grammatical forms.*

Methodology. *In the paper there are specified the evaluation criteria, there are described the research methods: conversation, testing, analysis of children's activity products, statistical processing of experimental data, generalization, deduction; there are specified the instruments applied in the investigation, there are presented the results obtained regarding the level of training the preschoolers and small schoolers' linguistic competence.*

The novelty and originality of the investigation *derives from the elaboration and implementation of the evaluation method of preschool and small school children's linguistic competence.*

Conclusions. *The processing and interpretation of the experimental data allowed the conclusions to be drawn: the development and implementation of the methods for assessing the level of training the children's linguistic competence facilitated the identification of the current reality regarding the particularities of contemporary children's use of noun forms in various expression contexts; with age, the level of children's linguistic competence increases.*

Keywords: *evaluation, linguistic competence, evaluation criteria, evaluation tools, attested results, preschool age, primary school age.*

Introduction. The formation of the linguistic competences represents a request of significant resonance for the instructive-educational activity of the subject at different age stages, detached from the prerogatives of the contemporary educational policies, which aim to progressively form personalities with a high linguistic culture.

Ensuring continuity in children's linguistic competences training is a pressing concern of teachers from the pre-school and primary education, which facilitates the effective interaction between the educational agents in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, ensuring both the dynamics of children's language development and the design of the educational process, so as to create optimal conditions for the coherent formation of the respective competences.

Conceptual landmarks. The linguistic competence of a person concerns all the possibilities put exclusively in the fact that he/she controls the language, which implies his/her ability to construct and recognize the infinity of grammatically correct sentences, to interpret those with meaning, to identify ambiguous phrases, to feel that some phrases, possibly very different in sound structure, nevertheless have an obvious grammatical similarity, while others, phonetically close, are totally grammatically different, etc. [1, 192].

V. Pâslaru considers that in relation to the general classification of competences, which establishes general competences and specific competences, the communicative linguistic competence is at the same time a general competence, because it is indispensable to any human activity, and a communicative specific competence. The author defines the communicative linguistic competence, adapted according to the formula of X. Roegiers, as an integrated set of linguistic and communicative knowledge, abilities to explore the values of the language systems and to train them in various contexts of communication and attitudes towards the phenomena of language, communication and of the messages communicated/received, spontaneously practiced, that allow the activity of general and special communication [3, 36–37].

V. Mîslîţchi states that the linguistic competence has two interpretative perspectives: general and special. From a general perspective, the linguistic competence represents an immanent integrality of the phonetic, lexical and grammatical system of the language, which requires the motivated mobilization of a structured set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are in an interdependence relationship and are manifested by mutual influences since the personality aims to reach the purpose of communication.

From a special perspective, the linguistic competence represents an immanent integrality of the acquisitions specific to the linguistic phenomenon selected by the subject (knowledge, skills, attitudes) that are in an interdependence relation and manifest in a unique way since the subject intends to code exactly and precisely the message [2, 103–104].

Knowledge, skills and attitudes, as indispensable elements of the linguistic competence, involve, besides the phonetic and lexical dimension, the grammatical dimension as well, in the center of which the noun holds a significant position. The incorrect use of the noun grammatical forms by the subjects has a negative influence on the whole process of forming the grammatical aspect of the speech, and as a result we cannot speak about the quality of the linguistic competences.

Experimental design. In order to identify the level of training the children's competence of using the grammatical forms of the noun, we initiated the ascertain pedagogical experiment, which aimed to achieve the following objectives: to determine the criteria for evaluating the initial level of the preschool and primary school children's competence of using the noun grammatical forms; to elaborate the methods of initial evaluation of the preschool and primary school children's linguistic competences; to apply the methods of evaluating the initial level of the formation of the children's competence of using the noun grammatical forms; to process and interpret the experimental data.

The research methods applied during the ascertain pedagogical experiment were: conversation, testing, analysis of children's activity products, statistical and mathematical processing of experimental data, generalization, deduction.

The experimental sample comprised 105 children of preschool age (53 preschoolers constituted the experimental group and 52 children formed the control group) and 214 children of primary school age, as follows: first grade – 57 children (28 children constituted the experimental group and 29 children formed the control group), second grade – 53 children (25 children formed the experimental group and 28 children formed the control group), third grade – 53 children (the experimental group consisted of 26 children, and the control group consisted of 27 children) and fourth grade – 51 children (26 children formed the experimental group and 25 children formed the control group).

One of the objectives pursued during the stage of the ascertain pedagogical experiment was the elaboration and implementation of the initial assessment method of the level of preschool and primary school children's competence of using the grammatical forms of the noun.

The criteria for identifying the initial level of the formation of the linguistic competence aimed: *the use of the noun number form* – the use of nouns that have a form for the singular and a form for the plural; the use of identical singular and plural noun forms; the use of nouns from the category of singular or plural tantum; the use of nouns with several plural forms; *the use of the noun gender form* – the use of mobile nouns; applying the masculine and feminine form expressed by two different nouns; the use of epicene nouns; *the use of the case form of the noun* – the use of the noun in the objective case; the use of the noun forms in the possessive case.

For the children of preschool age (children in the preparatory group) and the pupils of the first grade, we developed the methodology for evaluating the initial level of the children's competence of using the noun forms, which included eight tests, designed and implemented according to the degree of complexity of the proposed tasks.

We would like to mention that we evaluated the level of special linguistic competence – the children's competence to use the grammatical forms of the noun specific to the Romanian language.

Through the first test we aimed to evaluate the ability to use the nouns that have forms for both numbers, to use the nouns of the singular tantum.

The instructions given to the children were: Use *many/much* for...

The suggested words: dog, snake, ox, tiger, man, house, strap, doll, sister, key, treasure, day, fox, sparrow, bank, parrot, frog, hour, crate, refrigerator, tractor, character, aquarium, sign, t-shirt, egg, needle, wardrobe, hammer (nouns with forms for both numbers in the Roumanian language), pepper, honey, gray (the children were asked the question: Do you know what the gray is? The children offered one of the answers: Yes. No.), pea, milk, blood (nouns in singularia tantum in the Roumanian language).

The second test focused on assessing the children's ability to use identical nouns as a form for both numbers, to use nouns in pluralia tantum.

The instructions given to the children were: I say two, you say one.

The suggested words: glasses, trousers, applauses (nouns which belong in the Roumanian language to the category of pluralia tantum), knee, hedgehog, fox, duck, frog, chicken, saleswoman (nouns identical in singular and plural forms in the Roimanian language).

The third test aimed at assessing the children's ability to use the correct grammatical form, imposed by the norms of the literary language.

The instruction given to the children was: Choose the correct version.

The children were proposed to choose the correct variant in terms of the Romanian literary language for the words : ball of wool, cabbage, tie, match, acorn, wing, quilt, salad.

The objective of the fourth test was to evaluate the ability of children to use nouns with several forms of plural, belonging to different genders and having different meanings.

Assessing the children's ability to use the gender of nouns was the objective of the fifth test. The instructions given were: Find the pair for the following beings.

The suggested words: friend, doctor, student, tailor, wolf, fox, turkey, ox, horse, goat, ram, cat, father, sister, elephant, butterfly, giraffe, squirrel, ant.

The sixth test aimed at assessing the children's ability to use the grammatical forms of the noun in the objective case. Based on a picture (The bear is calling his friends), the children have been able to answer the questions asked, using the proposed words.

The instructions given to the children were: Answer the questions using the proposed words.

a) Who is the bear calling? The words used according to the picture: boy, Dan, girl, Emily, butterfly, hedgehog, wolf, rabbit, snake, squirrel, owl, fox, frog.

b) Who is the bear calling? The words used: boys, girls, butterflies, hedgehogs, wolves, rabbits, snakes, squirrels, foxes, frogs.

The objective of the seventh test was to evaluate the children's ability to use the grammatical forms of the noun in the possessive case.

The given tasks: Answer the questions using the words below.

a) Whose table is it? The words used: Mihaela, Daniel, mother, boy, girls, brothers.

b) Whose locker is it? The words used: Tudor, Cristina, father, aunts, sisters, grandparents.

c) Whose pants are they? The words proposed in the Roumanian language: Beatrice, Mihai, sister, friend, girls, children.

d) Whose toys are they? The words proposed in the Roumanian language: Alexandru, Maria-Eliza, child, sister, little girls, friends.

The test number eight was a complex one and aimed at assessing the competence of using the noun grammatical forms, coming from a concrete context of expressing a message. The task proposed: Look and make up a story according to the picture presented.

In order to identify the initial level of the linguistic competences, for the pupils of the second, third and fourth grades, we developed four tests, which included three categories of items: at the level of knowledge, application and integration.

The first test aimed at diagnosing the level of the children's ability to use the number of the noun, and the second test focused on the gender of the noun. By elaborating the third test we aimed at determining the level of the preschool and primary school children's competence of using the case of the noun. The fourth test had as objective the complex diagnosis of the initial level of the competence of using the forms of the noun.

We present below some types of items included in the elaborated tests:

1. Change the shape of the words so that they can express more objects: guest, chick, sharp, glass, fir, foam, french, shepherd, fairy, bitch, helmet, coffee, saddle, butter, quarrel, stripe, meadow, factory, cup, morning, station, aunt, sister, daughter, stew, ship, pan, zipper, earth, incident, luggage, car, lock, doll, jacket, example, window, dew, knife, snake, radio, gold, crow, honor, lipstick, oxygen.

2. Compare the forms of the words that follow. Circle the correct form:

I write *many*.

3. Relate what you observed to the transformation of the words.

4. Determine which words you can use to show more objects. Include the identified words (only those that show more objects) in developed statements, so as to render as many meanings as possible.

5. Include the identified words (only those that show more objects) in the statements, so that you can render as many meanings as possible.

6. Determine the pair of the following beings: friend, camel, doctor, student, cousin, tailor, brother, elephant, painter, butterfly, reader, laugh, nephew, cook, city, wolf, squirrel, lion, translator, ant, turkey, hawk, chinese, dutch, prince, trainer, masor, leopard, giraffe.

7. Make up a composition with the title «At the Zoo».

8. Imagine the bear is calling his friends. Answer the question completely: Who is the bear calling? using the words: boy, Dan, girl, Emilia, butterfly, hedgehog, wolf, rabbit, snake, squirrel, owl, fox, frog. Change the form of words to express more beings.

9. Answer the question *Whose house is it?* using the words: grandmother, Maria, Andrei, child, fairies, hunters.

10. Build word combinations, putting the words of both columns in the correct form. Examples of words from the first column: beauty, kindness, courage, sweetness. Examples of words from the second column: young, autumn, honey, grandparents.

11. Form sentences in which the word that shows the address is located: a) at the beginning of the statement; b) inside the statement; c) at the end of the statement.

12. Make up a poem of four lines using names of beings that answer the question Who?

In accordance with the criteria and tests developed, we placed the children on four levels of training the competence of using the grammatical forms of the noun, as follows:

Excellent level: The children use correctly the singular and plural form of the given nouns, recognize and apply the singular and plural tantum nouns, use the nouns with several forms in the plural number having the same or different meanings. The children use correctly the gender forms of the noun: the use of mobile nouns; applying the masculine and feminine form expressed by two different nouns; the use of epicene nouns. Also, the children use correctly the case forms of the nouns which refer to the application of the noun in the nominative case; the use of the noun forms in the objective case; the use of the possessive forms of the noun.

Good level: The children use correctly the nouns with both forms of number, they use the identical nouns as the singular and plural form, as a rule, they do not have difficulties in applying the nouns of the singular and plural tantum category, but they make mistakes in the use of nouns with several forms of plural. From the perspective of using gender forms, the children use correctly mobile and epicene nouns, but encounter difficulties in using two-gender nouns, having different meanings. The children make mistakes in using the forms specific to the possessive case.

Satisfactory level: The children use correctly nouns that have a singular and plural form. Also, they use correctly the identical nouns as the singular and plural form, but have difficulties in applying the nouns in the singularia and pluralia tantum category, they do not always use the grammatical form of the nouns accepted by the norms of the literary language. They use correctly the mobile nouns, the nouns that render the gender in different words, but they make mistakes in using epicene nouns and those that have two different genders and meanings. Regarding the case category, the children use correctly the nouns in the nominative case, but they make grammatical mistakes in using the noun forms in possessive and objective cases.

Low level: The children mostly use correctly the nouns that have a singular and plural form, but frequently use incorrectly the nouns with several plural forms; most of the times they use incorrectly the nouns in the singular and plural tantum categories; they use correctly, mainly, mobile nouns, but they frequently use inadequate epicene nouns, they make multiple mistakes in using the nouns that have two different genders and meanings; they use correctly the forms specific to the nominative case, they use incorrectly the forms of the noun in the possessive and objective cases.

The sample involved in the experiment included 105 preschoolers and 214 children of small school age.

We specify that from the total number of 105 preschoolers, 53 children formed the experimental group and 52 children constituted the control group.

Research results. The processing of the experimental data allowed the placement of preschool children on four levels: excellent, good, satisfactory and low. The experimental data regarding the initial level of the preschool children's competence of using the grammatical forms of the noun are presented in Figure 1 and allow the following situations to be ascertained: at low level 11 children were registered (20.8 %), 28 children (52.8 %) were placed at a satisfactory level, 11 children (20.8 %) were registered at a good level, and only 3 children (5.6 %) of the total number were placed at the excellent level from the total number of 53 preschoolers.

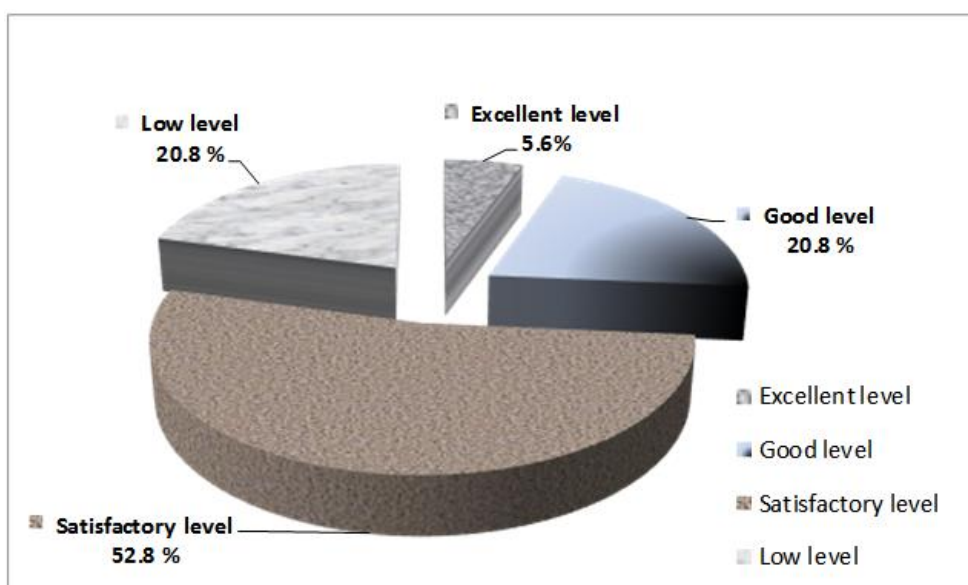


Figure 1. The level of the preschoolers' linguistic competence in the experimental group

In the control group the situation is as follows: 10 preschoolers (19.3%) have a low level of the competence in using the grammatical forms of the noun; with a satisfactory level there were 26 preschoolers (49.9%), the good level was seen at 12 preschoolers (23.1%), 4 preschoolers (7.7%) of the 52 subjects included in the control group possess an excellent level of the linguistic competence formation.

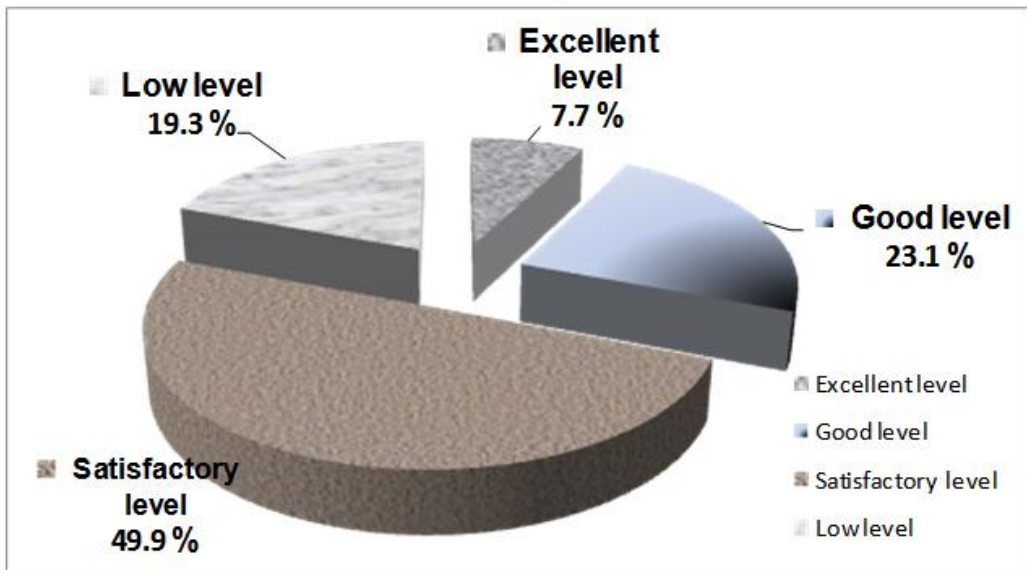


Figure 2. The level of the linguistic competence of the preschoolers included in the control group

Figure 3 shows the comparative data regarding the level of the preschoolers' linguistic competence included in the experimental and control groups.

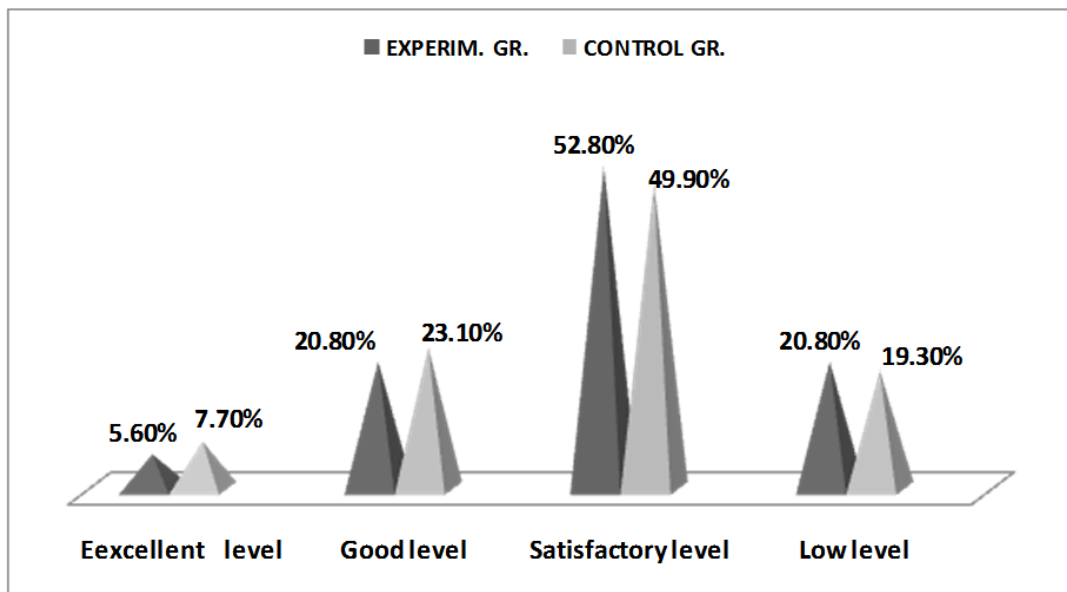


Figure 3. Comparative results regarding the level of the formation of the preschoolers' linguistic competence in the experimental and control groups

We aimed at identifying the level of the formation of the competence of using the noun grammatical forms, special linguistic competence, and in the case of children of young school age.

The interpretation of the experimental data allowed the placement of the children of the primary school according to the four levels of the formation of the competence of using the noun grammatical forms: excellent, good, satisfactory and low.

Table 1

Level of the linguistic competence of primary school pupils organized by grades

<i>Grade</i> <i>Levels</i>	<i>Experimental sample</i>				<i>Control sample</i>			
	<i>Excellent level</i>	<i>Good level</i>	<i>Satisfactory level</i>	<i>Low level</i>	<i>Excellent level</i>	<i>Good level</i>	<i>Satisfactory level</i>	<i>Low level</i>
<i>Grade I</i>	2 pupils 7.1 %	5 pupils 17.9 %	15 pupils 53.6 %	6 pupils 21.4 %	2 pupils 6.9 %	5 pupils 17.3 %	15 pupils 51.7 %	7 pupils 24.1 %
<i>Grade II</i>	2 pupils 8 %	5 pupils 20 %	11 pupils 42.3 %	7 pupils 28 %	2 pupils 7.2 %	6 pupils 21.4 %	14 pupils 50 %	6 pupils 21.4 %
<i>Grade III</i>	2 pupils 7.7 %	6 pupils 23.1 %	11 pupils 42.3 %	7 pupils 26.9 %	3 pupils 11.1 %	7 pupils 25.9 %	12 pupils 44.5 %	5 pupils 18.5 %
<i>Grade IV</i>	2 pupils 7.7 %	7 pupils 26.9 %	11 pupils 42.3 %	6 pupils 23.1 %	2 pupils 8 %	6 pupils 24 %	12 pupils 48 %	5 pupils 20 %

The analysis of the experimental data highlights the fact that with age, the level of the linguistic competence of the children of small school age increases. Both in the experimental and in the control groups, the number of pupils of grades III and IV increased at a good and satisfactory level, compared to that of pupils of grades I and II. At the same time, at the level of the third and fourth grades there was a decrease in the number of pupils with a low level of linguistic competence.

Figure 4 illustrates the situation recorded on the entire sample of small school children included in the experimental and control groups.

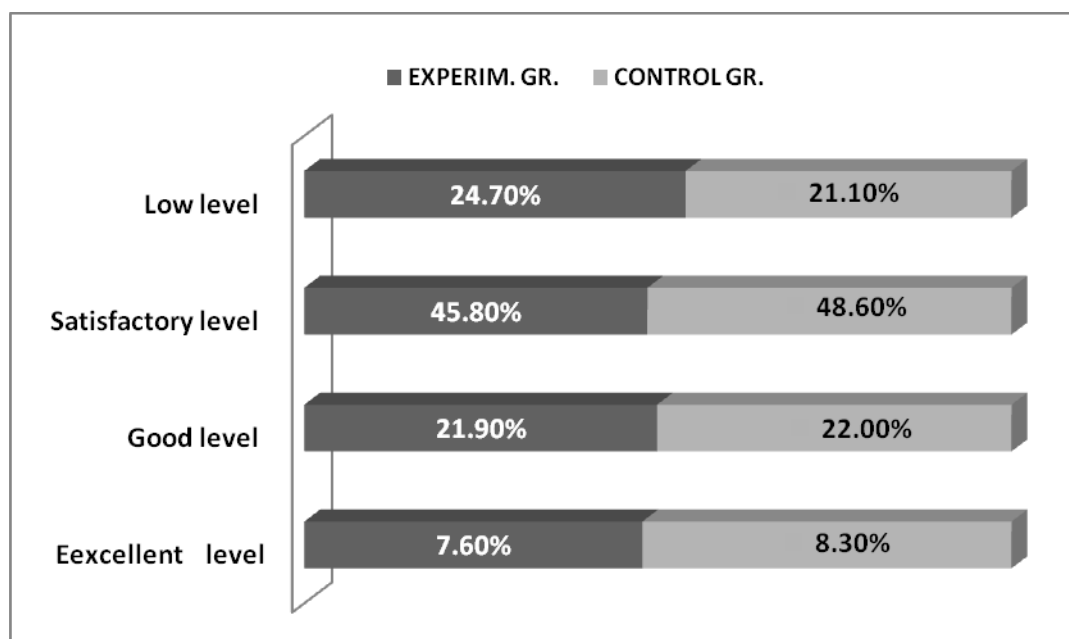


Figure 4. Comparative results regarding the level of the linguistic competence of the small school children in the experimental and control groups

The processing and interpretation of the experimental data after the implementation of the four tests allowed the identification of the initial level of the formation of the competence of using the grammatical forms of the noun as follows: in the experimental group at a low level, there were registered 26 pupils (24,7 %), 48 children (45.8 %) were placed at a satisfactory level, 23 schoolchildren (21.9 %) were identified at a good level, and 8 subjects were designated at an excellent level, (7.6 %) out of the total number of 105 pupils of small school age.

The control sample obtained the following positioning of the initial level of the competence formation of using the noun forms by the children of small school age: at a low level there were 23 children (21.1 %), at a satisfactory level – 53 children (48.6 %), at a good level – 24 children (22 %), and at an excellent level there were 9 children (8.3 %) out of the total number of 109 children of small school age.

Conclusions. The analysis of the investigation data allowed the following conclusions to be drawn:

– The elaboration and implementation of the method of evaluating the level of the linguistic competence formation of the preschool and primary school pupils ensured the identification of the current reality regarding the particularities of the use of the noun forms in different expression contexts.

– The results obtained from the implementation of the methodology for assessing the level of the linguistic competence of the children involved in both samples, experimental and control, do not show major differences, being almost equivalent.

– The significant number of children attesting a low and satisfactory level of linguistic competence implies the need to identify and implement the relevant teaching technologies to ensure continuity in the formation of the respective competence in preschool and primary school children.

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Мисліцкі В. Ф.

ORCID 0000-0001-7868-4439

*Доктор педагогічних наук,
доцент кафедри психопедагогіки та дошкільної освіти,
Тираспольський Державний Університет,
(Кишинів, Республіка Молдова) E-mail: mislitchi.valentina@ust.md*

ОЦІНЮВАННЯ ЛІНГВІСТИЧНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ ДІТЕЙ – ДЕЗИДЕРАТ ДИДАКТИЧНИХ КАДРІВ ДОШКІЛЬНОЇ ТА ПОЧАТКОВОЇ ОСВІТИ

Оцінка мовних компетентностей дітей – це дезидерат вчителів дошкільної та початкової освіти, що стосується забезпечення формального, неформального, неофіційного контексту, та спричиняє підвищення якості мовної освіти

***Мета дослідження.** У проблемному дослідженні забезпечення наступності у процесі формування мовних компетентностей дітей метою проведеного нами педагогічного експерименту визначено: оцінити рівень мовної компетентності дошкільників та дітей у початковій школі на основі спеціального типу володіння мовою – вживання граматичних форм румунських іменників.*

***Методологія.** У роботі визначено критерії оцінювання, застосовано такі методи дослідження: бесіда, тестування, аналіз продуктів діяльності дітей, статистична обробка експериментальних даних, узагальнення, дедукція. Стандартизовані інструменти, застосовані в дослідженні, дозволили представити отримані результати щодо рівня сформованості мовної компетентності у дошкільників та молодших школярів.*

***Новизна та оригінальність дослідження** спричинена розробкою та впровадженням методу оцінювання мовної компетентності дітей дошкільного та молодшого шкільного віку.*

***Висновки.** Обробка та інтерпретація експериментальних даних дозволила зробити висновки: розробка та впровадження методів оцінювання рівня підготовки мовної компетентності дітей сприяли виявленню сучасного стану та особливостей сучасного використання сучасними дітьми іменникових форм у різних контекстах вираження; з віком рівень мовної компетентності дітей зростає.*

***Ключові слова:** оцінка, мовна компетентність, критерії оцінювання, інструменти оцінювання, атестовані результати, дошкільний вік, молодший шкільний вік.*

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