
Influence of the Early Prevention Programme “Zippy’s Friends” on Self-development of Children’s Social Competence and Establishment of Safe Emotional Environment in Educational Institutions

Ona Monkevičienė

Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, Department of Childhood Studies,
Studentų St. 39, LT-08106 Vilnius, Lithuania, ona.monkeviciene@leu.lt

Abstract. The article theoretically substantiates the purpose of programmes of early prevention to develop children’s social and coping skills, presents the concept of coping with challenges, strategies for overcoming difficulties, which are applied by children, as well as structure, which predetermines efficiency of early prevention programmes. Seeking the analysis of the impact of the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ on self-development of children’s social competence and creation of safe emotional environment in educational institutions, the research of several stages is presented: a) content analysis of the Lithuanian Pre-primary Education Curriculum and the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’, which highlighted the specific contribution of the latter programme to children’s social competence; b) generalisation of the results of the research in the impact of the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ on development of children’s social competence; c) identification of the impact of the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ on creation of safe emotional environment in an educational institution.

Keywords: *social competence, safe emotional environment, early prevention, coping with difficulties, pre-primary education curriculum, programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’.*

Introduction

The development of children's social competence, improvement of safe emotional environment in an educational institution, humanisation and democratisation of interaction between a child and a teacher are prioritised in contemporary system of education. The goals of pre-school, pre-primary and primary curricular, which orient a teacher towards learning of a child, helping him or her to understand own feelings, self-development of self-respect, empathy, skills of positive communication as well as skills of coping with problems, conflicts and difficulties. Teachers are encouraged to support a child, when s / he faces difficulties, has emotional or behavioural problems.

On the other hand, only models of positive behaviour are most frequently provided for in the educational programmes and textbooks. Due to ethical issues, examples of inappropriate children's behaviour are not analysed, therefore, when a child encounters a problematic situation or behaves in an inappropriate way, s / he does not find a proper answer to the question: what to do now? There emerge situations, when adults divide children's feeling into "bad" and "good" and explain to them that to get agree is bad. Hence, child's ability to learn to express difficult feelings and to help himself or herself to feel better is developed. "Moralising pedagogy" does not facilitate child's acquisition of most necessary coping skills.

Under conditions of fast pace of life and fierce competition, the culture of individualism has taken firm root, which lays emphasis on the importance of a child to learn to overcome difficulties him self or herself, whereas the others have to cope with their problems themselves. This increases alienation, reduces empathy and concern about each other.

It is not surprising that violence, harassment, bullying and lack of empathy are observed among children in educational institutions. Such problems tend to prevail in Lithuania and are particularly painful. On the basis of the Programme of Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) of the World Health Organisation, which coordinates various aspects of school learners' life, five surveys of Lithuanian school learners were carried out (1994, 1998, 2002, 2006 and 2010), whereof results revealed that according to prevalence of harassment and (or) bullying in Lithuanian schools, Lithuania is a leading country among countries that take part in the HBSC survey.

Seeking changes in such situation, since the school year of 2000–2001 the international early prevention programme of emotional and behavioural problems 'Zippy's Friends' (developed by the organisation "Partnership for Children") has been implemented in Lithuania and public company "Vaiko labui" has been in charge of its realisation. Making attempts to evaluate the long-term effect of the early prevention programme, two problem questions are formulated: a) what influence does the programme 'Zippy's Friends' have on development of children's social competences; b) what effect does it have on establishment of safe emotional environment in educational institutions.

The goal of the article: to reveal the influence of the early prevention programme 'Zippy's Friends' on development of children's social competence and on establishment of safe emotional environment in an educational institution.

The objectives:

- To theoretically substantiate the effect of early prevention programmes on self-development of child's social competence and coping skills and microclimate at school.
- To carry out analysis of the content of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' and 'The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education' from the perspective social competence development.
- To generalise the results of the research on the impact of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' on development of children's social competence.
- To identify the effect of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' on establishment of safe emotional environment in educational institutions.

The methods of the research: qualitative and quantitative research methods – theoretical analysis, systemisation and generalisation of ideas, content analysis of programmes, systemisation and generalisation of research results, internet survey. The content analysis of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' and 'The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education' was conducted. The results of the research on the impact of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' were systemised and generalised. The internet survey was carried out in Lithuania and its sample included 232 teachers in the programme 'Zippy's Friends'.

1. Theoretical substantiation of efficiency of early prevention programmes developing children's social competence and coping skills

Concept and significance of coping with difficulties while developing child's social competence. Theoretical background of self-development of coping skills derives from the theory of stress and coping by R. Lazarus and S. Folkman (1984). According to the scientists, coping with difficulties embraces modification of thinking and behaviour adapting them to certain circumstances, which are perceived by an individual as difficult challenges that exceed his or her own powers. R Lazarus and S. Folkman single out two ways of coping with difficulties: a) *coping through behaviour*, which includes actions carried out to change a critical situation or to solve the problem, which evokes painful feelings; for example an individual meets a friend and solves the conflict with him or her, etc.; b) *emotional coping*, which embraces actions to mitigate painful experiences and to improve own wellbeing speaking to someone, going for a walk, etc. D. B. Pincus and A. G. Friedman (2004) distinguish *cognitive coping*, which is applied by young children already, who reflect their difficult emotional situation or emotional wellbeing. The research by the aforesaid authors as well as by other researchers shows that younger children use

problem-focused coping strategies, whereas later they start using emotional coping and cognitive coping strategies.

T. Paris, director of Association for Emotional Health of Children, proposed the scheme, which visualises the process of coping (see: Fig. 1).

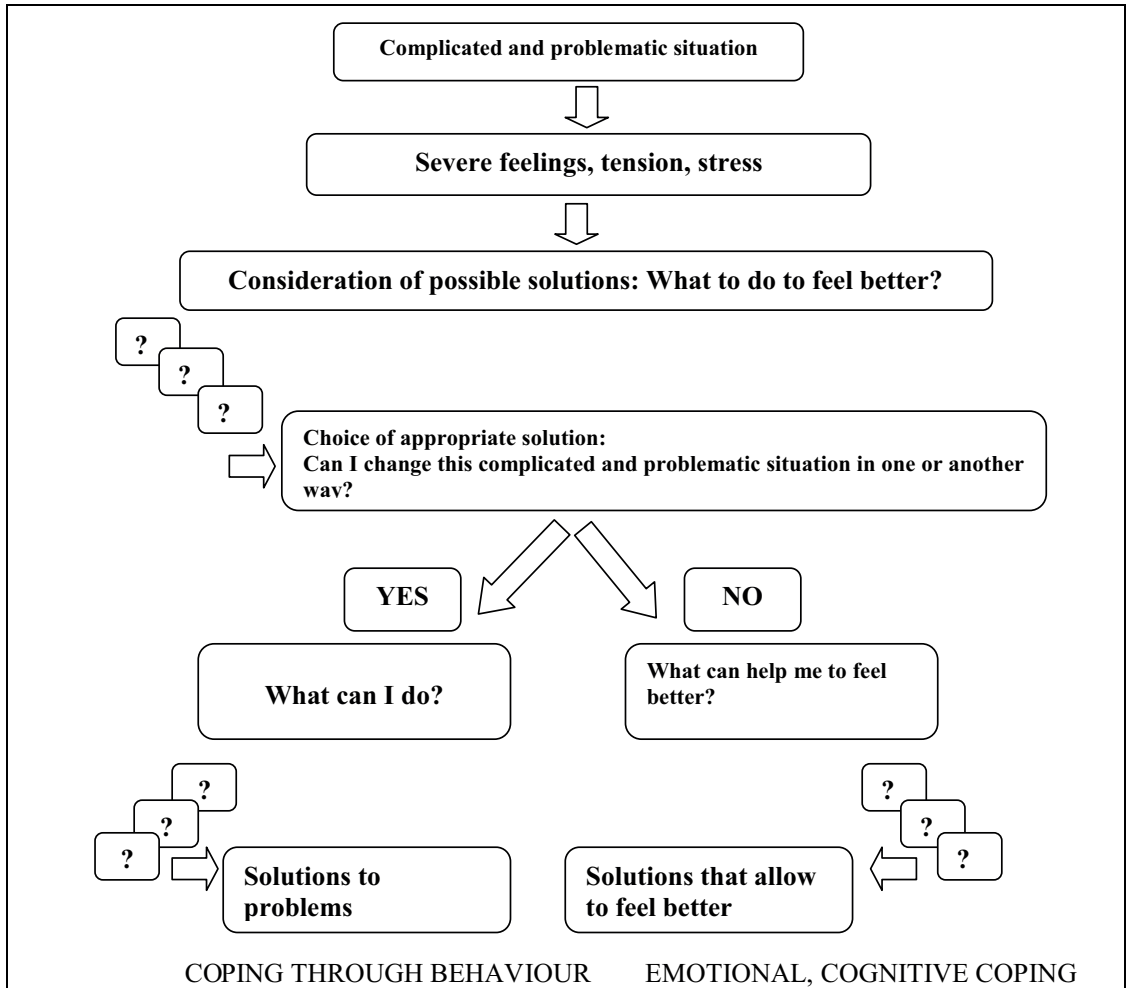


Fig. 1. The concept of the process of coping with difficulties according to T.Paris (published under permission of the author)

The scheme presents a better determined process of reflection and selection of solutions, which help to feel better. According to T. Paris, in complicated situations and searching

for appropriate solutions, children may raise the question: *Can I change this complicated and problematic situation in one or another way?* If the answer is YES, attempts are made to find solutions, which would contribute to changing or coping with unpleasant situations (to make friends, to solve conflict, to clarify misunderstandings, etc.), i.e. techniques of *behavioural coping* are applied. If the answer is NO, solutions are sought to mitigate unpleasant feelings (to talk to somebody, to engage in pleasant activities, to address the problem from a different perspective, etc.), i.e. techniques of *emotional and cognitive coping* are used.

Children, who join the early prevention programme 'Zippy's Friends', learn to independently identify an appropriate solution following a simple rule "A good solution helps me to feel better. A good solution does not cause any harm to me and others". Hence, children get used to observation of own emotions, behaviour as well as those of others as well as self-develop empathy. Early prevention programmes usually encourage children to notice if others need help and to do it as well as to ask for assistance when it is necessary. Therefore, self-help climate is created in the group.

Following the aforesaid conceptions, essential components of social competence self-development may be envisaged: identification of own emotions and those of others, reflection of problematic situations, selection of acceptable solutions and their adaptation, collaboration and mutual help, which improve own emotional wellbeing and that of others.

Scientific research that points out at what age children may start employing coping strategies. B. L. Mishara, M. Ystgaard (2000) proved that even 4–6 year old children may self-develop coping skills and that skills of overcoming difficulties acquired at early age remain for longer time and facilitate successful coping with complicated or critical life situations and challenges.

K. Chalmers, E. Frydenberg and J. Deans (2011) established what strategies are applied for coping with stress by four year old children while separating from parents, in their relations with friends, teachers, when they dislike something, when they have to make a choice or encounter any night fears. Children cope with stress through play, doing something pleasant, dealing with emerging problems in accordance with their capabilities, applying calming techniques, ignoring problems and searching for help or comfort. Four year old children also use a big number of inefficient coping techniques (passive waiting, anger or inappropriately expressed anger). The authors conclude that prevention programmes should target at expansion of the repertory of efficient coping strategies applied by children and at encouraging children to give up inefficient strategies. According to the authors, 6–9 year old children are already capable of applying a variety of more complex coping strategies, such as problem solution-oriented coping with difficulties, strategies of search for help, play, fantasy, search for emotional assistance, self-soothing strategies, ignoring or avoidance strategies, positive thinking, reflection of encountered difficulty or problem.

Other researchers (Marcelo, Yates, 2014) proved the importance of pre-school children's imagination used during their play to development of their coping strategies. On the basis of the research data, the quality of child's fantasy and expression of negative (not positive) affect have impact on flexibility of coping strategies applied by a child, which facilitates learning to overcome behavioural problems. Daily challenges, which are reflected in child's play, encourage search for and application of a more varied coping strategies as well as to learn to overcome certain behavioural problems.

It has been also proved (Pincus, Friedman, 2004) that children, who manage to successfully deal with daily challenges, are more successful in coping with complicated life situations, expose themselves to less complicated problems, their demonstrate more social behaviour and feel better.

The aforesaid studies have confirmed that 5–7 year old children may successfully participate in early prevention problems and self-develop social and coping skills.

Scientific research that substantiate the assumption that general coping strategies learnt children may be applied for overcoming of various challenges. *The theory of child coping competence* by A. D. Moreland, J. E. Dumas (2007) assumes that challenges fall into three main domains: *affective*, which are related to primarily emotional needs and demands; *social*, which embrace mainly social needs, interpersonal and social problems; *achievement*, which deal with attainment of goal, academic requirements and learning difficulties. The authors of the aforesaid theory carried out research on children's coping abilities, which revealed that *children tend to apply the same strategies for coping with challenges from different domains*. Hence, general coping strategies adopted by children may be used coping with all the kinds (affective, social and achievement (academic)) challenges. It is important to ensure that children acquire a wide repertory of coping strategies.

Peculiarities of early prevention programmes, which may contribute to their efficiency. Some early prevention programmes lay bigger emphasis on development of children's social skills, *others focus on self-development of social abilities and coping strategies*. The latter programmes provide for assumption that development of social skills is included into the pre-school and primary education curricular, whereas self-development of coping strategies does not get sufficient attention.

Having analysed a big number of early prevention programmes, D. B. Pincus, A. G. Friedman (2004) argue that the majority of them focus only on *teaching of problem solving strategies*. The programmes do not teach children cognitive and emotional coping strategies, i.e., to have a different attitude towards a problem noticing the good sides of the complicated situation; they are not taught how and when to calm down and to talk to somebody. Moreover, they face serious difficulties learning these strategies autonomously. The research conducted by the authors showed that 1st-2nd formers, who failed to participate in early prevention programmes, usually applied *behavioural coping strategies*, oriented towards direct solving of problems (65 % of all the strategies

applied), *emotional coping strategies* (30 %) or *avoidance strategies* (5 %) are used much less frequently by children. Applying only behavioural coping strategies, learners feel unwell when they encounter situations, which they are not able to change. Hence, using only behavioural coping strategies, children's ability to deal with difficulties is not highly efficient. To enable a child to feel better and to efficiently cope with challenges, it is necessary to learn to apply strategies of all the three domains. The authors identified that children in primary school learn strategies of emotional and cognitive difficulties fast, if they engage in prevention programmes, where such strategies are acquired.

M. T. Greenberg and others also evaluated efficiency of early prevention programmes. They also made a conclusion that the programmes, *which ground self-development of social competence only on knowledge and academic abilities*, fail. According to the authors, only the models, which target at development of coping skills based on integral social, emotional and cognitive experience, are efficient (Greenberg et al., 2003). The research conducted by R. P. Weissberg, M. J. Elias (1993) disclosed that complex prevention programmes, which embrace development of a big number of abilities (e.g., emotional awareness, communication, problem solution, etc.) are efficient.

According to B. L. Mishara, M. Ystgaard (2006), preventive education in usual groups or classes should integrate learning of various coping strategies, expanding the repertory naturally acquired by children and developing their abilities to apply them in different problematic situations.

On the basis of the aforesaid research, not only strategies of behavioural coping but also those of emotional and cognitive coping were included into the programme 'Zippy's Friends' for 5–6 year old children developed by "Partnership for Children". The programme targets at development of social skills. It is oriented towards experiential rather than towards academic self-education of children and towards provision of support to each other. In Lithuania this programme has been implemented in pre-primary groups and the first forms in Lithuania since 2000.

Influence of early prevention programmes on improvement of microclimate for emotional self-development in educational institutions. Children attending pre-primary groups and primary school have already acquired a broad and stable repertory of pro-social behaviour models. The research revealed that children, who have mastered more techniques of pro-social response to challenges, are more successful approaching life challenges and feel better. Following the data of the research conducted by R. Veenstra, S. Lindenberg, A. J. Oldehinkel and others (2008), primary learners, who act in a pro-social manner are accepted by their peers, do not experience exclusion and bullying. Pro-social behaviour is also related to their academic achievements.

R. P. Weissberg, M. U. O'Brien (CASEL – Collaborative for Academics, Social and Emotional Learning, 2004) carried out the metaanalysis of 317 studies with the total sample of 324 303 school learners aiming to identify influence of development of emotional and social competence on learners' emotional wellbeing, behaviour and academic

achievements as well as their correlation (see: Fig. 2). The authors indicated that taking part in programmes children learnt to recognise and to express own emotions in appropriate ways, to understand emotional states of others, to set positive daily activity and learning goals, to make responsible decisions and to collaborate and communicate in an active way. They also learnt to respect themselves, others, family, school, country, learning and work. Favourable conditions for positive expression of school learners are created.

The results of the meta-analysis proved that implementation of emotional and social competence self-deployment contributes to decrease in manifestations of school learners' aggressive, hyperactive and risky behaviour, they observe school rules in a more responsible manner, more frequently carry out assignments consistently and completely, expressed own emotions in ways, which are accessible to others. The academic achievements of school learners have also improved.

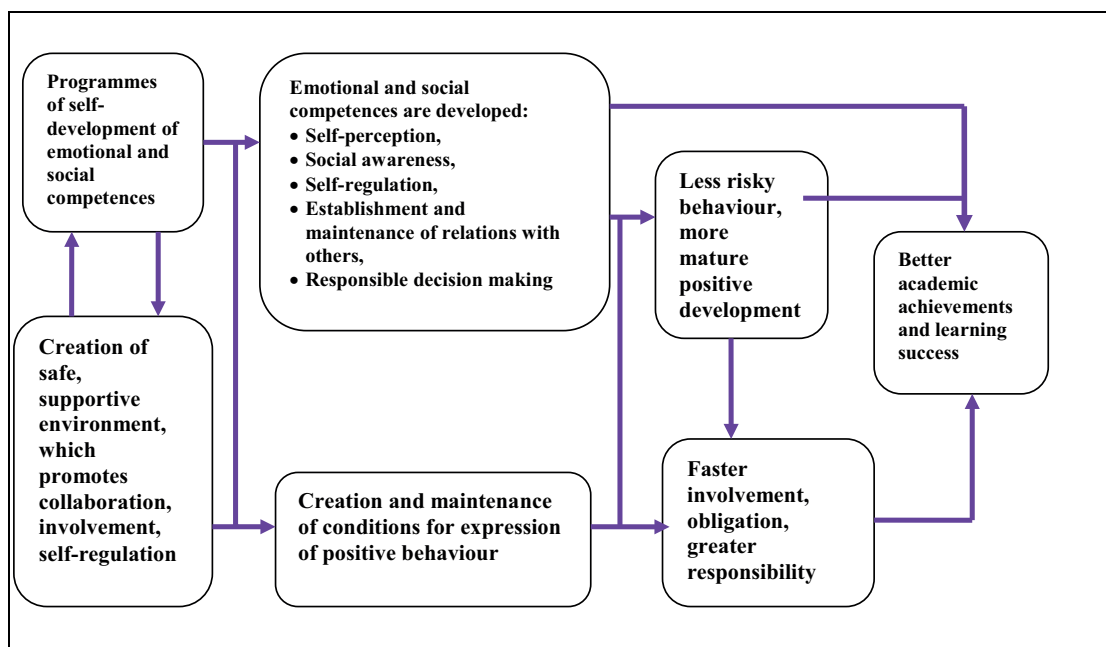


Fig. 2. The link between emotional and social competences and school learners' academic achievements (according to Weissberg, O'Brien, 2004)

2. The analysis of the content of 'The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education' in Lithuania and the programme 'Zippy's Friends' from the perspective of development of children's social competences. The programme 'Zippy's Friends' is most frequently implemented in the pre-primary groups, which are attended by children starting at age

of 6. In 2014 the new ‘The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education’ was launched in Lithuania. There emerged a need to evaluate if the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ is oriented towards the development of children’s social competence, which is provided for in the Curriculum of Pre-primary Education and to what extent and how this programme contributes to its deeper development. Therefore, the analysis of the content of the aforesaid programmes was carried out (Tables 1 and 2).

The analysis of provisions for social competences in the programmes. The analysis of *attitudes developed by children* (Table 1) revealed that the provisions for social competence in ‘The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education’ embrace the development of relation with oneself, peers, adults and environment, i.e., their content is broader than in the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’. This prevention programme targets at development of social and coping skills, which are related to child’s emotional wellbeing; therefore, the content of provisions is narrower but more adapted towards not feeling lost and believing that there is a way out from any complicated situation.

However, several peculiarities of provision of The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education, which are not favourable for development of child’s social abilities that are related to emotional wellbeing and coping, were disclosed. The provisions outlined in the General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education *more frequently focus on ideal models of positive behaviour rather than on attitudes towards coping with encountered difficulties* (e.g., “benevolent, constructive collaboration with other children”, “protection from sexual abuse and violence”). Some of the *provisions are particularly abstract and not understandable to children yet* (e.g., “to nurture the good”, “to respect teachers and other employees of a school or any other education provider and their work”). The principle that *a child addresses an adult rather than peers for help* is clearly expressed. *Individualism rather than interpersonal relations* is highlighted (e.g., “interest in and evaluation of oneself as a person, who is characterised through unique features; protection of own personal space, respect for privacy of others”).

The programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ contains provisions, which direct a child towards interest in complicated own emotions and those of others and belief that any situation may provide solutions, which allow to feel better and that not only adults but also children as well as they themselves are capable of helping. Moreover, the provisions in this programme target not at models of ideal behaviour but at real daily challenges and a belief that it is possible to cope with them. *Hence, these provisions focus on development of coping skills and, hence, they purposefully supplement and deepen self-development of children’s social competences.*

Table 1. Children's attitudes as outcomes of development of social and health competence in the programme 'Zippy's Friends' and 'The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education'

Category	The programme 'Zippy's Friends'	The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education
Content of competence		
Attitudes towards own emotional wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentions to speak about own emotions, feelings and experiences and those of others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition and expression of emotions and feelings.
Attitudes towards friendship and positive communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentions to communicate and collaborate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being friendly and benevolent to the surrounding people. • Being tolerant. • Nurturance of friendship. • Nurturance of the good. • Benevolent, constructive collaboration with other children. • Avoidance of violence and bullying in communication.
Attitudes towards encountered difficulties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief that difficulties are a component of daily life and they may be dealt with. • Belief that even in cases, when sad or complicated situations cannot not be changed, there are things, which may help us to feel better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance of changes as an unavoidable part of life. • Control of own impulses. • Calming down and relaxation having experienced strong emotions. • Protection from sexual abuse and violence.
Attitudes towards support and assistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief that asking for help is an important way of coping with difficulties. • Desire to help others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turning to adults for a piece of advice or help when necessary. • Searching for help, when a disaster strikes.
Attitudes towards oneself as a person.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-confidence and reliance on own abilities to overcome difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in and evaluation of oneself as an individual possessing unique characteristics. • Protection of own personal space, respect for privacy of others.
Attitudes towards belonging to a group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive attitude towards getting acquainted and making friends in a new environment. • Positive attitudes towards provision of constant help to others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempts to belong to a group (pre-primary education, yard mates with similar hobbies, etc.). • Feeling a member of family or relation and feeling proud of it. • Resistance to unacceptable behaviour of others.

Category	The programme 'Zippy's Friends'	The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education
Attitudes towards adults, the group and school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for adults' experience and wisdom. • Respect for teachers and other employees of a school or any other education provider as well as their work. • Feeling a member of school community or that of any education provider. • Being vigilant and careful communicating with strangers.

The analysis of skills of social competence in the programmes. The analysis of children's social skills to be developed in 'The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education' and the programme 'Zippy's Friends' (Table 2) highlighted that the scope of *The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education* is broader as it embraces not only abilities to recognize and express emotions, to establish friendship and to communicate positively, to cope with encountered difficulties, to provide support and help or to search for them but also those related to child's belonging to a group and communication with adults. The latter abilities are not distinguished separately in the programme 'Zippy's Friends'. Children learn to communicate with others developing skills of communication, establishment and maintenance of friendship and others, whereas they learn to communicate with adults discussing problems and solutions to them.

On the other hand, the programme 'Zippy's Friends' *focuses on development of coping skills more*. For example, 'The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education' provides for development of ability "to appropriately express own emotions, moods and feelings", whereas the programme 'Zippy's Friends' includes not only the aforesaid ability but also skills related to other complicated feelings such as "to recognise complicated feelings and to properly react to them", "to understand that changes may have positive consequences". Hence, the programme allocates a special attention to self-development of abilities to respond to complicated feelings in an appropriate way. Moreover, the programme 'Zippy's Friends' contains not only usual abilities of making friends and maintaining positive relations but also those of friendship reflection, identification of successful and unsuccessful communication, listening to others, responding to loneliness and rejection, solving of disputes under influence of strong feelings. It is obvious that the programme 'Zippy's Friends' *enables a child to acquire abilities to cope with complicated situations related to maintaining relations with others*.

Developing children's coping skills, 'The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education' provides for specific ways how to calm down, to gain self-control, to respond to bullying or doubtful behaviour of adults. On the other hand, next to the above-mentioned specific ways, the programme 'Zippy's Friends' aims to develop *child's abilities to search for solutions independently, to decide which solution is appropriate and to apply it in any difficult or problematic situation*. This increases child's self-dependence and decreases his

or her dependence on adults. Additionally, the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ emphasises strategies for coping with changes and losses and makes children aware of several useful solutions to these problems.

The programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ also prioritises development of children’s mutual help skills, whereas The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education encourages children to ask adults’ help.

Table 2. Children’s abilities as outcomes of social competence in the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ and ‘The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education’

Category	The programme “Zippy’s Friends”	The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education
Content of abilities		
Identification of emotions, their expression, response to complicated feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to recognise own feelings and to discuss them. • Ability to recognise feelings of other people and to discuss them. • Ability to recognise complicated feelings and to properly respond to them. • Ability to understand that changes may have positive consequences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate expression of own emotions, moods and feelings. • Expression of own emotional reaction to changes in own life and most approximate environment. • Discussion, reflection and evaluation of changes dividing them into ones depending on himself or herself and to ones independents from himself or herself.
Skills of coping with difficult situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to retain calmness having encountered a problem, to understand it and to find the best solution. • Ability to arrive at and choose solutions, which may help to cope with difficulties and depressive feelings. • Ability to identify, which solution is appropriate in a complicated situation. • Ability to recognise bullying, to better understand rules regarding behaviour without bullying. • Ability to recognise harassment, to properly respond and ask for help. • Ability to become aware of ways how to ease and live through loss as well as to feel better. • Ability to learn how to behave having experienced sorrow and loss; to learn to discuss it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment and maintenance of friendly relations with others (e.g., initiation of conversation, invitation to play, sharing of toys, empathy, etc.) • Initiative to get acquainted: start of a conversation, introduction of oneself, invitation to engage in joint activities. • Demonstration of friendship signals (smile, sharing, assent, support) and tolerance (respect for different opinion, appearance, words). • Self-control, management of own feelings, search for acceptable solutions to conflict situations in mutual disagreements, disputes, etc. • Feeling of moods, concerns and troubles of other people, demonstration of sympathy (to the unhappy, scolded, betrayed).

Category	The programme “Zippy’s Friends”	The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfort, relaxation while plying, moving around, turning over pages of books, observing environment • Management of own emotions in daily activities, attempts to prevent oneself from impulsive behaviour. • Application of at least several ways how to resist behaviour, which is humiliating, inappropriate or suspicious (to call to order, to ask help from adults, to make attempts to make friends with other children). • Reliance on own feelings, intuition and ability to say “no” to suspicious people, retreat in threatening situations (resist, run, reject, scream, etc.), asking for help from a reliable adult. • Withstanding of an invitation from strangers to go for a walk, for a ride, for a treat or for activities, etc.
Skills of provision of and search for support and help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to understand who can help in various situations. • Ability to offer own help in a complicated situation. • Ability to help a friend in distress. • Ability to search for help for oneself and others in complicated or critical situations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking help from adults whom a child trusts. Asking for help, advice and explanation facing misfortune or difficulties.
Belonging to a group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to establish mutual relations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, observation of social norms in a group, home and public places. • Demonstration of signs of belonging to a group: care about others, feeling important and needed, active involvement solving issues topical to a group (e.g., suggest a game, a theme of the project, assume obligations and responsibility for own group, etc.).
Relations with adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to decide when to ask help from adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polite, attentive and tolerant behaviour taking into account requests of adults, respect for their opinion, etc.

Generalising it can be stated that ‘The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education’ emphasises *development of generic skills of social competence*, whereas the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ aims to deepen *this competence from the perspective of development of coping skills*.

3. The generalisation of the results of the research on influence of the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ on development of child’s social competence. Generalizing the results of the research carried out in Lithuania in the effect of the programme on child’s social abilities, attempts were made to highlight these abilities, which are most sustainable. Three studies were generalised: a) the research on efficiency of the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ conducted by B. L. Mishara, M. Ystgaard (2002) in Lithuania, which consisted of 2 stages: in 2001 social and coping skills of children, who had just completed the programme, were assessed; in 2002 the same skills were evaluated one year after the finish of the programme making attempts to establish their persistent value; b) the research on adaptation to school of children after the completion of the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ conducted by O. Monkevičienė, B. L. Mishara, S. Dufour (2006) in 2002; c) the research on children’s social and coping skills after four years of completion of the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ carried out by P. Gudynas, R. Skripkienė in 2012. Table 3 presents systemised children’s coping and social skills established by the authors of the research, whereof development was influenced by children’s participation in the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’.

It should be emphasised that *all the scientific studies highlighted better abilities of applying coping strategies among children, who participated in the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’*. Following the data of the research conducted by B. L. Mishara, M. Ystgaard, children from the experimental group used a bigger number of more efficient techniques of coping with difficulties (on the basis of children’s interviews) just after the completion of the programme; however, after one year this indicator did not improve and only slightly differed from the children in the reference group ($F = 2.88$; $df = 1.193$; $p < .09$). The research carried out by O. Monkevičienė, B. L. Mishara, S. Dufour (2006) in 2002 confirmed that, according to the opinion of parents and teachers, children from the experimental group applied a bigger number of appropriate solutions to problems of adaptation at school; moreover, the solutions were more varied compared to children from the reference group ($F = 48.9$; $df = 1.108$; $p < .001$). The research carried out by P. Gudynas, R. Skripkienė in 2012 showed that statistically significant difference was observed between the coping skills of children, who participated the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ and those of children, who did not complete the programme: they find ways out of complicated situations and are able to help others to cope with communication problems. *Hence, it can be concluded that the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ have a long-term effect on children’s coping skills.*

All the studies disclosed a positive influence of the programme on children's communicative abilities and positive interpersonal relations. Following the data of the research conducted by B. L. Mishara, M. Ystgaard, cooperation skills of children from experimental group (on the basis of children's interview and pedagogical observation) improved, statistically significantly differed from the abilities of children in the reference group and one year after completion of the programme even increased (children's interviews: $F = 7.84$; $df = 1.226$; $p < .006$; teachers' observation: $F = 9.81$; $df = 1.226$; $p < .002$). The results of the research by O. Monkevičienė, B. L. Mishara, S. Dufour (2006) in 2002 revealed that children from the experimental group encountered considerably fewer problems in relations compared to children from the reference group (teacher's opinion: $F = 21.23$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$; parents' opinion: $F = 16.85$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$). The survey of 4th formers carried out by P. Gudynas, R. Skripkienė in 2012 also showed that children from the experimental group liked working together in one group with class mates and helping them to solve problems more compared to those from the reference group. *Hence, the programme 'Zippy's Friends' has a long-term impact on children's communication and collaboration abilities.*

The research results also disclosed better skills of self-control and self-regulation of among children, who had attended the programme 'Zippy's Friends'. According to the data acquired by B. L. Mishara, M. Ystgaard, self-control skills of children in the experimental group (on the basis of children's interview and pedagogical observation) improved and differed from the abilities of children in the reference group and one year after completion of the programme even increased (children's interview: $F = 7.84$; $df = 1.226$; $p < .006$). The research carried out by O. Monkevičienė, B. L. Mishara, S. Dufour (2006) in 2002 demonstrated that children from the experimental group encountered considerably fewer problems of self-regulation and discipline compared to children from in the reference group (teachers' opinion: $F = 11.20$; $df = 1$; $p < .01$; $F = 6.89$; $df = 1$; $p < .01$). The third research did not highlight any statistically significantly better developed skills of self-regulation.

The research by B. L. Mishara, M. Ystgaard demonstrated an increase in children's persistence and empathy after the completion of the programme 'Zippy's Friends', whereas P. Gudynas, R. Skripkienė revealed statistically significantly higher verbal communication skills of children in this group.

The decrease in manifestations of inappropriate children's behaviour was observed: externalization, hyperactivity (B. L. Mishara, M. Ystgaard (2002) and selfishness (O. Monkevičienė, B. L. Mishara, S. Dufour (2006).

The systemised and generalised research results allow to conclude that the programme 'Zippy's Friends' has a sustainable impact on development of children's coping skills and social competence.

It was established that skills linked to participation in the programme 'Zippy's Friends' enable school learners to better feel at school and to avoid bullying. The correlation of

the five skills distinguished by P. Gudynas and R. Skripkienė is as follows: *indicator of wellbeing at school* – 0.46; correlation with *indicator of feeling bullied* is negative – 0.22.

Table 3. Children's coping and social skills, which were influenced by children's participation in the programme 'Zippy's Friends' children (identified by the authors of the research)

B. L. Mishara, M. Ystgaard (2002)		O. Monkevičienė, B. L. Mishara, S. Dufour (2006)	P. Gudynas, R. Skripkienė (2012)
Assessment of social and coping skills after completion of the programme	Assessment of social and coping skills 1 year after completion of the programme	Research on children's adaptation in school	Assessment of social and coping skills 4 years after completion of the programme
314 children in the programme, 104 children in the reference group	229 children in the programme	140 children in the programme, 106 children in the reference group	168 children in the programme, 386 children, who did not participate in the programme
Coping skills	Coping skills	Coping skills	Coping skills
Cooperation	Cooperation	Interpersonal relations	Cooperation
Self-control	Self-control	Self-regulation, discipline	
Assertion	Assertion		Communication
Empathy	Empathy		
Externalisation	Externalisation	Selfishness	
Hyperactivity	Hyperactivity		

4. The impact of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' on creation of safe emotional environment in educational institutions. Making attempts to identify the impact of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' on creation of safe emotional environment in educational institutions, the internet survey of teachers, who implement the programme 'Zippy's Friends', was carried out. The sample included 232 teachers.

Attempts were made to identify the opinion of teachers implementing the programme about the influence of the programme on microclimate in children's group (Fig. 3). The teachers highlighted skills of children's positive behaviour, which were developed by children while participating in the programme: children started demonstrating a wish to help each other (indicated by 82.30 % of teachers), became friendlier (pointed out by 76.29 % of teachers). The respondents also emphasised a decrease in inappropriate behaviour after children learnt to apply coping skills: fewer manifestations of teasing and bullying (68.97 % of teachers), scuffling and aggressive actions (58.15 % of respondents) were observed. Hence, the majority of teachers in the survey noticed an obvious improvement in microclimate of their group.

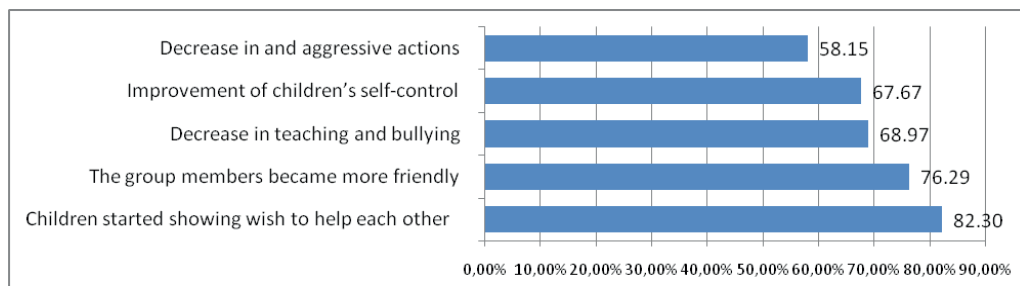


Fig. 3. *The impact of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' on microclimate in a group of children (%)*

The survey also aimed to identify if implementation of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' had any influence on other teachers of an educational institution (Fig. 4). While implementing the programme, the interest of the whole educational institution in development of children's social and coping skills as well as in sharing of ideas and exchanging experience are encouraged. Following the opinion of the teachers in the survey, other teachers became interested in the programme 'Zippy's Friends' (pointed out by 72.8 % of teachers) and in other early prevention programmes (indicated by 29.31 % of the respondents). Other teachers were also actively engaged in development of children's social skills and in coping strategies (pointed out by two thirds of the respondents). The programme 'Zippy's Friends', when implemented in an educational institution, encouraged teachers to be more concerned about children's wellbeing (opinion of almost half of the respondents). Hence, it can be stated that the implementation of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' had a positive effect on attitudes and intentions of other teachers to pay more attention to development of children's social competences and coping skills.

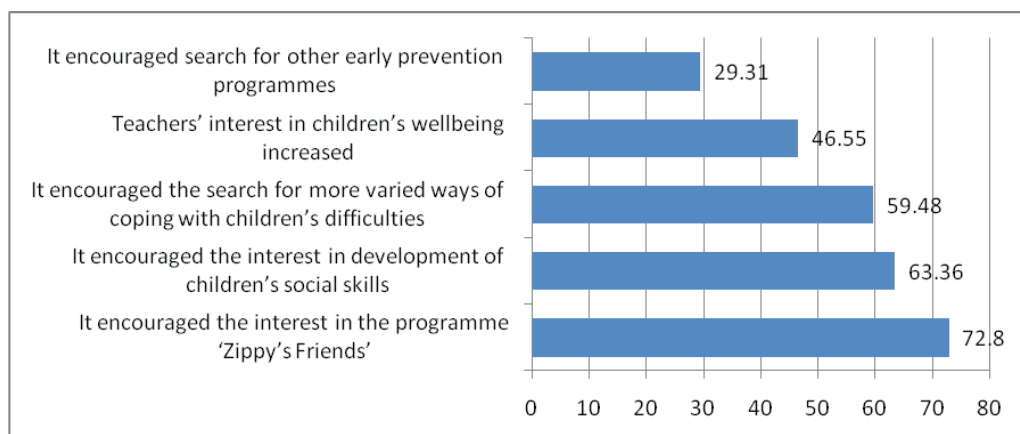


Fig. 4. *The impact of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' on other teachers in an educational institution*

The survey also attempted to establish if the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ had an effect on parents’ attitude towards development of child’s social competence and coping skills (Fig. 5). While implementing the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’, teachers endeavour to involve children’s parents as well, encourage them to maintain the skills acquired by a child in home environment as well. In teachers’ opinion, parents’ confidence in the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ (according to the opinion of 75.80 % of parents) and their interest in development of children coping skills (pointed out by half of the teachers) strengthened. One third of teachers noticed that parents learnt to better understand their children and to help them. One fifth of teachers noticed a higher sensitivity of parents not only to emotional wellbeing of their own children but also to that of other children. Hence, the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ enhances parents’ attention to development of children’s social competences and coping skills.

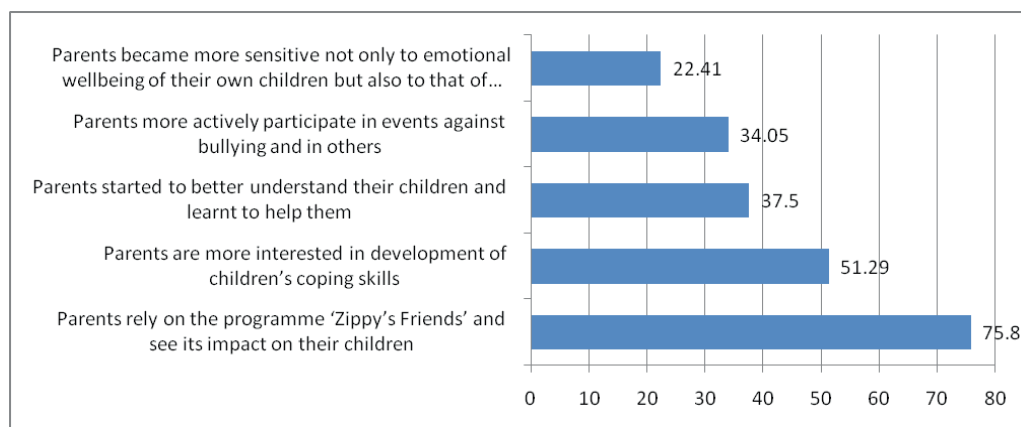


Fig. 5. *The impact of the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ on parents*

The influence of the implementation of the programme ‘Zippy’s Friends’ on overall microclimate of an institution and on interest in development of children’s social competence was also investigated (Fig. 6). Implementing the programme, the teachers observe support from administration of an institution most obviously (pointed out by 72.41 % of teachers). Slightly more than half of the respondents mentioned that issues of children’s social wellbeing are more and more frequently discussed in methodological meeting in an educational institution, that community of an institution started participating in events dedicated to child’s emotional health. More than one third of teachers stated that techniques, which are useful for self-development of child’s social competence were included into the educational programme of a pre-school education institution. According to the teachers, the image of an institution improved due to implementation of the programme (21.12 % of the respondents). Slightly more than one tenth of the respondents

pointed out that teachers became more sensitive to each other. Hence, the influence of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' on institution's microclimate is many-sided.

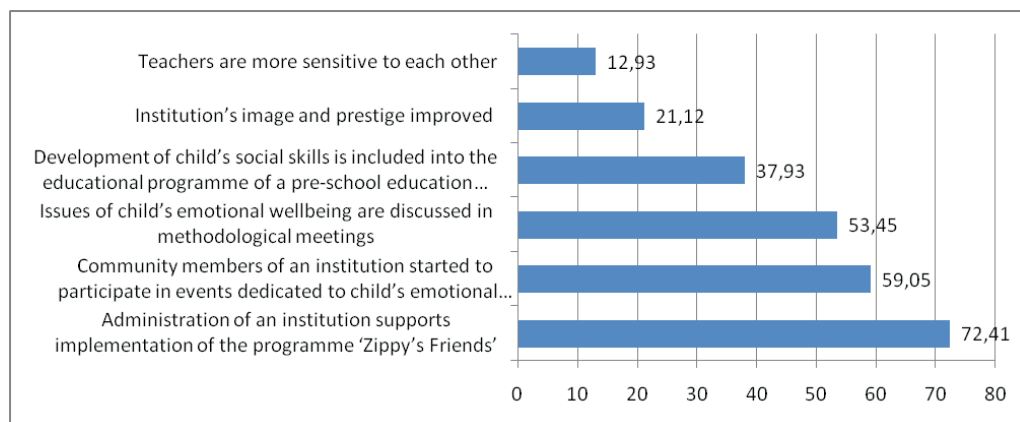


Fig. 6. *The impact of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' on microclimate of the whole educational institutions*

Generalising it can be stated that the implementation of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' has a broad impact on the climate of a pre-primary group as well as an institution, i.e., it contributes to establishment of safe emotional environment.

Conclusions

1. The programmes of early prevention of emotional and behavioural difficulties, with the programme 'Zippy's Friends' being the most significant, are targeted at development of children's coping skills and, therefore, deepen and enrich self-development of children's social competence. The programme 'Zippy's Friends' provides for the self-development of behavioural, emotional and cognitive coping abilities, whereas the outcomes of The General Curriculum of Pre-primary Education in Lithuania emphasises development of general abilities of social competence not including the aspect of coping with difficulties.
2. The systemisation and generalisation of the research on efficiency of the programme 'Zippy's Friends' allowed to highlight a sustainable long-term effect of this programme on children's ability to apply a broad and diverse repertory of coping strategies. Coping abilities acquired in a pre-primary group enable a child to easier adapt in a school and remain with a child until 4th form. A long-term effect was established on children's abilities to communicate and collaborate as

well as on abilities of self-regulation, self-discipline and verbal communication, i.e., the programme has a long-term effect on development of children's social competence.

3. The programme 'Zippy's Friends' implemented in pre-primary groups have a multi-sided influence on the whole microclimate of an educational institution: facilitates establishment of more friendly, more peaceful interpersonal relations based on self-help in a group; it increases attention of all the teachers in an institution and parents to development of children's social and coping abilities as well as encourages activity of all the community members pursuing safe emotional self-educational environment in an institution.

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Ankstyvosios prevencijos programos „Zipio draugai“ poveikis vaikų socialinės kompetencijos ugdymuisi bei saugios emocinės aplinkos ugdymo įstaigose kūrimui

Ona Monkevičienė

Lietuvos edukologijos universitetas, Ugdymo mokslų fakultetas, Vaikystės studijų katedra,
Studentų g. 39, 01806 Vilnius, ona.monkeviciene@leu.lt

Santrauka

Straipsnyje teoriškai pagrindžiama ankstyvosios prevencijos programų paskirtis ugdyti vaikų socialinius ir sunkumų įveikimo gebėjimus, pristatoma sunkumų įveikimo samprata, vaikų taikomos sunkumų įveikimo strategijos, esminiai socialinės kompetencijos ugdymosi komponentai – savo ir kitų asmenų emocijų atpažinimas, probleminių situacijų apmąstymas, tinkamų išeičių pasirinkimas ir pritaikymas, bendradarbiavimas ir tarpusavio pagalba, pagerinant savo ir kitų emocinę savijautą. Teoriškai pagrindžiama ankstyvosios prevencijos programų veiksmingumą lemianti jų sandara – orientavimasis ne į akademinės žinias, bet į integralią socialinę, emocinę ir kognityvinę vaikų patirtį, kompleksiskumas – daugelio socialinių gebėjimų (emocinio supratingumo, empatijos, bendravimo, problemų sprendimo, pagalbos priėmimo bei teikimo kitam ir kt.) plėtotė, įveikimo elgesiu, emocinio bei kognityvinio sunkumų įveikimo strategijų ugdymas.

Siekiant plačiai išanalizuoti programos „Zipio draugai“ poveikį vaikų socialinės kompetencijos ugdymuisi ir saugios emocinės aplinkos kūrimui ugdymo įstaigose, pristatomas kelių etapų tyrimas: a) atlikta Lietuvos Priešmokyklinio ugdymo bendrosios programos ir programos „Zipio draugai“ turinio analizė, išryškinusi specifinį pastarosios programos indėlį plėtojant vaikų socialinę kompetenciją; b) apibendrinti programos „Zipio draugai“ poveikio vaikų socialinės kompetencijos plėtojimui tyrimų rezultatai; c) nustatytas programos „Zipio draugai“ poveikis saugios emocinės aplinkos ugdymo įstaigose kūrimui. Taikyti kokybinio ir kiekybinio tyrimo metodai – teorinė analizė, idėjų sisteminimas ir apibendrinimas, programų turinio (*content*) analizė (Lietuvos Bendrosios priešmokyklinio ugdymo programos ir programos „Zipio draugai“ turinio analizė), programos „Zipio draugai“ įgyvendinimo veiksmingumo tyrimų rezultatų sisteminimas ir apibendrinimas, internetinė apklausa.

Programos „Zipio draugai“ veiksmingumo tyrimų sisteminimas ir apibendrinimas padėjo išryškinti tvarų ilgalaikį šios programos poveikį vaikų gebėjimui naudoti platų bei įvairių sunkumų įveikimo būdų repertuarą. Priešmokyklinėje grupėje įgyti sunkumų įveikimo gebėjimai padeda vaikui lengviau adaptuotis mokykloje ir išlieka iki IV klasės. Ilgalaikis poveikis nustatytas vaikų bendravimo ir bendradarbiavimo, savireguliacijos ir

savidisciplinos gebėjimams, t. y. programa turi ilgalaikį poveikį vaikų socialinės kompetencijos plėtojimui. Programa „Žipio draugai“ turi įvairialypį poveikį visam ugdymo įstaigos mikroklimatui: padeda susikurti draugiškesniems, taikesniems, savipagalba grindžiamiems tarpusavio santykiams grupėje; padidina visų įstaigos pedagogų ir tėvų dėmesį vaikų socialinių ir sunkumų įveikimo gebėjimų ugdymui; skatina visos bendruomenės aktyvumą, siekiant sukurti saugią emocinę ugdymosi aplinką įstaigoje.

Esminiai žodžiai: *socialinė kompetencija, saugi emocinė aplinka, ankstyvoji prevencija, sunkumų įveikimas, priešmokyklinio ugdymo programa, programa „Žipio draugai“.*

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