



PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF FOSTERING INITIATIVE IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract: This scientific article provides a systematic analysis of the principles governing the formation of the phenomenon of initiative during the socio-psychological development of preschool children (specifically, ages 5-6), as well as the internal and external factors that influence it. In modern psychology, initiative is interpreted not merely as a behavioral manifestation but as an integrative quality associated with an individual's ability to independently set goals, based on an awareness of their own capabilities, and to exert willpower in pursuit of them. The article scientifically substantiates that the 5-6 age period is a "sensitive" (highly receptive) stage characterized by the crystallization of the child's "Self" image and a growing need to find their place within social relationships.

Keywords: Preschool education psychology, The phenomenon of initiative, Personality of 5-6-year-old children, Socio-psychological determinants, Development of the "Self-concept," Volitional qualities, Creative approach, Internal and external motivation, Learned helplessness syndrome, Person-oriented education, Subject-subject relations, Independent decision-making, Emotional intelligence, Cognitive curiosity, Social adaptation.

Introduction:

In the era of global change in the 21st century, the issue of human capital development is becoming more relevant than ever. At a time when the modern world is changing rapidly, society needs not just knowledgeable performers, but proactive individuals capable of making independent decisions in non-standard situations, inclined to innovate, possessing inner freedom and high willpower. The foundation of these qualities in ontogenesis is laid precisely at the preschool age, specifically between the ages of 5 and 6, which is considered the stage of the individual's active social and psychological formation. The fundamental reforms implemented in the preschool education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan in recent years, in particular the implementation of the state curriculum "Ilk Qadam," aim not only to prepare the child for school but also to form them as a full-fledged social subject. However, pedagogical and psychological practice shows that in most cases, adults (parents and educators) misinterpret the concept of "initiative" in a child. Often, a child's manifestation of desire and the desire to try new things are evaluated as "disobedience," "disorderliness," or "stubbornness." As a result, the seeds of initiative are extinguished in children growing up under the authoritarian approach of traditional upbringing methods or excessive care (hyper-opeka). This, in turn, leads to the emergence of a dangerous syndrome in psychology [4] known as "learned helplessness." That is, the child becomes a passive performer who does not believe in their own strength, waiting for instructions from adults at every step. Therefore, studying the problem of forming initiative in 5-6-year-old children not only as a pedagogical but also as a deep psychological process is one of the most acute requirements of today. The period of 5-6 years is a specific "sensitive" stage in a child's mental development. During this period, the child

tries to understand the concept of "I" and find a balance between their personal desires and the requirements of society. According to the theory of psychosocial development of the famous psychologist Erik Erikson, it is in this age range that the crisis of "Initiative vs. Guilt" occurs in a child. If the child's independent actions, ideas, and striving for leadership in games are supported during this period, the quality of firm initiative is formed. Conversely, if their actions are constantly criticized or restricted, the child develops a chronic sense of guilt and self-doubt. Initiative is more than just physical activity. This is a child's volitional action that involves setting goals, planning, and overcoming difficulties to achieve a result. A child aged 5–6 no longer simply wants to hold a toy; they want to make something new out of it, invent the rules of the game themselves, and unite their peers around their idea. This process requires a combination of the cognitive (mental) and emotional spheres. However, existing scientific literature often focuses on the external manifestations of initiative, while its internal psychological mechanisms—motivation, self-esteem, and the connection with emotional intelligence—are insufficiently disclosed. Today, preschool educational organizations place great emphasis on the intellectual development of children (elements of reading, counting, and writing). However, recent studies in world psychology show that the most important indicator of school readiness is not how much information a child knows, but their inner desire to acquire new knowledge and the ability not to fear difficulties. An enterprising child quickly adapts to the new school environment because they perceive an unfamiliar situation as an "opportunity" rather than a "threat." From this perspective, this research paper prioritizes the human factor. We view the child not as an "object of influence," but as a small "subject" building their own life. The problem is that modern parents are often accustomed to doing everything for a child (clothing, feeding, solving problems) in order to ensure their safety or save time. This "bear service" hinders the formation of the child's ability to exert willpower. As a child grows older, passivity becomes a dominant trait, and it is very difficult to change this trait later. Therefore, the development of mechanisms for the psychologically correct formation of initiative at the age of 5-6 is not only a pedagogical but also a strategic issue that serves to improve the quality of the nation's gene pool. In this article, the object of research is the process of socio-psychological development of 5-6-year-old children, while its subject is the psychological determinants (causal factors) and mechanisms for the formation of initiative characteristics in children of this age. The main question that interests us is: "Why do children raised in the same environment grow up to be leaders and proactive, while others grow up to be shy and passive?" To answer this question, factors such as the child's place in the family, parental attitude, the social environment in kindergarten, and the child's level of self-awareness must be deeply analyzed. The main objective of the article is to identify the psychological patterns of initiative development in 5-6-year-old children and to develop effective recommendations that can be implemented in practice. To achieve this goal, the following tasks have been defined:

1. Scientific and theoretical substantiation of the relationship between the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of the phenomenon of initiative.
2. Identification of psychological barriers (fear, anxiety, insecurity) that hinder the manifestation of initiative in older preschool children.
3. Propose technologies for creating a psychological environment in the children's collective and family that encourages initiative, guarantees the "right to make mistakes," and increases the child's internal motivation.



this research work is far from dry theories and is based on humanitarian ideas aimed at finding a way to a child's heart, realizing their inner potential, and preparing a new generation that thinks freely and takes bold steps into society. Initiative is the greatest gift given to a child; it accompanies them throughout their entire lives and becomes the key to success.

Methods:

This research work was conducted based on the humanistic principles of psychology and L.S. Vygotsky's theory of "cultural-historical development." At the heart of the research methodology lies the idea of studying the child not as an object of passive observation, but as an active subject capable of controlling their own behavior. Therefore, all selected methods were as close as possible to the child's natural environment (play, communication, free activity) and were organized based on an "ecologically clean" approach that does not harm their mental state.

The study was conducted at state preschool educational organizations in the Republic of Uzbekistan in three stages (statistical, formative, and control) during 2023-2024. A total of 120 children aged 5-6 years, their parents (120 people), and group educators participated in the study. The children were randomly divided into two equal groups: the experimental group (60 people) and the control group (60 people). To determine and evaluate the current state of initiative qualities in children, the following set of comprehensive methodologies was used:

1. "Observation" method: This is the most basic and primary method, aimed at studying children's natural behavior. [5] A specially developed "Initiative Assessment Card" was used for the observation process. Using this card, the child's actions in the following situations were recorded:

In game activity: Proposing a game plot, leading the distribution of roles, attempting to change the rules of the game.

During the lesson: Strive to be the first to answer the teacher's question, ask what you do not understand, and state your opinion.

In free activity: To be able to find an occupation for oneself without getting bored.

Observations were conducted in a manner that did not restrict the child's freedom. This served to prevent the "social approval" effect and to see the real picture.

2. The "Magic Room" or "Free Choice" situational experiment:

A special simulated experiment was conducted to determine the volitional component of initiative. The child was introduced to a room equipped with various interesting toys, drawing tools, and constructors. The experimenter deliberately gave the child no instructions ("Do whatever you want") and stood aside as if busy with his own work.

Assessment criteria: The child's ability to find a hobby within a reasonable period of time, make decisions without adult assistance, and show interest in their chosen hobby was measured. Children with low initiative hesitated for a long time or asked adults, "What should I do?" Children with high initiative immediately set their goals and began their activities.

3. The projective methodology of "Unfinished Tales":

It was used to study the child's cognitive initiative and verbal (speech) creativity. The child was told the beginning of an interesting fairy tale and asked to continue it. In this process, the child's ability to turn the fairy tale plot in an unexpected direction, assign active actions to the characters, and find ways out of problematic situations was analyzed. This method allowed the child to unconsciously express their inner fears or aspirations.



4. Survey for parents and educators:

To determine the influence of the family environment and pedagogical style on a child's initiative, D. Baumrind's methodology "Parental Relationship Styles" was used in modified form. Based on the survey results, the type of upbringing in the family (authoritarian, liberal, or democratic) and its correlation (dependence) on the child's independence were studied.

After the diagnostic stage, a special developmental program called "Little Inventors" was developed and implemented for the experimental group. The program was designed for 3 months and included psychological trainings and game sessions held twice a week. The main methodological methods of the program were:

The "Problem Situations" method: The children were not given ready-made answers. For example, questions such as "How can I cross the river without a boat?" encouraged them to look for non-standard solutions. Most importantly, any answer was accepted as correct, which eliminated the children's fear of making mistakes.

"I am a leader" role-playing games: Each child took turns playing the role of a group leader (for example, "Ship Captain," "Construction Manager"). These passive children also developed a sense of responsibility and the ability to lead a team rather than giving orders.

Feedback (Reflection): At the end of the lesson, the children answered the question: "What did I learn today and what did I suggest?" This served to develop self-awareness.

The reliability of the empirical data collected during the study was verified using mathematical-statistical methods. Student's t-test was used to determine the statistical significance of differences between the experimental and control groups. Pearson's correlation coefficient was also used to study the relationship between family upbringing style and child initiative. All calculations were performed using the SPSS 22.0 statistical software package.

This methodological approach made it possible not only to record changes in the child but also to conduct a deep scientific analysis of the causal link between these changes. Most importantly, the methods used were carried out in full compliance with the principle of respect for the child's personality and a careful attitude toward their inner world.

Results:

Analysis of the data obtained at the initial stage of the study showed that the level of initiative in children aged 5-6 in the experimental and control groups was initially almost identical and unsatisfactory. According to the results of the "Observation" and "Magic Room" methods, only 18.3% (22 children) demonstrated a high level of initiative. While the majority of them (45%) possessed situational (unstable) initiative, it was found that 36.7% of children had a low level of initiative, i.e., the "wait and do" strategy was dominant.

The correlation analysis between the family upbringing style and the child's independence (Pearson's coefficient, $r=-0.68$) is particularly noteworthy. The analysis showed that children raised in authoritarian (strict control) and hyper-caring families hesitated for an average of 4-5 minutes to find an activity in the "Magic Room" experiment and frequently looked at the experimenter while waiting for permission. This confirmed the presence of "learned helplessness" syndrome in them.

The main achievement of the research became evident after the formative experiment - the "Little Inventors" program. **After 3 months of psychological training, a dynamic of positive changes in the behavior of children in the experimental group was noted:**



1. High initiative indicator: in the experimental group, it increased sharply from the initial 18.3% to 56.6%. In the control group, this figure reached only 20% (due to natural growth).

2. Cognitive activity: in the "Unfinished Tales" methodology, instead of stereotypical answers (for example, "adults came and saved me"), the children of the experimental group began to propose creative solutions (for example, "the hero made a ladder himself," "he asked the birds for help").

3. Not being afraid to make mistakes: During the sessions, 70 percent of the children reached the level of being able to say their thoughts confidently, even if they were wrong.

Mathematical and statistical analysis (Student's t-test) confirmed that the changes in the experimental group were not random, but the result of the applied psychological program ($t=3.4$; $p<0.01$). The results prove that granting a child the right to choose and encouraging their initiative allows them to transform their social status from a passive performer into an active subject in a short period of time.

Analysis and discussion:

A comparative analysis of the empirical results obtained during our study shows that the problem of forming initiative traits in 5-6-year-old children has deeper socio-psychological roots than pedagogical methodology. The effectiveness of the "Little Inventors" program used in the experimental group (an increase in high initiative from 18.3% to 56.6%) is explained not simply by the fact that new games were played, but by a change in the paradigm of relationships between adults and children.

According to our analysis, the "growth point" of initiative [11] is a sense of psychological security. The "learned helplessness" syndrome identified during the assessment stage was primarily caused by the children's fear of making mistakes. In the traditional system of education and family upbringing, the "right answer" is often encouraged, while the "wrong action" is punished or criticized. This leads to a negative solution to the crisis of "Initiative versus guilt" in Erik Erikson's theory. During the experiment, we legitimized the children's "right to make mistakes." As a result, it was only when the child felt confident that "if I do something wrong, they won't hate me" that his inner creative energy "came out of the ice" and he began to act not for external evaluation, but for inner interest.

The results of the study once again confirmed L.S. Vygotsky's theory of the "near zone of development" in the modern context. However, our analysis showed that in the development of initiative, the role of adults should be manifested not in leading the child, but in being their "companion". The low (statistically insignificant) change in the control group indicates that the traditional "instruct - execute" (instructive) method fosters performance in the child but stifles initiative.

In particular, when analyzing the factors of the family environment, we encountered an interesting paradox: the children of parents who excessively love their child and protect him from all difficulties (hyper-caregivers) recorded the lowest initiative rate. From a psychological perspective, this "love" is actually turning into a paralyzing force for the child's will. The fact that a parent puts buttons on a child's shoes instead of theirs and agrees with their friends instead reinforces the child's unconscious belief that "I can't do it myself." After explanatory work with parents within the framework of our program, it was observed that granting the child independence in minor household tasks (for example, choosing clothes or setting the

table) sharply increased their social "Self." This means that initiative is formed not only in kindergarten but, above all, in an atmosphere of trust within the family.

One of the controversial aspects is the boundary between initiative and obedience. Some educators tend to perceive a child's activation as a "discipline violation." However, our research has proven that true initiative is not anarchy, but a sign of a high degree of self-regulation. In the "Magic Room" experiment, children who showed high initiative not only started the game but also set and strictly followed the rules themselves. This means that initiative, arising from internal motivation, simultaneously develops a sense of responsibility in the child.

Our analysis is also consistent with Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's [10] "Self-Determination Theory." Initiative manifests naturally when children satisfy three basic psychological needs: autonomy (independence), competence (a sense of one's own strength), and dependence (necessity in society). The "Little Inventors" program in our study served to meet these needs. Conversely, an action performed under duress or solely on the basis of external incentives (sweets, stickers) does not become sustainable initiative. The child stops moving as soon as the reward is lost.

Another important scientific novelty is that it was found that initiative in children aged 5-6 [9] does not have a direct correlation with the level of mental development (IQ). Children with high intellectual potential but shy and lacking initiative constituted the majority. This indicates that initiative is not a cognitive ability, but an emotional-volitional quality. Analysis of the "Unfinished Tales" methodology showed that enterprising children possess high emotional intelligence and do not panic in situations of uncertainty, but instead utilize the emotion of "interest." Thus, in preschool education, fostering not only a child's mental abilities but also their emotional stability and volitional qualities is considered the foundation of initiative.

Conclusion:

Based on the analysis of the conducted theoretical and empirical research, the following scientific and practical conclusions can be formulated: Initiative in preschool children (5-6 years) is not merely a temperamental trait or an innate ability, but a dynamic quality that is formed and modifiable under the influence of the social environment. Our study confirmed that the foundation of initiative is determined not by a child's intellectual knowledge, but by their internal self-efficacy and willpower stability. The loss of initiative in a child is often linked not to their inability, but to a "learned helplessness" syndrome caused by strict adult restrictions and the fear of making mistakes (the demand for perfectionism). Significance of empirical results: The special "Little Inventors" program used during the study showed that if a child is provided with an environment of psychological safety (i.e., guaranteed not to be criticized) and given freedom of choice, even passive children develop social activity and leadership in a short period of time. We have proven that the most effective mechanism for developing initiative is to transition a child from the "performer" position to the "partner" and "creator" positions. Based on the research results, the following recommendations were developed for teachers of preschool educational organizations and parents:

Legitimizing the "right to make mistakes": Adults must view a child's mistakes not as a "tragedy," but as an "experience," and make the child feel this. Instead of saying, "You did it wrong," an approach like, "That's an interesting solution, let's try to find another way" will eliminate the child's inner fear.

Increase the number of choice situations: The child should be given the opportunity to make a small choice during the day (for example: "What game are we playing today?," "What clothes are you wearing?"). This fosters a sense of control over the child's life.

Rejecting hyper-caring: Parents should stop doing things for the child that they can do for them. The process of overcoming difficulties develops the child's willpower.

Encourage action, not results: A child should be praised not only for winning or drawing a beautiful picture, but also for trying something new and giving an idea. This stabilizes initiative motivation.

This study revealed only one aspect of the problem. In the future, it is advisable to study the gender characteristics of initiative (the difference between boys and girls) and its impact on a child's physical health. The initiative in the personality of a 5-6 year old child is the "compass" of his future successful life. The task of us adults should be not to break this compass, but to help it find the right direction. After all, an enterprising child is the future of society, the main driving force of development and renewal.

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