

Ewa Jagiełło

University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in Siedlce

Mária Vargová

Catholic University in Ružomberok

Economy as a Crucial Component of Elementary Education Curriculum

Introduction

The aim of the article is to demonstrate how important it is to teach children a way of economic thinking from an early age. Children become acquainted with the real context of their existence; they develop their skills of planning, arranging, and managing activities connected with economy on the micro-scale. This results in the building of a research approach to life which can help children make good decisions when considering either their choice of items to be bought, or the purpose of saving money. Nowadays having such a skill seems very rare, particularly because there is a wide tendency to promote a commercial style of living which may cause real danger in bringing up children who, if they lack this knowledge, may purchase goods which are not worth very much as their quality may be low. This reveals the necessity to deal with many "rubbish" things that deceive particularly young customers.

Wide perspective justification for economy implementation in elementary education curriculum

Analyzing the pros and cons of implementing the basics of economy in the elementary education curriculum as novelty following the latest tendencies, a constructive solution appeared. Some arguments indicate

the need to start with this problem. The fundamental one turned out that economic education has always been the subject of debate all over the world, the evidence for which can be found in the following documents:

- The white book entitled “Policy in a Branch of Financial Service in 2005–2010s”, published in May 2007.
- The green book concerning retail financial services on an equal market.
- The resolution of the European Parliament concerning policy in the financial services area, accepted in July 2007.
- The Ecofin³ Council (**Economic and Financial Affairs Council**), established on 8 May 2007. It appealed to Members of the European Community to hasten to undertake activities to increase awareness of citizens concerning the necessity to acquire knowledge within the financial sector, with simultaneous preservation of the proper investor’s protection.
- The European Commonwealth Commission, in the report concerning equal European market of the 21st century, defined financial education as the basic element of its efforts aiming at assuring that the common market will bring immediate profits to European citizens, enabling them not only to choose the best financial services offered on the European market, but also to acquire the basic knowledge on personal finances (KOM (2007) 724).

³ The Ecofin Council (Economic and Financial Affairs Council) belongs to one of the European Community institutions. The Ministers for Economic Affairs and Ministers for Finance of the European Community Member Countries are included in Ecofin. Together with the Common Affairs Council and the Agricultural Affairs Council, it is one of the oldest configurations of this organ. The Ecofin Council deals with formulating and accepting the establishment of the economic policy, which is a major instrument for achieving financial cohesion among the member countries of EU. Moreover, it supervises the member states in relation to progress on the way towards Economic and Currency Union.

However, it is clear that technical progress, globalization and innovations induce a level of complications which are becoming more salient. For many people it is difficult to predict when and whether at all financial offers shall change. Some research (Financial Knowledge of the Poles, 2009) has been undertaken and indicates that the level of knowledge of finances and the economic basis among consumers is rather low. "The main problem of the society is not only a low level of knowledge, but also lack of motivation to change this situation. The majority of those surveyed consider economic knowledge to be boring, however useful in life. According to them, it should be transmitted in an easy and pleasant way, e.g. on the radio or television" (Kaczmar, 2013, p. 2). After considering the respondents' opinions, Polish Television together with the National Bank of Poland made a TV series entitled "Take it easy, It's only Economics", which aimed to increase the economic competence of the Polish people in an accessible and clear way.

The section "Animations" from the website NBPortal.pl is worth recommending because of a series of multimedia presentations and animated films about economic subjects, as well as the central bank, marketing and advertisement.

The European Commonwealth Commission, in an announcement entitled "Financial Education" of 18 December 2007, mentioned some problems which are faced by consumers of financial products. They are as follows:

- Many people cannot plan their financial future; they are concerned or they choose the products which do not fulfil their needs. Therefore, the probability that these people will fall into a trap of debts or will have other problems is increasing, particularly when their personal situation changes, e.g. because of a loss of relatives, divorce or losing a job;
- People often overestimate their knowledge concerning financial services;
- For many people, the world of finances is too complicated to understand: they realize more and more often that they lack the basic

skills necessary to understand and make financial operations. This can have important consequences when it comes to the ability to negotiate with the individuals or firms offering suitable services or to receive from them the best offer (KOM (2007) 724T).

There is a need to improve the level of economic awareness in the society. Everyone should know the rules of the mechanisms on the economic market. Knowledge on the way the market functions allows us to reasonably manage our own financial funds. The above analysis implies that the ability to plan expenses and predict the consequences of making economic decisions is the most essential aspect of avoiding failure on the financial market.

Planning skills grounded in economic education

The means of payments are understood as limited funds which are used to fulfil economic needs. Another notion is associated with this. It is the category of **unlimited funds**. Here the problem appears: how to fulfil unlimited human needs with limited funds? The economy is the answer to this question; it examines the ways of making decisions concerning the use of limited funds in order to achieve as many benefits as is possible, and to fulfil all the needs.

In this context one can pose a question: Does the economy have only a financial aspect? To answer this question, one may apply definitions included in the literature on the subject.

Etymologically, the word **"economy"** originates from combining two Greek words: *οίκος (oikos)* – house and *νομος (nomos)* – rule. According to historical resources, this term was used for the first time by the Greek philosopher Ksenofont to define household management. The ancient people associated this word with the rules of running the house. Another version coming into existence is the word "economy" which comprises the integration of such words: *oikos* – house, household and *nomeus* – man managing, directing.

In foreign language dictionaries we can recognize five meanings of the word:

1. To study the law that rules production, exchange and division of the goods in society;
2. To study the rational management of home funds;
3. To study the management of people living within mutual social bonds;
4. The ability to use something rationally in the economic area, in short economy;
5. In the past, the royal estate the profit from which was assigned for the needs of a court in Poland (Kopaliński, 1983, p. 114; Wiśniakowska, 2009, p. 239).

It is essential to take effective action to achieve the desired effects. Limited funds force us to take decisions and simultaneously make choices. A child also faces making a choice: for example, he or she considers whether to buy a lollipop or candies, because a parent allows the child to choose only one thing. When choosing something, we bear certain consequences, including financial ones. For instance, if the the above mentioned child decides against the lollipop in favour of candies, the lollipop becomes an alternative cost. This demonstrates that the need to shape the economic attitude among children manifests itself naturally. When a child makes a choice, he or she is unintentionally affected by the criteria of rational economy; these include:

1. Consideration of what is the most important
2. Search for alternative solutions
3. Careful analysis of every presented possibility.

Following this way of analysing decisions, step by step, teaches respect for money, economical management, and the rules in the world of finances. It also influences children's attitude to finances, although, first of all, children learn simple economic aspects from their parents. From the earliest

age they accompany parents during shopping, and this provides a good opportunity to learn. A child observes how parents plan the shopping. Parents sometimes read a shopping list that has been prepared earlier, and put the products into the shopping basket. For a child, at this stage of life, it can be too complicated because of many reasons. First, the child may have a problem with reading; second, there are the same things on the shelves, but they come from different companies. What distinguishes them is: the brand, packaging and price. Adults tend to analyse, considering a few different aspects, and then finally make a choice, trying to save some money. For the child this is also inevitably an excellent lesson – how to save money, for its value is estimated by the limited funds in a budget.

In the EU countries, there are a lot of initiatives in order to help teachers teach a proper approach to finances. Numerous programs, realized by different institutions, are directed towards both the adults, young people, and children. There are various forms for transmitting economic knowledge in the educational context. They depend on the consumer. For younger clients, children's economic universities are organized, board and computer games are created, animated films are made, fairytales and stories are written or financial education programs are promoted, for example, "From a Penny to Pound" or the programme "A Pile of Pence". For slightly older children, contests, competitions and conferences are organized. Moreover, there are magazines that introduce selected aspect of the world of finance to young people, for example a magazine for the young manager "Ekonopedia" (accessible on the website www.ekonopedia.pl). In Poland, the National Bank of Poland supports most of these undertakings, when promoting economic knowledge to be transmitted to private and institutional receivers. However, pre-school education is not taken into consideration.

Based on its analysis of the programmes which have already come into effect in the EU, the Commission formulated some essential rules to be elaborated within effective economic educational programs; these include:

Rule No. 1: Financial education should be actively supported and it ought to be constantly accessible at all stages of life.

Rule No. 2: Economic education programmes should be carefully adapted to the particular needs of people who apply them. A prerequisite for the achievement of this goal is the undertaking of research concerning the present state of knowledge to ensure that it is possible to identify those issues in which the lack of knowledge is the most conspicuous.

Rule No. 3: Consumers should gain knowledge relating to economic and financial matters as early as possible. The proper national organs ought to consider including knowledge within this sphere as a compulsory subject in educational programmes.

Rule No. 4: Economic education programmes should include the universal tools to inform the participants about the necessity of broadening knowledge concerning financial matters, and developing the ability to estimate financial risks.

Rule No. 5: Knowledge concerning finance, transmitted by companies offering financial services, should be open to the public in an honest, clear and fair way. It is necessary to care about the consumer's interests in order to eliminate the opportunities of cheating them.

Rule No. 6: People who directly implement the economic education programme should receive some sufficient funds and proper training in order to follow the instruction efficiently with faith in their skills.

Rule No. 7: It is necessary to support the coordination among the founders at the national level, to achieve a clear division of duties, exchange experiences more easily, as well as use accessible resources in a rational and proper way, according to priorities. It is also necessary to improve international cooperation between the institutions offering economic educational programmes, to exchange the best training practices more easily.

Rule No. 8: Authors offering economic educational programmes should seasonally assess and update the implemented programs when necessary, so that they could always respond to the best applied solutions.

According to the first and the third rule, the basic economy should be introduced from an early age. The authors of the pre-school curriculum share the view that the aim of pre-school education is the development of social skills among children because they are crucial in an adult life. The

child, before he or she enters the school, is able to behave in different everyday situations and tries to predict the results of his or her behaviour. A child can make a choice between good and evil. While building the system of values, a small child can see the difference between the poor and the rich. Moreover, he or she is preoccupied with a sense of respect towards them (Annex No. 1 to the order of the Minister of National Education of 23rd December 2008). Pre-school age is a time when some habits are consolidated, the patterns of behaviour are coded, and, moreover, self-confidence and financial confidence are developed. One cannot forget that the child learns very efficiently through games, in the world of dreams and illusion. Fairy tales, stories and legends enable the arrangement of this space. Through them, it is possible to introduce a child into the sphere of economic matters, in an easy and pleasant way. Some elements of economic education can be found in numerous fairy tales, literary or television stories.

Acquainting preschool children with economic culture should undoubtedly take place at the proper level in order to ensure that they can understand such basic principles in a context that will allow them to develop to their full potential. The key observation of the report "A Small Consumer and Finances" reveals that adults are not prepared to teach economics to children in kindergartens, schools and families. There is a lack of methods, programs, conceptions and very often knowledge. To make the situation better and solve such problems, the program "Propaedeutics of Economic Understanding" has been implemented in the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities. It includes the following issues:

- The function and role of money in people's lives.
- The purchaser's value of coins and banknotes, goods equivalent.
- The ability to use money in buying and selling transactions.
- Teaching how to manage pocket money and savings. Planning expenses.
- The influence of advertisement on economic ways of thinking among children.
- Institutions in which the economic mechanism works: the shop, store, bank, cashier's office.

- The acquirement of management skills with tricks and marketing traps (e.g. in a shop).
- The creation of skills to make money.
- Charity work (Gneezy U., Meier S., Rey-Biel P. 2011, p. 199).
- Social and economic status: the poor and the rich.
- Basic economic notions like: a coin, trade, cash, banknote, price, consumer, client, selling, buying, change, shop assistant, payment card, credit card, bank account, virtual money, saving, loan, credit, debt, promotion, discount, payment.

Finally, it is worth becoming acquainted with the list of benefits of financial education promotion prepared by the European Commonwealth Commission; it is classified in the three areas:

List No. 1: Classification of economic knowledge popularization benefits

Individual	Economic	Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It will help children to understand the value of money and the rules of management in relation to the funds and the rules of saving – It will assure the necessary skills of living on one's own among the young people – It will help adults to plan their home budget – It will teach how to prepare people for unexpected situations in life – It will teach people how to invest and save money for retirement – It will prepare people to avoid being victims of payment fraud – It will allow people to understand conceptions and financial products better – It will teach people how to make better choices in the case of financial service, therefore it can decrease the risk of being trapped in financial trouble 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It will contribute to the stabilization of the financial system – Decrease the number of citizens who do not pay off financial debts (loans, credits) – Increase diversity⁴, and the safety of economic and investment products – Increase the efficiency of the financial sector – Rising prosperity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Problem of financial exclusion (rejecting higher-cost and higher-risk offers) – Everybody saves money, even people with low income

Source: elaboration based on the European Commonwealth Commission Bulletin, Brussels 18th December 2007 entitled "Financial Education", KOM (2007) 808

⁴ Diversification – making different products or getting involved in new areas of business in order to decrease the risk of running economic work. Through diversification not only the probability of loss is decreased, but the possibility of gaining the highest profit is also reduced.

Everyone can spend money without any education but it is necessary to learn how to save, invest, plan expenses and apply the ability to make money. It is better to start teaching some economic aspects at an early age, by engaging parents and teachers. It is essential to include small children in the financial management sphere, which will raise the level of economic knowledge within the society. A child who becomes interested in finances from an early age will manage to cope with many problems in the future. Therefore, our thesis is that it is a myth that introducing the knowledge on spending and saving money at a very early stage shall result in the development of their materialistic attitude to life.

Conclusion

Children are vividly interested in a wide variety of things happening in the world and they ask adult lots of questions. Children at the pre-school age ask a lot of questions; they are curious where money comes from, why parents go to work, why poor people exist, what someone who works in a bank does, what may be found in a cash desk, why it is not possible to buy everything, etc. Every question should be listened to and answered; they cannot be ignored. This is an adult's duty to elaborate a program involving a series of classes concerning economic issues. One has to be aware of the fact that among children at the pre-school age "some attitudes showing management appear only at a very low level. Only some of them are able to show ingeniousness and independence when searching for solutions in situations regarding what to do in a case where a lack of money is observed. Most children at such an age show strong dependence on the adult's decisions and relatively low creativity. This can be fully accepted at the level of pre-school education, although it seems useful to talk about the value of money, saving, rational planning of expenses, making decisions. Moreover, it is necessary to know in life, what we can choose not to purchase, what we can wait for, what is more beneficial and what will turn out to be a loss (Dąbrowska, 2013, p.19).

In summary, those who undertake the task of introducing small children into the world of finances and business should remember about a very important side of life in a nursery school– parents. They are the first crucial source of any kind of knowledge to be transmitted into child’s education. This fact cannot be neglected. Nobody else, only parents, seem to be a “bank” for their child for a long period of time (A. MacEwan, 2013, s. 16–18). Parents perform the roles of financial advisors while children are making the first financial decisions.

Bibliography:

- "Financial Knowledge of the Polish" report of Kronenberg Foundation at City Handlowy, Maison Research House, September 2009, <[http:// www.citibank.pl/poland/kronenberg/polish/files/fk_badania_01.pff](http://www.citibank.pl/poland/kronenberg/polish/files/fk_badania_01.pff)>
- Annex No. 1 to the order of the Minister of National Education of 23rd December 2008. (*Journal of Laws, Act of 15th January 2009 No 4, item 17*), *Curriculum for pre-school education for kindergartens, nursery schools at schools and other forms of pre- school education.*
- Dąbrowska W., *Why it is Worth Remembering to Talk with Children about Economy?*, Dyrektor Przedszkola, February 39/2013.
- Gneezy U., Meier S., Rey-Biel P., *When and Why Incentives (Don't) Work to Modify Behavior*, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Volume 25, Number 4, Fall 2011.
- Kaczmar K., *Financial Competences of the Polish in a Market Economic*, (in:) *infos nr 5(142)*, 7th March 2013, p. 2 from the website: <<http://orka.gov.pl>> from 2nd April 2013.
- Kopaliński W., *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych* [Dictionary of Foreign Words], Wiedza Powszechna, Warsaw 1983
- MacEwan A., *Early Childhood Education as an Essential Component of Economic Development*, Massachusetts, January 2013.
- The European Commonwealth Commission Bulletin*, Brussels 18th December 2007 entitled "Financial Education:.. KOM (2007) 808.
- Wiśniakowska L., (elaboration), *Słownik wyrazów obcych* [Dictionary of Foreign Words], PWN, Warsaw 2009.

Abstract

Business, economy and finance are very popular subject-matters in the contemporary world. This is why it is important to introduce them, step by step, from an early age. "Pocket money", as well as allowing a child to be involved in the family's financial affairs, seems to be necessary for preparing children to develop their management skills which will be useful in their future, adult life. A child ought to know the value of money and possess some ability to apply it. Children gain such rudimentary knowledge on the basis of interaction with the social environment and everyday experience, through participating in economic exchange purchase-sale, witnessing the withdrawal of money from a cash ma-

chine by relatives, using the post office, etc. However, it is a teacher's duty to help children increase and systematize this knowledge in a process of early childhood education. The skills gained by children during the schooling will help them in the future. They will become responsible participants in economic life, making both rational choices and decisions which will affect positively their chance to gain success in personal and professional life.

Keywords: economic, education, child, consumer, finance, money.

Information about the authors:

Ewa Jagiello PhD – a graduate of Chemistry-Mathematics of The Higher School of Agriculture and Pedagogy in Siedlce (graduated in 1995). In 2007 she achieved a PhD in Humanities in the field of pedagogy from the Educational Research Institute in Warsaw. Since 2008 she has been an employee of the Institute of Education at the Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities. From 2010, a Board Member of the Society for Development of Educational Initiatives and a member of the Polish Committee of World Organisation for early childhood education, OMEP Baltic & Black Sea Circle Consortium, Association of Theory and Education at KNP PAN, Central European Exchange Program for University Studies – student and teacher exchange programme including Central Europe Universities. Her research interests relate to mathematical and economic education for small children. She is the author of over 90 articles in journals and collective works, at the national and international levels. She is the author of an academic textbook entitled "Cooperation of Preschool with Family and Environment" (2013). She has organized five national scientific conferences entitled: "Innovation in Elementary Education" (April 2010), "Education Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" (November 2010, 2011, 2012), "Child in the culture of modern world" (2011). She has organized four international conferences: "Vedecká s účasťou vzdelávaniu matematickému venovaná medzinárodnou konferencia v škole primárnej", "Matematika v škole primárnej-rôzne end, rovnaké body", 24–26 April 2013, Prešov, Slovak Republic; I International Conference on "Elementary Education – Examples in practice", Chełm, 28–29 April 2013; (XI) International Scientific Conference in "Education in Creating Modern Fact-capabilities and Limitations", 3–5 June 2013, Chlewiska; XII International Scientific

Conference in "Education Towards the Future – Challenges and Abandonment",
3–5 June 2013 Chlewiska.

Contact address:

Dr Ewa Jagiełło

University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in Siedlce

Institute of Pedagogy

ul. Popieluszki 9

08–110 Siedlce

e-mail: ewa_jagiello@poczta.onet.pl

Mária Vargová works as a lecturer at the Department of Pre-school and Elementary education at the Faculty of Education of Catholic University in Ružomberok. She deals with the issues from the area of multicultural education and the theory and practice in pre-primary and primary education.

Contact address:

PaedDr. Mária Vargová, PhD.

Catholic University in Ružomberok,

Faculty of Education

Department of Pre-school and Elementary Education

Hrabovská cesta 1

034 01 Ružomberok

Slovak Republic

e mail: maria.vargova@ku.sk