

University of Szeged  
Doctoral School of Education  
Social and Emotional Education Programme

TEODÓRA SZITÁS

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF 4–6-YEAR-OLD  
CHILDREN’S SOCIAL PROBLEM-SOLVING IN VOJVODINA AND IN HUNGARY**

*Summary of the PhD dissertation*

Supervisor:

Dr. habil. László Kasik  
associate professor



Szeged, 2025

The main aims of the doctoral dissertation were (1) to assess preschool children's social problem-solving (SPS), (2) to explore their mothers', fathers' and teachers' opinions about the children's problem solving, and (3) compare these results in Hungary and Vojvodina. A literature review of previous research identified that there has been no instrument that could measure the components of Chang et al. (2004) SPS model with verbal and visual tools for preschoolers. Therefore, such a new instrument was developed for the studies presented, to assess preschoolers using verbal and visual tasks. Altogether six instruments were used: the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ, Goodman, 2001); the Social Problem-Solving Parent/Teacher Questionnaire (SPSQ, Kasik & Gál, 2014); the Family Questionnaire (FQ, Szitás, 2020); Problems list (Kasik & Gál, 2017); the Person- and Situation-Based Social Problem-Solving Questionnaire (Gál & Kasik, 2015); and the Stories and Pictures for Assessing Preschoolers' Social Problem-Solving task battery (Szítás & Kasik, 2020). The dissertation introduces three empirical studies: (1) a pilot study in Vojvodina (n = 38); (2) the first large-scale study in Vojvodina (n = 147); and (3) the second large-scale study in Hungary (n = 162). By using several types of triangulation parents, teachers and children participated in each study. The pilot study indicated, amongst others, that the implementation of visual tools can be effective with preschoolers. The results of the two large-scale studies showed that mostly four-year-olds are the ones who stand out from the other age groups, often using impulsive and avoidant problem solving - however, to a lesser extent, these characteristics are also typical of five- and six-year-olds. Based on the comparative study, the similarities and differences between the perceptions of parents and teachers were outlined. According to the SDQ parents perceive children as more prosocial than teachers in both samples. Furthermore, according to the SPSQ Vojvodina teachers consider the expression of negative emotions to be most characteristic in four- and five-year-olds, while in Hungary mothers found these in five- and six-year-olds, and fathers in six-year-olds. The studies revealed important, significant differences between the perceptions of both parents and teachers, and also between mothers' and fathers' in both country samples. This was particularly pronounced in the case of externalizing problems. The findings of the dissertation can contribute to developmental interventions where the focus is on social competence as well as the involvement of parents and teachers to help the development of children's social problem-solving.

*Keywords:* preschool children, parents' and teachers' opinions, triangulation, social problem-solving, Hungary and Vojvodina