

A Study of Conceptualisation of Quality of Life by Czech Fifth-Graders

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Abstract:

Introduction: This study summarized the results of research on quality of life as conceived by Czech fifth-graders.

Methods: The subjects responded in writing to three tasks that asked them to describe the characteristics of quality of life. The first task required them to picture what they imagined under a magazine headline entitled “Quality of Children’s Lives”. The second task required them to explain this headline to their classmates, while the third task asked them to generate their own ideas of a bad life, normal life, and excellent life. The sample consisted of 174 fifth-grade pupils from two Czech localities. The pupils’ statements were open-coded, and then the codes were cumulated to create content categories.

Results: Ten large categories emerged from the data that depicted children’s ideas of quality of life. Data processing the frequencies of the content of the categories were computed to show the ranking of the characteristics of the quality of life as selected by the children. The study revealed that the fifth-grade pupils attributed a wide range of valuable characteristics (social, psychological, environmental, spiritual and personal) to the concept of quality of life.

Discussion: In pedagogical theory, the quality of children’s lives is a concept with a number of meanings. It includes qualities related to bio-psycho-personal, social, and spiritual aspects of life.

Limitations: The quality of children’s lives is a multidimensional concept and we can study only some of them.

Conclusions: Responses to the third research question can be summarized into three key answers, illustrated by relevant statements of the Czech fifth-grade students.

Key words: quality of children’s lives, primary education, pupils’ conceptualisations, fifth-grade pupils.

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1 Introduction

It is first necessary to understand the concept of the quality of children’s lives in the context of this study. The concept is applied to many human activities and is used in many scientific fields, e.g. philosophy, theology, social work, psychology, biology, medicine, ecology, sociology, politics, economics, etc.

The research of the quality of life originally proceeded in three directions:

- 1) objective – as a summary of objective indicators, for example research on the quality of living conditions of human beings;
- 2) subjective – as a summary of subjective indicators, for example research on the uniqueness of the quality of life of an individual’s “life journey”; and
- 3) a combination of subjective and objective indicators (Mareš, 2006, p. 11). This study concentrated on the pupils’ subjective perceptions of quality of life because it has been infrequently investigated in educational research.

The results of studies that dealt with the relationship of objective conditions and subjective experiences have inspired other studies. On their basis, general models of quality of life have been created, for example the Veenhoven’s model (2000) and the 3Bs model by the Canadian scholars Raphael, Rukholm, and Brown (1996) and others (being, belonging, becoming – to be, to belong somewhere, and to endeavour for something, to become something – see Mareš, 2006, pp. 15-16; Barnes, 2013; 2015). Mareš placed the topics of general models into a table that demonstrates the complexity of the structure of conceptualisation (2006, p. 17; Veenhoven, 2000).

Table 1

Bases of conceptualisations of the quality of life

	<u>External qualities of life</u> (<u>environment</u>)	<u>Internal qualities of life</u> (<u>individual</u>)
<i>Life chances, opportunities in life</i>	Physical appurtenance Social appurtenance Community appurtenance	Physical (somatic) being Psychological being Spiritual being
<i>Results of life, life profile</i>	Spiritual being: behaviour towards the environment, spiritual needs, faith Physical endeavour: voluntary work	Practical endeavour Free time Endeavour to achieve personal growth and personal development

This model makes it possible to identify if fifth-grade pupils approach the characteristics of quality of life from the perspectives of life changes and opportunities or if they concentrate on life results. Further, the model makes it possible to identify whether pupils prefer external (environmental) or internal (individual) causes of quality of life.

The hierarchical model of quality of life by the Slovak psychologist Kováč (2001, p. 40, as cited in Mareš, 2006, pp. 18-19) is another interesting way to structure the conceptions of the quality of life. Kováč's model specifies three hierarchical levels. The first level is basic, existential, and all-human, and it has six areas: 1) somatic condition; 2) mental functioning within normal limits; 3) a functional family; 4) material and social security; 5) a life-giving environment, and 6) basic abilities for survival. The second level is the middle (*mezzo*) level, which is individually specific as well as social, with the following six areas: 1) robust health; 2) favourable social inclusion; 3) level of social development; 4) friendly environment; 5) acquired competencies, and 6) experiences of satisfaction and wellbeing. The third and highest level is cultural and intellectual, which represents the meta-level of the quality of life and includes six areas: 1) trouble-free ageing; 2) experiencing appreciation; 3) manifestation of goodness; 4) contribution to life progress; 5) pro-social behaviour, and 6) the intensity of self-cultivation. Kováč's model indicates the time-dependence of the quality of life. This study assumed that the pupils' conceptualisations would be concentrated in the first basic level.

Mareš (2006) reports on the results of a meta-analysis of 68 models of quality of life, which was performed by a Canadian research team led by M. C. Taillefer (2003). The authors distinguished three types of models with different levels of generality: 1) the conceptual model, the simplest one, which states the dimensions and characteristics of the conception of quality of life but does not specify their mutual relations; 2) the conceptual framework is a group of models which describe, explain, or forecast the principle and direction of the relations between the elements and dimensions of the quality of life; and 3) the theoretical framework is a group of models that include the structure of the elements and, moreover, their connections with the theory that explains these connections. This study concentrates on the first level of quality of life.

The problems with understanding the conceptualisation of quality of life and its definitions were analysed by Mareš in 2006. The lower frequency of studies in connection with the quality of children's lives, for the purposes of this study, led to the acceptance of the following characteristics as a theoretical basis.

The quality of children's lives is a multidimensional concept defined by the World Health Organisation as follows:

It concerns an individual's perception of our position in life in the context of the culture and the system of values in which an individual lives; expresses the individual's relation towards his own objectives, expected values, and interests ... it includes the individual's somatic health, mental condition, level of dependence on the environment, social relations, beliefs, and faith in a comprehensive way – all in relation to the main characteristics of the environment... Quality of life expresses a subjective evaluation which takes place in a certain cultural, social and environmental context (Mareš, 2006, p. 25).

This definition served as a basis for the development of a model for the parameters of the quality of life of children, which will be employed in this study. As few studies have been previously undertaken that examine the quality of children's lives in the pedagogical context, this Czech case study helps fill a scholarly void. It specifies the following possibilities concerning the quality of children's lives, which can also be followed in education (Lukášová, 2010).

Table 2

A Model for enhancing the development of the quality of pupils' lives in education (Lukášová, 2010)

<i>A child as a pupil and the qualities of that child's life, which lead to the development of personality in adulthood</i>	<i>Values and objectives of primary education</i>
Possibilities of somatic growth in respect to maturing – identification of these potential abilities by teachers and pupils.	Somatic growth and maturing – physical and mental health, hygiene, environment, etc.; values of a healthy lifestyle, material conditions for health, psychomotor and sensory presumptions for learning.
Possibilities of mental development – areas of cognitive, emotional, volitional, and motivational development.	Mental development – intellectual (cognitive), affective (emotional), motivational (volitional).
Possibilities of social development – mutual meeting, development of relationships, cooperation, friendship, understanding, competition, group role, status, prestige.	Social development – perception of relationships, social experience, respect, cooperation, understanding, satisfaction in the school class and school environment, love of others and of the world, love of truth, etc.

<p>Possibilities of developing the child's ego– realisation of personal possibilities, self-knowledge, self-experience, self-evaluation, and self-development.</p>	<p>Development of personal qualities and self-development – self-exceeding tendencies of personal ego, self-realisation, self-knowledge, self-respect, self-control, self-evaluation, self-confidence, belief in the possibilities of personal development as well as in higher guidance.</p>
<p>Possibilities of intellectual (spiritual) development in axiological, aesthetic, ethical, and creative areas (looking for values and the development of creativity).</p>	<p>Intellectual development– leading towards the values of truth, beauty, good, justice, and other intellectual values and virtues of humanity, zest for discovering and creating life, truth, beauty, and goodness, creation and self-creation at all the mentioned levels, existential and self-exceeding cultural aspects (creativity, wisdom, character, respect).</p>

This model provides the theoretical framework for the categorisation and interpretation of the results of this research.

Concerning the quality of children's lives, the first large investigation in the Czech Republic was organized by Mareš (2006; 2007; 2008). Svatoš and Švarcová (2006; 2007; 2008) conducted the first empirical investigation of the conception of children's lives as expressed by student teachers in the Czech Republic. In another investigation, Lukášová (2006; 2007; 2008) assessed the knowledge of this concept by student teachers. At the same time, another study was focused on the subjective understanding of quality of life by fifth-grade pupils. Concerning the pupil's growth, the fifth grade closes the first phase of school attendance and is developmentally stable. Individual differences in perception of the quality of life can reveal deeper layers of pupils' subjective attitudes to life, which may be unnoticed by curriculum authors.

Clearly, the idea of the notion of quality of life must involve physical, mental, personal, social, material, and spiritual dimensions. To meet these requirements, this study focuses on the areas in which the subjective conceptualisation of the quality of children's lives is expressed by teachers specializing in primary education. It also concentrates on children's conceptualisations of the quality of life and how they describe it. These conceptualisations are the subjective perspectives of 10 to 12-year-olds determined by a number of factors: personal experiences, the opinions of schoolmates and friends, the opinions of parents, as well as by facts presented in media. However, it is not so important to learn what these conceptualisations are determined by as it is relevant to learn what they look like, so that teachers can respond to them. This is the domain referred to as

pedagogy of care for well-being (McMullen, Buzzelli, & Yun, 2016, p. 259; Seligman, 2012).

2 Methodology

2.1 Research questions

This research project aims to shed some light on the conceptualisations of the notion of the quality of children's lives by primary school pupils. Specifically, it concentrates on how pupils conceive this notion from three different perspectives: (1) their subjective interpretation of the notion, (2) the way they communicate the notion to peers, and (3) their description of some qualities of children's lives.

The research questions were as follows:

1. What conceptualisations of the quality of life do children describe when asked to interpret a magazine headline entitled "Quality of Children's Lives"?
2. What conceptualisations of the quality of life do children describe when asked to communicate this notion to their classmates?
3. What characteristics of the quality of children's lives do they emphasise when asked to describe the terms "a bad life", "a normal life", and "an excellent life"?

The research questions used correspond to the tasks assigned to the children. They are aimed at the identification of their subjective conceptualisations of the quality of life.

2.2 Research sample

The research sample consisted of fifth-grade pupils who originated from two localities in the Moravian section (the eastern half) of the Czech Republic. The reason for the focus on fifth-grade pupils was that prior research has indicated that this age group is developmentally capable of understanding the notion of quality of life and can produce meaningful descriptions thereof. The total size of the sample was 174 pupils: 75 boys (43%) and 99 girls (57%). They were recruited from two localities. The pupils came from compact classes, i.e. they were pupils who were taught together during the entire school year. The sample was made out of convenience, with the understanding that this would limit the implications drawn from the research findings. The composition of the sample, in regards to age and gender, is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

<i>Sample composition</i>							
<i>Age</i>	10		11		12		Pupils in total
<i>Gender</i>	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
<i>Number</i>	10	22	49	65	16	12	174

The age interval of 10-12 years is considered to be a relatively serene, balanced and stable phase in a child's development (Vágnerová, 1997). At this age, primary schooling is completed (Gesell et al., 2005; Adair, 2014). At the same time, it is the age of the first stage of the influence of pupils' experiences with quality of life.

2.3 Methods of data gathering

The data-gathering technique used an open questions format and was based on the work of Mareš (2006; 2007). It required the pupils to work out three tasks, which they wrote on an A4 sheet of paper. The pupils' descriptions were content-analysed inductively to produce content categories (Given, 2008; Constat, 1992), of which the frequencies were then calculated to provide a ranking of content categories.

The tasks addressed to pupils were as follows:

Task 1: If you see the headline "Quality of Children's Lives" in a magazine, what do you imagine? Think for a while and then write your answer below.

Task 2: How would you explain the headline "Quality of Children's Lives" to a peer so that he/she would understand it?

Task 3: We have prepared a table which you have to fill in. Imagine some of your classmates and friends and categorise them in the table according to the categories of quality of life therein. Please explain why you think that they have a bad, normal, or excellent life. Please do not write any names of children.

The table contained a description of a bad, normal, and excellent life:

Bad life: he/she probably has a bad life; the quality of his/her life is not good, he/she lives a worse life than the majority of children I know.

Normal life: he/she has a somewhat normal life; its quality is average.

Excellent life: his/her life is excellent; in my opinion, his/her life is better than that of most of the children I know.

The children filled in the answer sheets during normal school lessons; they did it anonymously, providing only two demographic data, i.e. gender and age. The data gathering was conducted by Saporová (2007) and Švikruhová (2009) within their masters' theses research under the supervision of the author of this article. This methodology made it possible to display the data in the following tables and graphs which provided answers to the research questions.

3 Results

3.1 Categories

The data allowed for the extraction of ten broad content categories that encompass the individual aspects of quality of life as described in the answers to the first task. The categories are:

- 1) Psychological aspect
- 2) Education
- 3) Health
- 4) Material aspects of life
- 5) Friends
- 6) Upbringing
- 7) Environment
- 8) Values
- 9) Needs
- 10) Family

The ideas were expressed by children approximately at the age of 11 which made it difficult to determine the borders of these categories. And that the researchers knew the pupils well, as well as the schools they attended, made the analysis easier. The content categories are described as follows:

- 1) The psychological aspect included the statements of pupils, which connected the quality of life with a number of psychological aspects. They pointed to the need for love, close relationships with family members or friends, happiness, and satisfaction. The mental states such as joy, "not sorrow", and the like were expressed as well. Furthermore, an appreciation of good relationships with familiar people and the need for friendly communication with them were detected.

- 2) Education includes statements that link the quality of life with education, instruction, and learning. The emphasis was placed on success at school. The pupils wrote about school achievement and good marks. They also projected their future lives. Progress at school is a reward, as it improves the probability of finding a good job.
- 3) Health is a rather broad category. It includes the statements of the pupils that connected quality of life with health and the absence of illness or a handicap. To describe health, the pupils used terms connected with physical movement and sports. The unhealthy manifestations were related to spending time on the computer. There were also statements describing addiction, for instance, tobacco or alcohol consumption. The pupils pointed out healthy relationships in the family, which were demonstrated by parents not shouting at each other.
- 4) Material aspects of life include statements describing awareness of the fundamental things needed for life. The pupils listed clothing, food, and drinks. They ranked the need to have quality meals much higher than the need to possess a computer. The need for money was listed as well, as most common needs can be met with that.
- 5) Friends were delineated as a separate category because several pupils stressed that friendship is a fundamental characteristic of their subjective conceptualisation of the quality of life. It is important for them to have friends and play and have joy with them. They sought friendship as support both in school and outside of it, in games and in hobbies.
- 6) Upbringing is a category expressing the requirements of good upbringing of children. The pupils connected the requirement of good upbringing with their obedience (someone who is obedient has no problems) and respecting the school code. Some pupils relate the notion of good upbringing with proper behaviour towards elders. Such pupils were referred to as being well brought up.
- 7) Environment is a quality of life category related to living conditions. Notions that were listed are a clean and peaceful environment, which is socially affable, and in which nobody is abused. The pupils expressed their view that a favourable environment is not present in institutions that care for orphans or children neglected by their parents.
- 8) Values is a category that included statements emphasising freedom and an option of independent decision making, as well as the possibility of voluntarily assisting the elderly or those who need help. It is interesting to

see how intensely some 11-year-old pupils expressed the value of freedom in their lives and decisions.

- 9) Needs is a category that expresses other urgent characteristics linked to the quality of life. Among them care (by the one who cares for children) as well as the need for a regular rhythm in life, which is associated with keeping the daily schedule in the family and in school were rated. Some statements concerned voluntarily taking care of something (an animal) or someone, and also the possibility of doing freely whatever the child wished.
- 10) Family is a category expressing a clear relationship between the notion of family and the subjective view of the quality of life. The family creates a stable home and the parents are good-hearted. The family is also healthy if there is a family member who the children can approach if needed. The family should consist of both parents; it should be a nuclear family. The family should not be susceptible to substance abuse.

3.2 Research results and their interpretation

Figure 1 presents the summary of findings – the categories identified in the answers to the first question. The categories were determined by key characteristics in the pupils' statements.

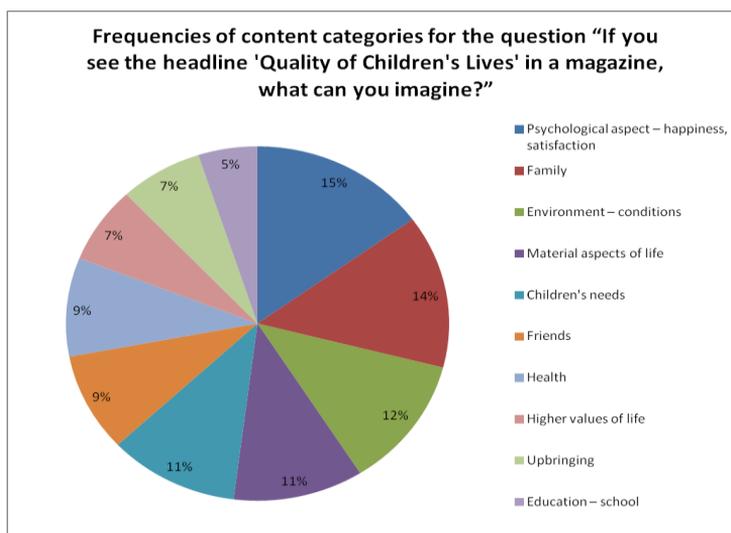


Figure 1. Frequencies of content categories for the question “If you see the headline “Quality of Children’s Lives” in a magazine, what can you imagine?”

The partial answers of pupils from the first task will now be presented. It is obvious from Figure 1 that under the phrase, “quality of children’s lives”, fifth-grade pupils imagine, in the first place, qualities associated with psychological aspects – happiness and satisfaction (15% of the children’s conceptualisations). For children, feelings of satisfaction and joy in life are the most frequent choices. Generally, they link the quality of life with psychological well-being, i.e. with inner contexts of quality of life. Qualities associated with family life (14% of the children’s attitudes) occupy the second place. The pupils recalled relevant associations within their family lives, so the external context prevails. Qualities associated with the environment and living conditions had the third highest frequency, representing 12% of the children’s statements (“How we live, in a clean environment, what we do, and how we perceive it.” “I imagine a different environment, different upbringing, health, love, and understanding.”). Here, the external context of the quality of life was conceptualised. Qualities associated with material conditions (i.e. food, living conditions, clothes, finances, and others) and children’s needs, which are described by children as the need for love, safety, and family in this meaningful range, occupy the fourth and fifth places, comprising 11% of the statements (“Someone loves us and somebody takes care of us.” “Love means that somebody loves us and that we have a family.”). Here, both external and internal individual meanings of quality of life were conceptualised. The quality of life associated with friends and health, comprising 9% of the statements, occupied the sixth and seventh places. The statements describing the qualities of life associated with higher values of life and the statements describing upbringing, making up 7%, took the eighth and ninth places in the table. Finally, the fifth-grade pupils associated quality of life with school and education in 5% of their statements.

In sum, the proportion of internal and external contexts of the quality of life of children is 42% to 58% (see Figure 1). Czech fifth-grade students associate the title of the magazine article with external contexts (in 58 % with the family, life and material conditions, friendship and quality education). Internal contexts of the quality of life are associated with the needs for satisfaction, with their child needs and the needs for health, as well as with relevant life values (42%).

The next section analyses the categories by specific examples of pupils’ statements so as to thoroughly understand the results of the first question. In the examples, the letter “G” indicates girls, while “B” is for boys. The number indicates age.

The quality of life that is connected with family often contains concrete examples: “When his father died, he stopped learning. The quality of life is higher when living with both parents rather than with one” (11, B). The description of elements connected with the quality of life does not necessarily

need not contain excellent conditions. Most frequently, pupils confined themselves to expressing the absence of some negative characteristics: “If they are not abused. Or they are not seriously ill” (11, G). When pupils wanted to specify the notion of conditions, they described contrasts: “His life is satisfactory or unsatisfactory; he has a place to dwell in, or no place to dwell in” (11, G). The students expressed their needs faithfully: “Freedom – doing what one wishes” (11, B). Sometimes a specific need of a child was expressed: “That they feel secured. Yes, you have to be secured” (11, B). The students offered positive perspectives on the spiritual aspects and higher values of life: “You are happy, you are free” (11, G). Frequently, they had a moral tone, both with boys and girls. “Children should appreciate things in their surroundings” (11, B). “Each parent should take care of his/her children” (11, B). “Children should not smoke or drink alcohol” (11, G).

In answers to the first question, 351 pupils’ statements have been identified. Concerning their content, 10 key categories appertain which have been categorised according to the characteristics they share. The results show that the environmental aspects prevail over the individual ones. All dimensions of the quality of life included in the model (Lukášová, 2010) were represented. First of all, these are the social aspects that relate to the quality of life of children within the family, among friends, and receiving a quality education at school (37% of statements). Next, there are statements concerning the individual aspects of psychological requirements of satisfaction (15%), happiness and the requirement of safety and, surprisingly, also freedom (in total 26%). In these psychological statements, the children’s needs for self-realisation and for adequate self-evaluation may be distinguished. Further, higher value needs and ideas of moral aspects of life (7%) as well as the emphasis on bio somatic health were present (9%).

Examples of answers when answering task No. 2: How would you explain the headline “Quality of children's lives” to a peer so that he/she would understand it?

Repetition of task wording:

“Some children may have a bad, normal, or excellent life” (11, G).

“A human being can have a bad, normal, or excellent life” (11, G).

Simple short answers:

“Life” (10, G).

“You have got a family and money” (11, B).

“That he is doing great” (10, G).

A description of several elements that are related to quality of life:

Some answers emphasise that not everything needs to be great:

“They will take care of you better and you will have everything you want; however, it does not always need to be great; there are many contradictions” (10, G)

“That they have what they want and they have parents” (11, B).

Mentioning contradictions:

“The quality of children’s lives is different, some of them are better off and some of them are worse off” (11, B).

“For example, somebody is spoiled and somebody is starving in Africa” (11, G).

“How the children are doing, if good or bad” (12, B).

Seeing positive things:

“To have good parents, to visit a good school, nice clothes, many friends, to have what I wish from time to time” (12, G).

“To have the right to our own decision, to take care of some animal to make the child happy” (12, B).

Moralization:

“He must be healthy, he cannot be tortured, he cannot drink alcohol and smoke” (11, B).

“You have to obey, get dressed well; you are not allowed to give up and you must reach your goal” (11, G).

Using comparisons, dramatization:

“When a doll is torn, it is unusable” (11, G).

“I would show it to him by pretending to be conceited so that he would understand it” (11, G).

“I would tell my brother that it is just like being locked up somewhere for your whole life, that it is terrible” (10, G).

Mentioning a personal example:

“I imagine being outside with my friends and with my hamster and laughing” (11, B).

“I have my family, I have a home and toys and I have something to eat” (11, B).

“Mum, dad, brother, I have a place to play” (10, G).

Mentioning a concrete example from the lives of other children:

“Some children are born disabled, and they will live in a normal way” (11, B).

“That the children have their parents, they are not in children’s institutes and homes, they are healthy and without illnesses” (11, G).

“I would tell him about the way the children live” (11, G).

Attempts to explain the term quality of life:

“How the child is doing, who its friends and parents are, what its environment for life is” (12, B).

“How the child is brought up, what the child eats, in what environment it lives” (12, G).

“Mum and dad, siblings who love you and devote their free time and love to you, basic things for life, family” (11, G).

In the second part of the findings that concern explanations of the concept of quality of life to a friend, students presented different categories. Unique statements were provided, from which representative qualitative examples have been chosen. The great array of statements with which pupils can explain the concept of the quality of life to classmates have been presented in the answers to the second question. The answers to the third question are displayed in the following graphs. Three subcategories of answers can be distinguished, i.e. a bad life, a normal life, and an excellent life.

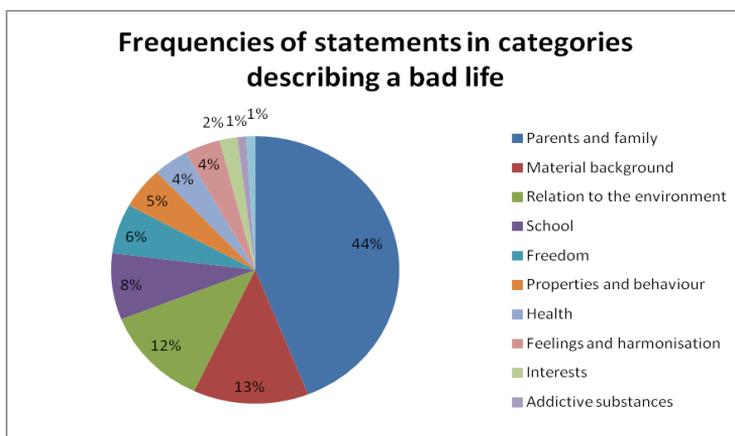


Figure 2. Frequencies of statements in categories describing a bad life.

Evidently, the concept of a bad life for Czech children aged 10-12 is associated with the characteristics of the family. The family and the parents are frequent sources of perception of a bad life by pupils (44%). The frequencies were calculated from 555 pupils' statements.

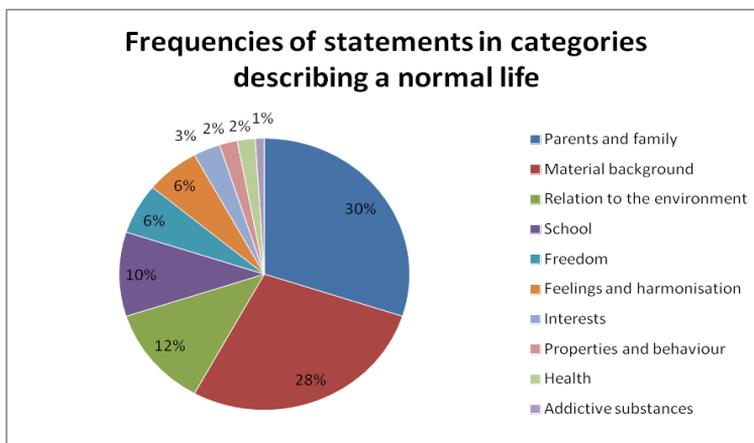


Figure 3. Frequencies of statements in categories describing a normal life.

The family is also the most important factor in pupils' characteristics of a normal life (30%). The results were calculated from 509 pupils' statements associated with the quality of normal life. References to parents were frequent. A normal life is associated with school characteristics. Material provisions play an important role for children (30%) as well as other environmental characteristics of quality of life (12%). A similar percentage of pupils' statements were related to the quality of school (10%).

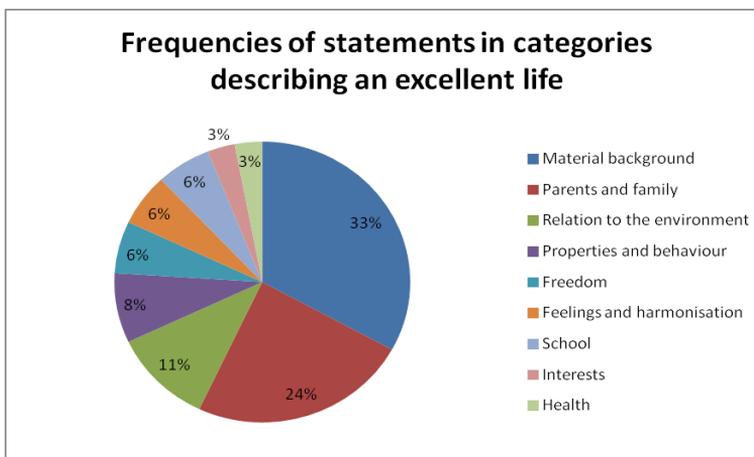


Figure 4. Frequencies of statements in categories describing an excellent life.

An excellent quality of life is represented by 598 statements, which are, however, distributed differently than in the case of previous qualities. First,

pupils connect the quality of life with above-standard material provisions (33%). The relationships within the family are also important for the perception of the quality of life. Almost one-quarter of the pupils' statements was associated with this social quality of life (24%). In pupils' statements, school plays a minor role in the perception of an excellent quality of life (6%).

To illustrate the categories, only those examples with the highest frequencies in the statements were selected.

Responses to the third research question can be summarized into three key answers, illustrated by relevant statements of the Czech fifth-grade students.

- The first finding shows that the social characteristics of the family and parents play a relevant role in conceptualizing quality of life by fifth-graders.

In the categories of bad and normal lives, the pupils' experiences of family life appeared. In answers that conceive of a bad life because of family problems (44% of the pupils), the following experiences were described: "He has bad parents, they beat him, harass him, the parents scold him."; "He has no parents, they died."; "His parents have divorced, he has only one parent."; "She is not loved and has no home."; "They are not interested in him, they do not care for him, they do not worry about him." It can be inferred that the pupils link the quality of life to the quality of a family. A bad family is one which does not support the child, is non-existent, or is incomplete.

As for the pupils' conceptualisations of quality of life connected with a normal life, family (30%) is in the first place. However, the pupils used arguments different from those used in describing a bad life. For instance: "His parents love him, he feels their love."; "She has a family and relatives, she does not live alone."; "She has both her parents."; "She has nice and good parents."; "His parents are interested in him, they care for him, and they create a proper family background."

Concerning the experiences with an excellent life, the pupils rated family second, after material conditions. As many as 24% of the pupils used the following arguments: "She has both her parents and an excellent family."; "His parents love him; he feels their love and care."; "Their parents are interested in them; they care for the children and create a good background at home."; "She has good parents; it is fine even if one has only one parent."

- The second important finding is the appearance of material and environmental conditions in conceptualisations of the quality of life by

fifth-grade pupils. These play a major role in their descriptions of an excellent quality of life.

Material conditions are the main factor connected with an excellent quality of life (33%). The most frequent arguments: "Rich parents have a lot of money, enough finances, and good jobs."; "The pupil receives whatever he wants from his parents."; "They have luxurious holidays, take trips, and enjoy other fine events."; "She has plenty of toys and branded goods."; "She has a large, even unlimited, allowance."; "They possess a house, villa, swimming pool, estate, and an expensive car." Arguments that advocate a normal quality of life were made by 28% of the pupils. Examples of their statements are as follows: "They do not have an abundance of things, nor a lack of them."; "She has a lot of things, adequate to her needs."; "She has enough money, as much as needed; her parents earn good or average salaries."; "She lives in a flat and has a room of her own."; "She has nice meals and drinks." Concerning a bad quality of life, 13% of the pupils associated it with an unfavourable material background. For instance: "She has little or no food and drinks and has unfavourable living conditions."; "She has no money or toys."; "She has dirty clothes or not enough clothing, or her clothing is worn out."; "She has no home, she is homeless."

The relationship to the environment was rated third of the three qualities of life that were described. Concerning a bad quality of life, the pupils emphasised relationships with friends (33 statements out of 65): "She has only a few friends or none at all." As many as 45 statements out of 64 were associated with a normal quality of life. "He has friends, he has a few very good friends." The same applies to the excellent quality of life. "He has many friends. He has a lot of good friends."; "His friends love him, he is popular among his friends, he is a good team member."

- The third important finding concerns school and education, which play important roles in the pupils' conceptualisations of the quality of life.

The final interpretation concerns the category of school, which interestingly appeared only with characteristics of a bad and normal quality of life. For example, pupils presented the following characteristics related to a bad quality of life: "Pupils have bad marks; they are slow at learning."; "They are admonished by the teachers, they forget to bring learning materials to school." Concerning a normal quality of life, the statements were, "Pupils have good marks; they are good at learning."; "The pupils learn; they are of average intelligence." These statements demonstrate how important success at school is for the pupils' quality of life. As far as the excellent quality of life is concerned, the school plays only a minor role; it was ranked the seventh place.

4 Discussion

In pedagogical theory, the quality of children's lives is a concept with a number of meanings. It includes qualities related to bio-psycho-personal, social, and spiritual aspects of life. Therefore, it is important that future teachers should understand all these aspects and use them in their everyday practice.

The results of this study show that for the Czech fifth-graders, especially the aspects of their psychological experience of life, their satisfaction, and experiencing happiness are important. Furthermore, the social context of the quality of life is clearly significant, with the emphasis on family conditions and relationships with parents.

The data on the conceptualisation of material aspects of the quality of children's lives are interesting because only 13% of all the statements were related to a bad life, whereas 28% of statements were related to a normal quality of life, and 33% to an excellent quality of life.

Only 11% of children provided answers to the research stimulus: *When you see the headline "Quality of Children's Lives" somewhere in a magazine, what do you yourself imagine by this phrase when you think of it a bit?*

5 Conclusions

The obtained empirical results of the research into the quality of children's lives give a strong motivation to continue the research and expand upon it (Lukášová & Mareš, 2014). The decision to use open questions as the data-gathering method seemed to be appropriate because the children understood the task and described the quality of life of someone else, as well as their own. In agreement with the study of Mareš and Neusar (2012), the first two questions were somewhat more difficult to answer than the third one. However, the pupils did produce high quality answers. In the future, it will be important to take into consideration the limits of the data-gathering methods used in this study. Mareš and Neusar pointed out that even a small change in the instructions during the administration of the questions may affect the pupils' answers. The same warning can be found elsewhere in literature (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000; Sudman, Bradburn, & Schwartz, 1996).

Furthermore, the fact that the pupils originated from certain localities (the northern Moravian cities of Ostrava and Orlová) might have affected the answers and the study outcomes. So, there is a question about the generalized ability of the answers to pupils living in smaller towns and villages, or in cities in other geographic areas of the country.

No large differences were detected between boys and girls. The girls only produced more moralised answers than the boys. They wrote what should or should not be a good quality of life and how parents and children should behave. This is more typical in their answers to the first and second questions.

The children wanted to have parents with whom they feel fine and to be cared for, have at least average school marks, have a place to stay, meals, and some friends. Health is considered a “gift,” and for this reason it appeared infrequently in the children’s statements.

In contrast to the expectations, school and instruction did not play a decisive role in the children’s statements. The positive experience of receiving good marks is important for them because it symbolises academic success.

Children are realistic and they know that a normal life also brings some inconveniences. Bad things usually contain a drop of good things and vice versa. They admit that a life with even one parent can be excellent. Mareš and Neusar (2012) stated that a more detailed analysis can reveal that an excellent life can also include some negative characteristics, e.g. being spoilt. This phenomenon was the focus of a study by Lukášová and Hasalova (2012), in which drawings and interviews were used to analyse the negative characteristics linked to an excellent quality of life. The results were also published in the study by Lukášová and Mareš (2014).

Even though the number of studies on the quality of life of children has increased recently, Rapley (2003) and Mareš and Neusar (2012) are still correct that more research is needed in order to learn how exactly the quality of life is interpreted by children and how research questions should be addressed to them. Even so, this study demonstrates that the Czech fifth-grade pupils, aged 10-12, are able to answer questions concerning their quality of life. Their statements may serve for their teachers.

When comparing the findings of this study with the model of pedagogy of care in which 9 categories of the quality of well-being in the lives of young children were identified, similarities can be seen in nine components: “senses of well-being” are specified that are synergistic, contributing to and dependent upon one another, which together, are requirements for overall well-being” (McMullen, Buzzelli, & Yun, 2016, pp. 262-263).

Categories that summarized the findings originated from the statements of Czech fifth-graders (11-12 years of age). This proves that children are able to distinguish even mild details in the quality of life within their families, in their relationships to parents and in association with the material and environmental

conditions of life. On the other hand, the pupils did not consider the relationship between quality of life and school important.

International studies have argued for the development of curricula with characteristics that increase the quality of life of young children (see Barnes, 2016). This study adheres to these challenges.

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