

Project Report

Shaping Entrepreneurial Attitudes among Young Children on the Basis of the “Entrepreneurial Kids” International Project

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Abstract: Entrepreneurship is one of the key competencies that should be developed in the educational process. However, in the form of a specific subject with particular objectives and outcomes, it only appears in secondary school. Younger children are involved in direct or indirect entrepreneurial activities in a variety of activities. However, these are not planned and not evaluated. Preschool and early primary school children also cannot benefit from the offer of projects or competitions outside of school due to the limited number of opportunities and because they often focus on economic aspects rather than the development of soft skills, which in children aged 3–10 seem to be more important for their overall development. This article presents an example of an initiative that can fill these gaps, i.e., the “Entrepreneurial Kids” project. The theoretical foundations of this project, its course, and its results to date are discussed.

Keywords: entrepreneurship education; preschool; early childhood education; education and business synergy



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1. Introduction

The concept of entrepreneurship has a long history, dating back to the first associated publications in 1755. Definitions of this concept have since centered around several basic streams:

- Personality approach according to which entrepreneurship is something you are born with.
- Economic stream which focuses on analyzing the role of entrepreneurs in the widely understood economy.
- Sociological and anthropological concept which is derived from the belief that entrepreneurship, in its broadest sense, is a social phenomenon; therefore, it is important to collect as much data as possible on companies and the individuals working in them, taking into account the social context.
- Behavioral theories defining entrepreneurial attributes [1].

Since 2006, entrepreneurship has been recognized as a key competence in the knowledge society [2,3], which should be shaped from an early age. Despite this, to date, there are few publications and real initiatives aimed at shaping this competence among young children.

2. Entrepreneurship in the Source Literature

Entrepreneurship is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon; hence, despite ongoing research, it remains difficult to find a single universal definition of the concept [4,5]. Currently, in the available literature, “entrepreneurship” is most often defined in two ways. The first group of definitions draws attention mainly to its economic aspect, while the second focuses on psychological characteristics. Representatives of the humanities and sciences consider the most important skills to be those directly related to the perception of opportunities and profit possibilities in the pursuit of a strategy to gain the greatest

possible material benefits by running a company or other business activity [6,7]. On the one hand, entrepreneurship is a feature of economies, encompassing issues such as economic processes in the company, the relationship between growth and economic development or employment, innovation, and technology, and the optimization of entrepreneurial processes [8]. Education in the aspect of entrepreneurship understood in this way will focus primarily on knowledge of company/group management, banking, finance, or product promotion [9]. On the other hand, in the social sciences, entrepreneurship is perceived as a complex phenomenon resulting from the interdependence and interaction of market factors, social factors, individual predispositions and capabilities, and individual personalities or characters [10]. Entrepreneurship is understood here primarily as a set of qualities that enable a person to succeed not only in the economic sector (having a spirit of initiative, resourcefulness, and the need to make decisions in an uncertain environment) but also in personal space (ability to cooperate in a group, cope with stress, communicate effectively, plan and consistently carry out planned actions) [11]. The aim of education based on this understanding of entrepreneurship is to shape individual spheres of development aimed, for example, at enhancing creativity and mitigating developmental disorders that could hinder or prevent the achievement of the aforementioned goals [12].

A concept combining both streams can also be found in the literature. Entrepreneurship is defined here as the result of the interaction of three elements: the context in which the opportunity (possibility) arises or is created, the set of personal abilities of the individual necessary to identify and exploit this opportunity, the skills needed to “materialize” this opportunity and produce the specified results.

This means that an entrepreneurial person not only sees opportunities but can create them [9].

The definitions of the concept in question are of direct relevance to education, based on European documents, in which entrepreneurship is seen as a set of competencies of a transversal nature, i.e., affecting people in all spheres of life, from personal development through active participation in society, to entering/re-entering the labor market as an employee or self-employed person and starting various types of ventures (cultural, social, or economic). They can be divided into several areas:

1. “Ideas and possibilities”: seeing possibilities, creativity, visioning, evaluating ideas (ideas), ethics, and “balanced’ thinking”.
2. “Resources”: self-awareness and self-efficacy, motivation and perseverance, mobilizing resources (obtaining and managing resources), competence related to financial and economic knowledge, mobilizing others.
3. “Action”: taking initiative, planning and managing, dealing with ambiguity, uncertainty, and risk, ability to work with others (team collaboration), and continuous learning through experience.

This categorization makes it possible to identify the specific outcomes that should be achieved in entrepreneurship-oriented education and to outline the frame of reference that should be included in any initiative as a condition for its effectiveness [13].

The effectiveness of entrepreneurship education is also determined by how the aforementioned categories are integrated into curricula and teaching methods, either by synergizing traditional education with the needs of a developing society or by changing the structure of the education system. Accordingly, entrepreneurship teaching is divided into three approaches. Teaching “about” entrepreneurship refers to a theoretical approach aimed at a general understanding of the phenomenon and is mainly applied at the tertiary education level. Teaching “for” entrepreneurship means a vocationally oriented approach to giving budding entrepreneurs the required knowledge and skills. Teaching “through” is an experiential approach in which students undergo an actual process of learning entrepreneurship, understood here in a very broad sense, making it possible to integrate it into different subjects in general education at all levels [14,15].

However, the associated research indicates that the planned effects are achieved to a minimal extent [16]. Regarding primary education, one challenge is the lack of the

practical aspect highlighted by the European Union, which, especially for young children, is necessary for a sustainable outcome in terms of knowledge and skills. The Eurydice report, echoing the European Commission’s call for Member States to provide students with at least one practical entrepreneurial experience as part of compulsory education, outlines some of the most important models observed in European curricula [15]. These include project work (in the field of entrepreneurship), practical and social challenges—solving specific problems in the working environment identified by entrepreneurs or external institutions or solving specific problems in the local environment to establish mini-enterprises—setting up and running a business for a period of time by students, and student microfinance initiatives—profit-driven crowdfunding ideas and projects.

Kucketz additionally emphasizes two elements that should be included in entrepreneurship curricula: the provision of entrepreneurial role models with which students can identify case studies or meetings with entrepreneurs, assess the effectiveness of project-based learning, learning by doing, and internships in start-ups [17,18].

The most common idea is that of mini-enterprises. At the primary school level, it is used by six European countries. In Spain, as part of the core curriculum, pupils and teachers can set up businesses that earn a specific profit and can have a legal personality. The situation is similar in Italy, however, pupils can also sell goods and services in a formal way by running a business free of charge within or outside school hours, in accordance with the school curricula. School staff may receive additional remuneration for such activities per the relevant provisions of the national collective agreements and taking into account the regulations on performance. In France, pupils and teachers can set up cooperatives/non-profit organizations (approval of the headmaster is required). Enterprises are informal in Germany or the UK (although here economic activity is explicitly included in the curricula). There are also some successful examples of entrepreneurship curricula, such as the “Mini Society” (for children aged 8–12 years) and the “Entrepreneurs in Kentucky Initiative” [19]. In the Netherlands, the BizWorld program (aimed at children aged 11–12) seeks to promote teamwork and leadership in primary schools through experiential learning methods [20].

Two features are noticeable in international operations. First, there is a lack of programs, projects, or competitions aimed at the youngest children (under 7–8 years). Second, there is a lack of international cooperation and orientation of actions taken toward economic aspects. A good example is the action taken in Poland. At the national level, there were nine projects and programs targeting children aged 6–10 years in 2022. However, each dealt with economic aspects (see Table 1).

Table 1. Projects targeting children aged 6–10 years, implemented in Poland.

Title of Project/Program	Age of Participants	Organizer
Entrepreneurship. “How to turn an idea into reality?”	Years 2–3 of primary school	Children’s University Foundation
From Polish grosz to Zloty	Years 2–3 of primary school	Foundation for Youth Entrepreneurship
School Savings Banks	Years 1–8 of primary school	PKO BP
Open Company Programme	Years 1–8 of primary school	Foundation for Youth Entrepreneurship
ABC Economics programme (children’s story book)	Younger years of primary school	Czepliński Family Foundation
TelantowiSKO programme	Years 1–8 of primary school	Co-operative Banks
I think, I decide, I act—finance for children	Years 1–3 of primary school	Association for the Promotion of Financial Education
Finansiaki	Preschool and primary school	Bank Santander
Financial primer	Preschool	Bank Millennium

Source: own study [21].

The elements related to soft skills do not appear to be included in the main objectives of entrepreneurship formation activities. This highlights the importance of promoting new solutions to fill the gaps related to the unavailability of a unidirectional and structured project centered around interdisciplinary entrepreneurship, thus complementing the scope of the core curriculum and the systematic implementation of the recommended forms of direct experience of reality that are most effective in relation to the education of young children.

3. Kids' Entrepreneurship in Practice—The Entrepreneurial Kids Project

Entrepreneurial Kids is a project that came into being in 2017 as a result of cooperation between the Faculty of Education and Psychology of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS) and the Department of Strategy and Entrepreneurship of the Lublin Municipal Office. The authors of the concept are Dr. Małgorzata Chojak (UMCS) and Mgr. Monika Król (Lublin Municipal Office).

The project is a response to the need to implement the so-called third mission of the university and cooperation with the socio-economic environment as well as the need for the Lublin Municipal Office to implement the city's development strategy. As a result of discussions held, it was possible to combine two seemingly distant areas in a single activity: the education of young children and the economic potential of Lublin. "Entrepreneurship" was identified as the leading theme common to both.

In 2023, the fifth edition of the project was implemented. To date, 60 preschool and early childhood groups (more than 1400 children), approximately 100 teachers, 200 students, more than 50 businesses from the Lublin area, and almost as many representatives of the creative sector have taken part.

The main objectives of the project were identified as fostering entrepreneurial attitudes in children, promoting the economic image of Lublin, and developing cooperation between higher education, local government, education, and the business sector.

The specific highlighted objectives include building a positive image of Lublin as a developing economic center, enriching the educational offer of schools and preschools with integrated activities aimed at shaping entrepreneurial attitudes, expanding the teaching offer of preschool and early childhood pedagogy studies, initiating and supporting real cooperation between Lublin companies and the creative sector and the education.

3.1. Theoretical Background

The project is based on an interdisciplinary definition of the term "entrepreneurship". In the activities described, this concept is understood not only in economic terms (learning about the history of money, coins, or the banking system) [6,9] but mainly in terms of soft competencies, such as self-confidence, the ability to work in a group, the ability to manage stress and, above all, creativity [10]. Pedagogical and economic literature indicates that these are key characteristics of an entrepreneurial person, which can (and should) be shaped in young children [22]. The aforementioned definition also results from an analysis of the core curriculum for preschool upbringing and general education (early childhood education), in which elements of economics are included in mathematics or environmental education, while the development of soft skills is somewhat marginal. Moreover, an analysis of projects/initiatives targeting young children on entrepreneurship demonstrated their scarcity and also their focus on economic aspects [21]. Promoting a broad understanding of entrepreneurship made it possible to design the project as an initiative that complements existing preschool and school educational activities. The innovation of the project in this respect is based on filling a gap caused by the lack of an "object"/activity integrating (in a purposeful and planned way) key elements (knowledge, emotional attitude, and concrete actions) concerning the development of one of the competencies defined as key by European documents [2,3].

The topic of creativity in thinking and acting and the courage to pursue one's own ideas and dreams also plays a special role in defining the concept in question [23]. Therefore,

it is crucial to support a child in this area. Especially since the most intense development of inventiveness and creativity occurs in preschool and early childhood [24–37]. The reality of the primary school contributes to its drastic sparsity, *inter alia* due to insufficiently met training and organizational needs of teachers in this area [28]. It is also important to emphasize that teachers should be aware that their students will be acting in a world the shape of which is unknown to us, working in professions that do not yet exist and performing professional duties that we currently have no idea about and which may be very different from what they look like today. This is why it is so important to foster inventiveness and creativity, which are essential in a changing reality, because they link directly to cognitive flexibility.

Another assumption on which the project is based is that the methodology of the activities is adapted to the developmental capabilities of the children with reference to Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development and sensitive periods. He defined it as the difference between the actual state of development and the potential development taking place when solving problems under the guidance of a more competent person—an adult or a peer [29,30]. The indicator of mature functions is what the child does independently without the participation of others, while the measure of maturing abilities and functions is everything that relates to the zone of intellectual imitation, *i.e.*, what the child does in a deliberate and purposeful way, cooperating with others. Taking into account the aforementioned information, it can be concluded that teaching is only effective when it precedes development. Each higher mental function appears twice in the child's development: once as a collective social activity, *i.e.*, as an interpsychic function, and the second as an individual activity, as the child's internal way of thinking, as an intrapsychic function. In order for this process to occur, the child's initiative and involvement are required, as well as their readiness to perform the task. The teacher's task is, therefore, to arouse motivation in the child and to maintain it until the learning process is completed. The child's participation in a learning task is primarily aimed at finding new ways of doing things not previously experienced by the child, which occur as a result of transforming the task set by the teacher [31].

Vygotsky's theory also included the need to diagnose the zone of proximal development. He believed that there are periods in a child's development that are most suitable for a certain type of teaching, meaning that it is only at a certain developmental age that the transfer of knowledge, the formation of habits and the acquisition of skills is easiest and most effective. This is because teaching is based not on mature functions, but on maturing functions that have the most beneficial effect on optimizing learning. This theory was further developed by M. Montessori who pointed out the existence of the so-called "sensitive periods" in the development of the child. These result from the child's increased developmental sensitivity to specific activities, knowledge, and skills (within a specific time frame). This manifests itself in greater motivation and less effort accompanying these activities. Between the ages of 5 and 11, children readily engage in imaginative and creative tasks [32,33]. Therefore, this element of entrepreneurship is leading the way in a project in which the tasks performed are based on skills mastered by children, *i.e.*, taking into account the level of literacy or numeracy, introducing teaching aids that combine pictures and words to younger children (reception and first year), basing activities on a play method linked to movement and polysensory cognition, and introducing new concepts based on children's current experiences (the content of the handouts can be modified according to children's knowledge of concepts from different backgrounds or cultures).

The structure facilitates the learning of new areas with the help of an adult and then using this knowledge independently during "learning by doing" (in the project, it is associated with setting up a business by children, managing it, earning money, etc.) [34]. The effect of using this method in young children is to increase the level of understanding of the content discussed and to increase the sustainability of the skills acquired. Direct experience in the project is also implemented in the form of the so-called study visits of children to large companies in Lublin and during meetings with representatives of the

creative sector. Pupils and preschoolers can then visit places usually inaccessible to non-employees, make a product themselves, or act as experts in advertising. The effectiveness of such activities stems from children's cognitive development, which is based on concrete operations during this period. A basic prerequisite for their effectiveness is the reference to concrete objects or their imaginative representations in a task situation [35]. Imaginative representations oriented toward the child's goal are particularly important. This is because they avoid chaotic thinking in the course of solving a task. During the development of perceptual thinking, children's actions, previously performed on real objects, begin to be reproduced as imaginative. It is worth emphasizing, however, that "real objects" can be the so-called models that, to varying degrees, reflect reality and allow us to learn about it but do not replace it. A child acting with a model of an object soon begins to understand that actions taken in this way can be successfully transferred to the real world. In the case of preschool and early school children, it is important that these models are not presented digitally but in 3D format. Therefore, the project presented here does not contain any digital or electronic material. This is a deliberate action resulting from the available scientific research [36,37]. They indicate that, with regard to young children, the use of new technologies should be limited to the achievement of goals that cannot be obtained by other means. Indeed, the positive impact of media on children's development is so small (scarcely proven) that it is more beneficial to provide them with a developmental environment almost devoid of new technologies, while basic skills of using them can be shaped, for example, through the use of the eTwinning platform or implementation of prevention programs. Taking into account the aforementioned information, media and new technologies were not included in the project. They were only used during epidemics when it was impossible to perform the planned activities in any other way. However, it turned out that in this situation, the results obtained were lower than in previous editions of the project.

3.2. Schedule of Activities

Each year, the project runs from January to June. This allows educational institutions and enterprises to plan potential participation (see Table 2).

The project begins with the recruitment of educational establishments, companies, creative people, and students. In the application, establishments undertake to carry out all project activities and provide materials and childcare. A formal requirement is to agree to all the planned tasks and undertake to actively promote the project. Only 15 establishments qualify for each edition (in the order of correctly completed applications), ensuring the maintenance of the "exclusive" nature of the idea and a high level of motivation among participants. Such a strategy has brought the expected results because, in the 2021/2022 edition, there were 15 free places and more than 70 applications, while in the previous edition, there were more than 80 applications. The Faculty of Education and Psychology of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University is responsible for the recruitment of establishments.

Recruitment of companies is achieved via individual interviews. This is due to the fact that CEOs/owners of companies are concerned with allowing young children on the premises and/or do not have ideas for organizing a meeting. This initiative is new in the country, so recruitment in this area requires an individualized approach. During the interviews, it is important that, in the case of difficulties or doubts, the entrepreneurs are supported with a ready-made handout/outline of activities that they could implement with children in their company. The recruitment of people from the creative sector follows a similar format. Both activities are the responsibility of the Strategy and Entrepreneurship Department of the Lublin Municipal Office.

Recruitment of students is limited to the field of preschool and early childhood education studies. This is related to one of the specific objectives of the project, to enrich the academic classes and enable the development of practical skills that are necessary for the intended profession. The condition for inclusion was the completion of at least the second

year of studies. Two students were sent to each establishment to minimize the risk of delays in life emergencies.

Table 2. Schedule of project activities.

Element/Stage of the Project	January	February	March	April	May	June
Preparation	- Division of tasks in the team - Drawing up documentation - Project promotion					
Promotion	Promotion on social media, in local media, submitting project to competitions					
Recruitment	- Recruitment information on websites - Acceptance of applications (due date after winter holidays; duration: two weeks for the first edition, one week for subsequent editions)					
Information meeting		Approx. 2 weeks after announcement of recruitment results				
Workshops			There should be an interval of one week between the first, second and third workshops. The fourth workshop is conducted after visits to the company and a meeting with the creative person.			
“Class company” project work				The company is set up at the last workshop with the student. Further stages up to the fulfilment of the target are carried out by the teacher in May (one month is enough time to get the expected results).		
Company visits				Workshops are performed in collaboration with large local companies and within their premises. Each group attends one.		
Meetings with creative people				Workshops performed in the educational institution or workplace of a representative of the creative professions.		
Visit to a bank			Visit to a bank can be performed independently of the other elements of the project.			
Gala						Project closing ceremony
Summary						Archiving of documentation, evaluation studies, preparation of reports.

Source: own study.

Once recruitment was complete, qualified establishments and students were invited to a compulsory information meeting to

- present Lublin's economic potential, with a focus on its potential for use in education-related activities.
- provide information on project implementation to school/preschool staff and students.

On the part of the establishment, a class teacher and headmaster representative were required to participate. The presence of the headmasters was related to the fact that it was necessary to obtain their consent for some activities (e.g., fundraising by children) that are not clearly specified in educational regulations and, among other things, to allow students and photographers documenting the project activities to enter the premises freely. Subsequent editions of the project have shown that the presence of headmaster representatives at the first meeting significantly increases the level of acceptance of the planned activities and the extent of support in problematic situations. Class teachers are invited to the meeting not only for informational purposes, but also to raise their awareness of the crucial importance of the sequence and method of implementation of the planned activities, compliance with the project's timeframe, and rules related to personal data protection (e.g., in promotional activities). The organization is also obliged to obtain the parents' consent for the implementation of the project. The presence of the students allows them to become familiar with the organization's representatives and plan the first meetings.

Another element is the workshop meetings, which are conducted by students at the establishments (see Table 3). This solution allows for increased motivation among the children (workshops conducted by teachers did not distinguish the activities from the classroom, and did not indicate the otherness, importance, or novelty of the initiative). Students receive pre-prepared handouts with teaching materials. Office materials are to be provided by the organization. The workshop topics are intended to prepare the children for the key activity—setting up their own company.

Once the company has been set up, the children—under the guidance of the teacher—implement the business plan (e.g., by organizing fairs or paid performances) and the intended purpose of the company (e.g., going on a class outing or trip together, buying pet food for the animal shelter, or raising money for a sick friend).

Throughout the project, the children are accompanied by a mascot, the business little goat, which “takes up residence” for this time in a specially prepared themed corner (where illustrations and information about new content are placed, as well as the children's work completed during the project). This allows for a better consolidation of acquired skills by, among other things, playing with the mascot and inventing additional creative accompanying elements (photos below). The choice of mascot refers to the symbol of Lublin (cultural and patriotic element of the project)—see Figure 1.

After the third workshop, another element of the project is implemented. The children already know that everyone is creative and has some talent or passion, and everyone can be entrepreneurial. They also know that this talent/idea/dream can be turned into a company. The next step is to experience first-hand contact with a large company and with a one-person/multi-partner business (identifying two ways to fulfill dreams and passions). During the study visits, the entrepreneurs organize thematic activities for the children related to the company's activities or its products. So far, children have participated in, among others: simulating a lift malfunction and learning how to behave in such a situation, making their own clay bricks, making grain buns, traditional Lublin *cebularz* pancakes, and sweet yeast cakes, learning how to behave during a fire or an accident (Interactive Fire Education Centre), creating an advertising poster, observing the production of sweets, bottling syrups and packaging them, playing a mini production line, where some people were responsible for assembling the individual parts into a single unit, someone else for packaging, labeling, transport, and logistics. These are just a selection of activities. What is important is that companies and creative people were recruited in such a way that the visit to them would be interesting and engaging for the children.

Table 3. Topics of workshops led by students.

Workshop Topic	Objectives	Task to be Completed at Home with Parents
Workshop no. 1 Let's get to know each other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Familiarization with the project themes and objectives - Integration of children with a little goat - Preparing a contract (agreement) between the children and the little goat - Preparing a creative corner for a little goat 	<p>The children give their parents envelopes with information about the project and a request to prepare a "signature" (photograph, handprint) to be attached to the contract prepared by the children. In this way, the parents are involved and informed about the activities and their objectives.</p> <p>During the following week, the children bring the so-called "rubbish" (clean, not smelly, safe to use unnecessary materials) to the little goat's corner.</p>
Workshop no. 2 Entrepreneurship—the difficult word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introducing the notion of entrepreneurship, understood among other things as creativity - Developing fine motor skills and social skills by making toys from unwanted items brought in - Building children's self-esteem by showing that anyone can be creative because anyone can make "something out of nothing" - Shaping an active attitude toward entrepreneurship as a trait to be discovered and developed 	<p>The homework consists of preparing a few-minute presentation with the parent (perhaps a talent, a toy, a hobby, or a favorite book). The parent is also given a short briefing on how to help the child in a stressful situation.</p>
Workshop no. 3 Everyone can be an entrepreneur		
Part one: Talent show	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practicing presentation skills and coping with stress - Building self-confidence by creating a successful situation for each child - Integrating the class/group by getting to know its members better 	<p>The presentation is organized by the teacher. They can invite parents, other groups from the preschool or school. It is possible to organize the "show" only with the group/class. However, this is the least effective way to achieve the intended goals. It is important that the teacher ensures that every child performs and that each child receives positive feedback (applause, praise from the teacher and possibly parents).</p>
Part two: Secrets of economic Lublin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction of concepts related to running a company (logo, business plan, marketing) - Getting to know companies and representatives of the creative sector based in Lublin (learning about the economic potential of Lublin) - Promoting Lublin as a strong brand 	<p>Prepare information with the parents about the company and the creative person the class/group will meet.</p>
Workshop 4. Starting your own business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shaping the skills of teamwork (through the children setting up their own business), planning (through the preparation of a business plan), and the consistent implementation of plans - Fostering creativity - Consolidation of the information obtained during the workshop. 	<p>Parents receive information from the teacher about the class company the children have set up and the goal they have chosen (it is important that parents agree to the goal). It is important to get parental support for the company's fundraising (e.g., participation in a fair organized by the children).</p>

Source: own study.

An element of economic education is performed during the children's visits to the bank. They have the opportunity to see how the institution works, what its staff does, and for what purposes customers come in. In one edition, the children were able to visit a sample vault or hold a bar of real gold. The aim of such activities is to familiarize pupils and preschoolers with the bank as a company that participates directly in the cash flow of every

enterprise but also of every person. This activity fits into the scope of financial education because children learn about the denominations of money and recalculate—in a historical context—the value of different means of payment. Due to the theoretical assumptions made in the project, the children do not, for example, participate in a virtual walk through the bank. Only during the pandemic period, the aforementioned activities were carried out remotely, but each group received materials specially prepared by the bank beforehand.



Figure 1. The project mascot in a setting made by the children.

The final element of the project is the final gala, attended by children, teachers, city and university authorities, and company directors. This is an opportunity for the children to meet all the project participants and present the companies they have set up in the form of 3D constructions on a jigsaw puzzle, which, when joined together, form a plan for the future Lublin (the children's economic vision of the city). After the gala, the children can take part in activities organized by the companies they have not visited. The gala helps to

emphasize the importance of the project and the subject matter addressed and to show one of the elements of the entrepreneur's life, which is a section in elegant business meetings where certain rules of *savoir vivre* must be observed.

At the end of each project, an evaluation is conducted. All participants in the project (students, parents, and teachers) or their legal representatives (in the case of children) gave their written consent to participate in the project (participation in the tasks, publication of their image, participation in the research and use of the results for the evaluation of the effects and their publication). Each participant could resign from participation at any stage of the project. The evaluation surveys were anonymous. Parents, teachers, and students were asked to fill out survey questionnaires (prepared for the project). Research with children was conducted by trained students of preschool and early childhood education. A targeted interview technique was used for this purpose. Only complete questionnaires (containing answers to all questions and all demographic data) qualified for statistical analyses. The results obtained were subjected to basic statistical analysis.

3.3. Internationalization

In Poland, the fifth edition of the project was being implemented in 2023. There were new elements in each of the previous editions because the authors tested the project's implications in different environments.

In 2021, the Saturday Polish School in Oxford took part in the ongoing activities. This is a non-compulsory weekend school attended by children of Poles living abroad in order to maintain contact with the Polish language and culture. The methodology of the project was adapted in the following way to the reality and possibilities of the school:

- (a) Topics and sequence of activities remained unchanged
- (b) The teacher in charge of the class received a set of materials to work with the children, examples of products that are manufactured by companies in Lublin, and a short video of a recorded visit to one of the companies located in Lublin
- (c) During the third workshop, the children worked not only with a map of Lublin but also with a map of Oxford on which they searched for their parents' places of employment
- (d) During the project, the children had an online meeting with colleagues from Poland where they were able to present the companies they had set up
- (e) Steps were taken to allow pupils from Oxford to join the gala remotely. For technical reasons, this proved impossible, but the children from abroad prepared a short recording, which was broadcast during the gala.

The 2022 edition involved schools in Lutsk, Ukraine. The implementation of the project in another country was preceded by several months of consultations to adapt the content to the children's education and the way state institutions and universities function. The mascot was changed for cultural reasons (see Figure 2). Lecturers and students participated in online training for each workshop, followed by a two-week teaching placement in Lublin. The first edition of the project in Ukraine took place against the backdrop of the ongoing war, which may be an indication of the need for this type of activity, which fits in perfectly with the current reform in the Ukrainian education system. Four grades of early childhood education took part in the first edition. In the next edition, preschool groups were added. The experience gained from the cooperative made it possible to outline a procedure to be followed before implementing project activities in another country. Due to the limited scope of this article, this topic will not be discussed further.

In 2023, the project received a prestigious award in an international competition on initiatives to promote entrepreneurship (EEPA). It took first place in the category "promoting entrepreneurial spirit" (see Figure 3). Attention was drawn to its innovation in terms of the target group and its ease of implementation in other countries. To date, no Polish initiative has achieved such a high standing in a competition where the audience was exclusively representatives of the business sector.



Figure 2. Project logo in Poland and Ukraine [The subtitles on the left and right of the figure are translations of the name of the “Entrepreneurial Kids” project into Polish (left) and Ukrainian (right)].



Figure 3. Confirmation of prestigious international award.

4. Summary

In the context of the definitions of “entrepreneurship” presented earlier, it is important to realize that some of the traits included in its semantic composition cannot be learned at school, even if education starts at an early stage [1]. Nevertheless, most researchers point to the family environment and the preschool stage as the most effective period to start, for example, financial education. The project presented in this article is the only international, low-budget, and easy-to-implement initiative aimed at young children.

Among the results achieved thus far are:

- Increased awareness of an interdisciplinary understanding of the concept of entrepreneurship among pupils, teachers, students, and entrepreneurs.
- Increased interest in entrepreneurial education among parents and teachers working in preschools and primary schools.
- Development of the possibility of a targeted and evaluable plan for cooperation between the business sector and education, and through this, creating space for the economy to have a real impact on the level of education.
- Improvements in the quality of primary education by introducing a new *modus operandi* to establishments in Lublin, which targets young children and integrates the aims and tasks of shaping in them one of the key competencies—entrepreneurship.
- Promotion of the economic potential and positive image of Lublin as a city that creates favorable conditions for cooperation between the local government sector, economy, and higher education.
- Promotion of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University as a leading scientific center for cooperation with the socio-economic environment and the creation of innovative inter-departmental solutions for the development of key competencies and as a university that offers students practical classes in social studies concerning entrepreneurship and the promotion of career opportunities in Lublin or its vicinity (shaping attitudes of local patriotism).
- Promotion of Poland on the international stage among business audiences (with a real impact on the European economy) as a country where entrepreneurship is promoted in an exemplary (worthwhile and implementable) manner.

It is also important to note that the structure (initial training, thematic workshops, study visits to companies and meetings with creative people, practical implementation of a business project) of the activities described can be applied to initiatives aimed at older and younger students. It only requires adaptation of the capabilities and interests of the target audience. An example is the “Entrepreneurial Youth” project implemented in Poland, which was developed based on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the “Entrepreneurial Kids” project.

In conclusion, entrepreneurship education is one of the main drivers of economic growth [36]. It is also a response to the ongoing process of globalization, which requires equipping people with entrepreneurial competencies [38]. The earlier such actions are taken, the greater the chance of obtaining the expected effects in various aspects of human functioning in the long term—the country and society. This is why activities that promote innovative ideas seem so important. Nevertheless, in the coming years, the cooperation of researchers, practitioners, and politicians should focus not only on the preparation of new multidisciplinary projects or programs but also on the evaluation of the goals and methodology of those implemented thus far [22].

Therefore, the next step, relating to the presented project, is to conduct interdisciplinary, international research on its short-term and long-term results. The results of the conducted preliminary evaluation research allow us to present conclusions about the overall effectiveness of the undertaken activities. However, they are limited by the small study group and few variables that were considered. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to present innovative measures to encourage researchers and practitioners to establish international research cooperation on the issues at hand.

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