

# Citizenship education in Lithuanian preschool education : The teachers' view

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**Abstract:** In Lithuania, citizenship education for preschool children was not regulated until 2022, and consequently the related issues have not yet received much attention from Lithuanian researchers. However, based on the insights of scientists from other countries it can be argued that in order for children to be active citizens when they grow up, it is important to develop their civic attitudes and behaviour in early childhood. The aim of the research presented in the article is to find out teachers' attitudes towards citizenship education for young children in Lithuanian preschool education. Summarising the results of a structured group interview, we can state that in Lithuanian preschool education institutions, children receive only a fragmentary and superficial education in citizenship, because, on the one hand, teachers have a narrow conception/understanding of citizenship and, on the other hand, they basically do not understand the content of the citizenship education programme and what components constitute citizenship competence. However, it should be noted that teachers understand the need to change the current practice, but they do not know how this can be done.

**Keywords:** early citizenship education, preschool education teachers, citizenship education programme, teachers' conception/understanding of citizenship

## Study Background

According to Schugurensky and Myers (2003), citizenship education is a vast field that includes a wide range of philosophical, political, and ideological perspectives and pedagogical approaches, goals, and practices. At the most abstract level of discourse, there is a general consensus that the

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main purpose of citizenship education is the development of good democratic citizens.

In Lithuania, since the Declaration of Independence (1990), citizenship education, taking into account cultural, social, and economic changes in the country and the world, has been considered one of the most important fields of school education. During the implementation of the civic education policy, in the years in which an independent Lithuania has existed, several editions of general programmes have been prepared for schools, over the course of which the concept of the content of citizenship, the forms of its development, and the expected outcomes have continuously changed. Already on the eve of the country's independence, the concept of a 'National School' was created (Lithuanian SSR 'Žinijos draugija' (Knowledge Society), 1989) that reflected the relevant tasks of the nation's education at that time – restoring the value of the dignity and individuality of the person and strengthening humanity, morality, national identity, and self-awareness. According to the general programmes of 1994 and 1997 (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, 1994; 1997), the greatest challenge to education at that time was freedom (a free person in a free society and state); therefore, attention was paid to developing conscious citizens who understand their duties and rights, who are able to constructively participate in the governance of society and the state and improve it, and who are able to foster love of the Motherland, responsibility for one's nation and state, a sense of national self-respect, and a determination to work for the benefit of the native land.

In implementing the policy of civic and national education, in 1998 the country's first 'Implementation of Civic Education in Educational Institutions' programme was approved, which inspired changes in the civic education programme adopted in 2004 – it almost no longer had the aspect of national education and was focused on knowledge of universal principles of democracy and neutral citizenship from a national point of view: *developing students' citizenship (cognitive and practical abilities), helping to systematise, consolidate, and give meaning to the knowledge of civic education acquired by young people in basic school, and developing democratic and civic attitudes*. However, in the civic education programme of 2008, the provisions of national education that were declared in the first years of Lithuania's independence were brought back, and the content of civic education was expanded and directed towards developing a person's patriotism and civic, cultural, and national identity.

It is obvious that in the civic education programmes presented, equal importance is given to citizenship and nationality education. However, citizenship is not always associated with nationality. More than a decade ago, a comparative analysis of the concept of citizenship titled 'Citizenship and Civil Society' (2012), conducted by the Information and Support Centre of Lithuanian Non-Governmental Organisations drew attention to the fact that the concept of citizenship in Lithuanian society remains conservatively focused only on the ethnic aspect of citizenship and not its political or civic aspects. The inhabitants of the country identify themselves more with their ethnic culture and historical past, but not with the state, its institutions, or the rights and duties of citizens. It is the origin, language, traditions and customs, and the history of Lithuania that society perceives as the foundation of citizenship. This could be explained by the insights of Piattoeva (2015) as to why in some countries '[c]itizenship and nationality are commonly treated as synonymous, or at least, as two sides of the same political coin' (p. 1). In Lithuania, as in other former republics of the Soviet Union, national character was officially recognised, nationality was recorded in personal documents, and the country was considered a national territorial unit with its own cultural autonomy. However, this did not have a significant impact on the real situation of the Lithuanian nation and the possibilities for it to maintain its identity. Its destruction was much more affected by the policy of mixing nations carried out by the Russian authorities, the aim of which was to form a multi-ethnic society that suppressed its ethnic origins and did not identify with the state. The Soviet way of life also suppressed personal responsibility, critical thinking, independence, initiative, honesty, and opportunities for activity, human dignity, freedom of speech, equality, justice and legality, tolerance, solidarity, and other values that are important for the formation of civic consciousness and civil society. This, in turn, led to a fundamental problem of the Lithuanian state and Lithuanian society that has been observed in studies of Lithuanian civil society map carried out for many years by the Civil Society Institute (for more details, see <http://www.civitas.lt/en/research/civic-empowerment-index/>) recorded the fundamental problem of the Lithuanian society and state – namely, the syndrome of civic helplessness that has taken over society, and the inability to find and widely apply an effective recipe for strengthening civil society.

However, it is possible to note that the passive political culture that dominated Lithuanian society for several decades is disappearing – the Lithuanian people have begun to embrace the political rights, freedoms, and duties of being a citizen. The Civic Empowerment Index study conducted in

2021 showed that the civic empowerment of Lithuanian society has begun to grow: the inhabitants of Lithuania have become more and more involved in various civic activities, especially through donations to and support for charity, local community initiatives and environment cleaning campaigns, expressing their opinions more and more actively in the public space, reporting observed violations of laws, and volunteering (Civil Society Institute, 2021). However, according to the findings of the Civic Empowerment Index study conducted in 2022, although Lithuanian society continues to actively engage in civic activities, especially in helping Ukraine and Ukrainians, the overall Civic Empowerment Index has decreased (Civil Society Institute, 2023).

Currently, one of the most important measures of citizenship education is the 'Long-Term Civic and National Education Programme' implemented since 2006 (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, 2006), which aims to create favourable conditions for the civic and national education of Lithuanian children, youth, and adults, for civic and national expression in society, and for active participation in civic activities, and also seeks to strengthen social partnership and national and civil solidarity. Citizenship education is one of the most important goals set for education in Lithuania's progress strategy 'Lithuania 2030'. This strategy, which presents a vision of a smart Lithuania, proposes focusing the education system on the development of creativity, citizenship, and leadership. In this context, developing/creating a mature and solidary civil society and preserving national identity are made strategic objectives of education. The Law on Education in Lithuania (2011) states that by helping students to be active members of civil society, general education schools in Lithuania should aim to create the conditions in which every person can develop the value orientations necessary to become patriotic citizens; can learn the foundations of national and ethnic culture, can develop a mature national self-awareness, thereby guaranteeing the continuity of the culture of the nation and the region; can acquire the foundations of civic and political culture that embody the traditions of democracy; and can as students develop an inner need to be active, be able to analyse social, political, and cultural reality and the conflicts that may arise in it, and develop the ability to freely and consciously understand, evaluate, make decisions, and act in an open pluralistic society. The content of Lithuanian general education programmes corresponds to the main modern European trends in education for active citizenship, and the practice of civic education in Lithuanian schools is focused on developing students' competences for participation in civic activities.

In the presented context of civic education, the focus is mainly on school-age children and there is no mention at all of how to develop preschool children's citizenship. However, given that preschool age is a stage when a child's personality and identity are formed, it is a favourable time to develop citizenship as well. As Tsioumis (2022) notes, a question some research papers are trying to answer is to what extent citizenship education is possible in kindergarten and in the first classes of primary school. An important objection is that young children do not have civil rights that they can exercise. A crucial aspect of this is the participation of children in social issues. Child participation is considered to occur when children have a say and get involved in decisions relating to activities in their everyday life. Nevertheless, Tsioumis (ibid.) points out that active citizenship is deemed to be very important in early childhood because it forms a basis for civic engagement when they get older. Children can develop skills, attitudes, and behaviours that can help them to be responsive citizens in the future. Civic involvement begins at birth and grows with time. Citizenship education in kindergarten helps young children to acquire a personal, social, and political identity, so that they can become active members of society and respect each other without being affected by social, linguistic, religious, or cultural differences. In order to become active members of society, children should develop their critical thinking, eliminate stereotypes and prejudices, participate in debates on various issues, and express their views (Sotiropoulou, Moysiadou & Tsioumis, 2022, p. 84).

The question of citizenship education in preschool age is still rarely raised by Lithuanian scholars. Probably because the documents regulating preschool education until 2022 did not even emphasise the development of a child's civic awareness, it was defined as one of the components of education in social competence: children develop national and cultural identity, civic awareness, and are interested in other cultures and respect them (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, 2014).

In the 'General Programme of Pre-Primary Education' (hereinafter – the Programme) approved in 2022, citizenship is singled out as a competence alongside others (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Components of the citizenship education of preschool children and their learning outcomes.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
<b>Civic identity and civic power.</b>	Children are able to recognise the symbols of the state of Lithuania (coat of arms, flag, anthem) and name the most important public holidays.
	They are able to distinguish between obvious elementary civil and uncivil behaviour.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
	They participate in simple civic activities initiated by the teachers.
<b>Life in the community as a way of creating/building a democratic society.</b>	Children are able to discuss the most important agreements and rules of conduct and adhere to them.
	They cooperate with friends in joint activities.
	They understand that everyone is equal, no one is better than others, and they can negotiate to reach a shared decision.
<b>Respect for human rights and freedoms.</b>	Children have and value their own and others' opinions and take into account their own and others' needs.
	They are able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in elementary situations and consider the effect on others.
	They are able to recognise advertisements and their purpose in popular media with the help of the teacher and parents.
<b>Creation of the state and the strengthening of statehood in the international community.</b>	Children are able to name the most important institutions of the State of Lithuania.
	Children are able, through their positive actions, to contribute to the preservation of culture and natural resources.
	They are able to name the most important international organisations of which Lithuania is a member.

The aim of this study is to find out teachers' attitudes towards citizenship education for young children in Lithuanian preschool education.

## Data Collection Procedure, Participants, Method and Ethics

Random purposeful sampling was chosen for the study. This is a method of forming a research sample in qualitative research that is used when there is a very large number of informative units of the general set, and, therefore, only a few units of the general set are randomly selected to form the required sample (Rupšienė, 2007). The data were collected using a structured group interview, where the researcher prepares specific questions in advance and considers the sequence in which to present them. The interviews with the informants were conducted in their organisations; therefore, before conducting the research, the consent of the heads of those organisations was obtained and they were asked to mediate in order to ensure the optimal number of participants were in the interviewed group: 6–8 teachers working in classrooms with older preschool children in that institution. The number of groups was determined using the following rule: increase the number of groups until the novelty of the information received in the last group decreases to such an extent that it is no longer worth including new groups in the study (Rupšienė, 2007). In total, 5 groups of informants – 33 teachers – participated in the study. They were informed in advance about

the aim of the study, and they were introduced to the ethical principles that the researchers would follow in relation to their subjects: free will (each informant participates in the research only at his/her own free will – no one puts any pressure on him/her), confidentiality of information (no one, except the researcher, can use the information provided by the subject), and anonymity (the subject remains anonymous during the entire study and after the study is completed). Before the interview, each subject's informed consent was obtained not only to participate in the study, but also to record the interview. Interviews in each group lasted 1–1.5 hours at a pre-arranged time and in a favourable environment of the informants' workplace, where there were no outsiders who could interfere with the conversation between the subjects and the researcher. After agreeing to participate in the interview, the teachers were cooperative and answered the researchers' questions sincerely.

The interview plan included the following questions: What is citizenship according to you? Are you civic-minded? Why do you think so? What civic activities were/are you involved in? How do you develop children's citizenship? How do you assess citizenship education for young children in your practice? Assess the children's possible knowledge according to the components of citizenship education for young children identified in the Programme.

After the research, the interview texts of each group of informants were rewritten and analysed using interpretive 'reading' (Gaižauskaitė & Valavičienė, 2016): when reading the interview transcripts, the aim was to understand what, according to the researchers, the informants meant, and what conclusions could be drawn not only by considering the literal text but also the related research context. After coding the appropriate parts related to the research subject, the data were conceptualised and the relationships between categories were described, creating new knowledge about the research phenomenon from the perspective of the research participants. After establishing relationships between different aspects of the data, the separate parts were combined into a coherent whole and linked to the social context, and a transition was made to the interpretation of empirical data.

## Findings

Judging from the informants' answers, almost a third of them (a total of 9) have a concept of citizenship that is conservatively focused only on the ethnic aspect. Informants described what citizenship meant to them in the

following terms: preserving the country's history and language; valuing and appreciating the nation's history; love for one's country and its nature, the nurturing of traditions and customs inherited from ancestors, getting to know one's country and culture; love and respect for the cultural traditions of one's nation; preserving the values of the nation, fostering the culture, valuing the language; pride in one's nation's history; our history, customs, and language.

The majority of the informants (18 teachers in total) interpret citizenship as the main duties of a citizen, i.e., paying taxes, complying with the laws of the country, performing military or alternative national defence services, and defending the state of Lithuania in the case of military aggression. To the informants, citizenship meant: compliance with the country's Constitution and laws; honest work and honest payment of state taxes; readiness to defend one's country against attack; the performance of military service.

The teachers who participated in the interview basically mentioned the duties of citizens listed in the Constitution of Lithuania, with the exception of the following: to observe and not to restrict the rights and freedoms of other people when exercising one's rights and using one's freedoms; to protect the interests of the state; to help strengthen its power and authority; to be loyal to it.

In the concept of citizenship, 6 other teachers mentioned the right of citizens to vote and the freedom to participate in the activities of non-governmental organisations or simply active participation in public life. Here informants said citizenship meant: participation in the elections of the President, the Seimas, and local governments; participation in state government elections; work for the benefit of other people without seeking financial or material benefit for oneself; participation in volunteering activities; helping members of one's community.

Although the Constitution of Lithuania enumerates incomparably many more rights and freedoms of a citizen (for example, citizens have the right to join the state service under equal conditions, the right to join political parties, the right to initiate legislation, the right to submit a proposal to amend or supplement the Constitution, the right to demand the announcement of a referendum, the right to petition, the right to oppose anyone who encroaches on the independence of the State of Lithuania, its constitutional order, or its territorial integrity by force, the right to move freely and choose a place of residence in Lithuania, to freely go abroad and



return to Lithuania), it cannot be said that teachers do not know them. Most citizen's rights and freedoms are already understood as a natural part of life.

In order for a child to grow as a civic-minded person, teachers must also be civic-minded. Therefore, the teachers were asked to self-assess their civic awareness by answering the question: 'Are you civic-minded? Why do you think so?' Twenty informants answered positively without hesitation, justifying this claim by saying that they nurture the traditions and customs of the nation, always participate in elections, are responsible workers and caring parents, are honest and virtuous taxpayers, and are active participants in public campaigns. Here are something of the things the informants said: 'I always behave honestly, respect others and help in any trouble, I instil these values in my child'; 'I actively participate in elections, I constantly follow news in political, social, and cultural life, because I care about the environment in which I live, I care about the future of Lithuania'; 'I pay taxes honestly, participate in elections and charity campaigns'; 'I instil in children love for our native land and country, I participate in public holidays and contribute to their organisation'; 'I contribute to support for Ukraine, I support Ukrainians, I participate in state events'; 'our customs, language, traditions are very important to me'; 'every year, my family and I participate in the campaign 'Darom' [Let's Do It] [this is an annual general campaign that started in 2008, when garbage is collected throughout Lithuania – author's note], and in state festive events, I donate to those in need'.

However, the other half of the informants (13 teachers) evaluated their citizenship very critically: 'I try to be a good citizen, but a lot depends on the situation'; 'I don't always take part in the elections, I don't contribute to all the organised campaigns'; 'there is often a lack of time to be active; the desire to participate somewhere is lacking sometimes'; 'I rarely participate and get involved in public life'; 'I only sometimes participate in state events, kindness or other campaigns'.

However, when the informants were asked to name which civic activities they themselves participated in or participate in, it became clear that only a few teachers are active here: they volunteer (in old people's homes, animal shelters, organisations helping Ukrainians), get involved in support and aid projects ('Ankstukai' (Born Early) – support for babies born prematurely; 'Blue/Yellow' – support for struggling Ukraine; 'Maisto bankas' (Food Bank) – help for those who are in need of food, fundraising for homeless animals). Meanwhile, the vast majority of the informants limit themselves to only participating in the country's most important public holidays or events

dedicated to them – 16 February (Day of Restoration of the State of Lithuania), 11 March (Day of Restitution of the Independence of Lithuania), and 6 July (Statehood Day) – and/or to commemorating memorable days – 13 January (Day of Defenders of Freedom) and 14 June (Day of Mourning and Hope, marking the beginning of the illegal Soviet mass deportations of Lithuanian residents to Siberia).

This position that the majority of the informants adopt also dominates the practice of citizenship education for young children: in addition to the fact that it is important for teachers that children recognise the symbols of the State of Lithuania (coat of arms, flag, anthem), know what the capital of the country is and who the President is, and can name the most important public holidays, the main focus is only on commemorating important days for Lithuania, when, at organised celebrations, children recite poems about Lithuania they have learned especially for the occasion, sing folk songs, and dance national dances dressed in national costumes, and they participate in thematic activities prepared by teachers, competitions, exhibitions, etc. Again, only a few teachers mentioned engaging children in civic activities: ‘Every year together with children and their parents we collect food for homeless animals’; ‘Before All Souls’ Day [a day of remembrance and honouring the dead, celebrated on 2 November – author’s note] we clean up forgotten graves, light candles’; ‘the children make book tabs and give them to seniors’.

Citizenship education in Lithuanian preschool education institutions can therefore be described as something ‘for special occasions’ initiated by teachers and not a consistent process of citizenship education, actively involving children in it as well.

Those informants whose concept of citizenship is conservatively focused only on the ethnic dimension particularly emphasised the importance of nationality education: they listen to and teach children to sing folk songs; they tell and read them Lithuanian fairy tales and then stage them; they solve riddles; they teach the children about ancient Lithuanian customs; actively participate in ethnocultural events, educational programmes in which children not only get to know the work of artisans but also try to bake bread, weave ribbons, weave baskets, etc.

However, based on the words of the informants, there are those who understand that festive and ethnocultural events alone are not enough to develop children’s citizenship:

*'I rate the current situation of citizenship education in my institution as poor – there is not much engagement or participation. Children need to be talked to not only during public holidays about why they are important, why flags are raised, it is also necessary to talk about less visible things: to explain to children why it is necessary to vote, why it is important to volunteer, to tell them more about various types of volunteering, so that they know and maybe think of volunteering themselves in the future.'*

*'Civic education should be talked about more, and not just before our public holidays. To involve children in citizenship campaigns, so that they also participate, and not just to talk to them about them.'*

*'It probably happens to be better elsewhere, but not here yet. What do we do with the children? It's just a task to draw a flag or a heart with tricolours [Lithuanian flag – author's note]. You drew it – thank you. We took a picture, hung it up, or participated in the competition. That's it.'*

*'Children need to be shown more than told. To organise trips more often, visit museums, famous places that can help you get to know the region and its history better.'*

*'Children are mostly talked with about Lithuania during the main holidays, when they participate in exhibitions and art competitions. But it is done only because it is necessary and to 'check a box'. I think that children should participate more in social life, to develop citizenship through the child's experience and feelings.'*

It would seem that the solutions to such problems should be in the hands of the teachers themselves. However, from the statements of the informants it can be understood that they cannot do anything without the involvement of the children's parents and the support of the institution:

*'For a more active citizenship education, I would suggest involving and interesting the community of the institution more often and striving for the active participation of both teachers and parents – because cooperation strengthens citizenship and interconnectedness.'*

*'It is necessary that the parents of the children show initiative.'*

*'I think that in order for us to be more active, the management of the institution should encourage and join more, support ideas.'*

*'Encouragement is needed from the heads of the institution to participate in various civic activities.'*

The following questions could be raised here: what kind of incentives and what kind of support would teachers like from the administration of the educational institution? How do they imagine more active participation from teachers and parents in developing children's citizenship? What initiatives and involvement do teachers expect from the children's parents? We assume that most likely the teachers themselves would not be able to provide specific answers to these questions, because the practical content of citizenship education seems somewhat abstract to them. The validity of this assumption is illustrated by informants' comments of this nature: 'First of all, we need a general understanding of what this [citizenship education – author's note] is'; 'they updated the programme, wrote up many competences, and threw it out to the teachers themselves to think about how to develop them – no methodological recommendations, no benchmarks, work the way you know how, and then they explain that you are not working well'; 'seminars are needed on this topic'.

The fact that teachers in Lithuanian preschool education institutions develop children's citizenship in the way they know how, but that they basically do not understand the content of citizenship education, can be inferred from the insights the informants provided when assessing children's possible knowledge according to the components of citizenship education for young children identified in the Programme (Table 2).

**Table 2:** Informants' assessments of children's possible knowledge according to the components of citizenship education for young children identified in the Programme.

Component	Competences	Examples of the informants' comments
<b>Civic identity and civic power.</b>	Children recognise the symbols of the state of Lithuania (coat of arms, flag, anthem). They are able to name the most important public holidays.	'Children know the symbols of the State of Lithuania, they know that 16 February, 11 March and 6 July are public holidays and can say why they are important for Lithuania; some children can sing the 'Tautiška giesmė' [National Song] themselves [this is the national anthem of Lithuania – author's note]; 'When they hear the anthem, they place their hand to their heart – very sensitive'; 'Children not only know the symbols, but they can say who the current President of Lithuania is. Not only that, they know who the former presidents were and recognise V. Adamkus and D. Grybauskaitė'.
	They are able to distinguish between obvious elementary civil and uncivil behaviour.	'What is meant by this? Is this the same as appropriate or inappropriate behaviour? Probably not the same. Where can children see this? How can we explain to them what behaviour is civil and what is uncivil?'
	They participate in simple civic	'They take part in tidying up the territory of the kindergarten, collecting food for homeless

Component	Competences	Examples of the informants' comments
	activities initiated by the teachers.	animals, in cleaning up forgotten graves before All Souls' Day [the latter initiatives are organised only by individual informants – <i>author's note</i> ]; 'We only participate in events, but they are probably not civic activities?'
<b>Life in the community as a way of creating/ building a democratic society.</b>	Children discuss the most important agreements, rules of conduct and adhere to them	'We have the most important agreements in the classroom, children know the rules of behaviour and try to follow them'; 'We teach the children to communicate constructively, the children are perfectly able to cooperate, negotiate for a joint decision';
	They cooperate with friends in joint activities	'Here are the things that go without saying, and without the programme we naturally developed and develop those communication skills';
	They can explain that everyone is equal, no one is better than others, they are able to negotiate for a shared decision.	'There are situations where you need to explain to the child that he/she is the same as others, but when should the children themselves explain that "everyone is equal, no one is better than the other", I don't know'.
<b>Respect for human rights and freedoms.</b>	Children have and value their own and others' opinions and take into account their own and others' needs.	'Preschool children are characterised by egocentrism, it is normal for them to find it difficult to easily accept the opinion of others, to sacrifice their own needs, but they learn'; 'They often argue, but this is natural, because truth is born in arguments. However, I can say that children are capable of finding an alternative in a problematic situation';
	They can distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in elementary situations, considering the effect on others.	'Children are perfectly capable of distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, they will also make a remark to a friend if he/she behaves inappropriately'; 'There are children with problematic behaviour, but in general children know the limits and stick to them'.
	They can recognise advertisements and their purposes in popular media with the help of the teacher and parents.	'What advertisements do they mean? Commercial, social, political? What should children identify in those advertisements? What, how and when to explain to children in order to recognise the goals of advertising? This probably means that you don't necessarily need to use everything that is advertised – every person has the right and freedom to choose, but I don't know how to do it in practice.'
<b>Creation of the state and strengthening of statehood in the</b>	Children can name the most important institutions of the State of Lithuania	'This probably means the President of the Republic, the Seimas, the Government? When elections are held, we talk to the children about what kind of elections are taking place. It happens that children say that they went with their parents to vote, but I never specifically asked if they knew';

Component	Competences	Examples of the informants' comments
<b>international community</b>		‘And what specifically should children name as the most important institutions of the Lithuanian state? What should that naming look like? How are children supposed to memorise them? Children remember through emotions, so how to create that emotional situation? The Seimas, the Government – I think they have certainly heard such names, but I cannot guarantee whether they will name them if you ask them what they know about the most important institutions of the State of Lithuania.’
	Through their positive actions, they contribute to the preservation of culture and natural resources.	‘It is already common for children to sort garbage, they understand that unnecessary paper, plastic, cans, glass can be recycled’; ‘They understand what responsible consumption is, why it is necessary to use electricity sparingly’; ‘Children know and understand the negative consequences of pollution on nature’; ‘We really talk about ecological topics with children a lot, we watch movies, read, then discuss. There is certainly enough educational material on this topic, but it is important to encourage children to think critically’; ‘Children understand that all plants and animals are important for nature, therefore they cannot be killed or destroyed’; ‘Children are interested in the nation’s traditions and customs, they are interested in their meaning – why do we do that?’
	They are able to name the most important international organisations of which Lithuania is a member	‘Children can definitely say that Lithuania is a member of the European Union and NATO. What other organisations should they know about? We also talked about the Red Cross with our children when they were collecting support for Ukraine and when they called to donate blood bags for Ukrainians’; ‘The worst thing is that we don’t know exactly which international organisations to talk to children about and how to talk so that they find it not only relevant, but also interesting, because otherwise they won’t even remember those talks.’

In summary, it can be said that the ‘Life in the community as a way of creating/building a democratic society’ component of citizenship education highlighted in the Programme is the one that has the clearest and most understandable outcomes/competences in the eyes of teachers: in practice, the child’s abilities to live in a social environment, to feel part of a group, to communicate and cooperate, to be able to give something of value to others and to take what he/she needs for himself/herself in socially acceptable

ways are systematically developed. This component largely includes respect for human rights and freedoms and developing the ability to have and value one's own and others' opinions, to take into account one's own and others' needs, to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and consider the impact on others. However, it was not clear to the informants what the developers of the Programme had in mind when they aimed for children being able to identify advertisements and their purposes in popular media with the help of teachers and parents.

'Civic identity and civic power' and 'Creation of the state and strengthening of statehood in the international community' are the citizenship education components that the informants understood least: the teachers do not doubt the children's ability to recognise the symbols of the State of Lithuania, to name the most important public holidays, and to contribute to the preservation of culture and natural resources with their value attitudes and actions. However, the informants could not answer the question of how to organise activities so that children are able to identify civil and uncivil behaviour, memorise what the most important Lithuanian state institutions are and the most important international organisations which Lithuania belong to. It is also admitted that they do not participate in civic activities with children – it is limited to teachers involving children in the commemorations of important days for Lithuania that they organise.

After summarising the research data, it can be said that children's citizenship is developed in Lithuanian preschool education institutions in a fragmentary way, because teachers basically do not understand the content of the citizenship education programme. This is most likely due to the fact that Lithuania did not have a long-term and consistent experience of citizenship, and the need to implement a policy of civic education appeared only after the country regained its independence, i.e., in 1990. It is known that people do not turn into citizens but become them. As noted at the beginning of the article, during the years in which an independent Lithuania has existed, several editions of citizenship education programmes have been prepared, over the course of which the concept of the content of citizenship, the forms of its development, and the expected outcomes have changed. Apparently, this has led to and continues to lead to a slowly emerging understanding in the public consciousness of how to properly perform the roles of a true citizen, which are many and various. It is easy to put into words that a good citizen is a person who is civically active, feels responsible for the community, and acts according to the principles of justice; however, it is more difficult to turn the declared civic values into reality and a norm of life. The idea that citizenship includes only the direct duties, rights, and

freedoms of a citizen, such as compliance with the laws of the country, the honest payment of taxes, participation in elections, etc., is quite a narrow understanding of citizenship, as it is additionally and no less important to be active in the community, to notice problems in one's environment and solve them, and to mobilise and involve others, including children, in civic initiatives so that they feel they are important and active participants in civic activities, and not passive observers or executors.

## Conclusions and Discussion

The need to implement a policy of civic education in Lithuania appeared only after the country regained its independence. Several editions of citizenship education programmes were prepared for this purpose over the course of three decades, in which the concept of the content of citizenship, the forms of its development, and the expected outcomes were changing. This most likely hindered the formation of an understanding in the public consciousness of what citizenship is and how to properly perform the roles of a good citizen.

Based on the research data, Lithuanian preschool teachers treat the concept of citizenship differently. Most of them perceive citizenship as the main duties of a citizen: to pay taxes, obey the laws of the country, perform military or alternative national defence service, and defend the state of Lithuania in the case of military aggression, etc. Nevertheless, almost a third of the interview participants understand citizenship in a conservative way, focusing only on the ethnic aspect: the history of the nation, nurturing the native language and traditions, and children's nationality education. For a minority of teachers, citizenship is related to active participation in public life.

Although the teachers of older preschool children who took part in the study consider themselves civic-minded, their civic activity is basically limited to adopting a responsible attitude to family and work, honestly paying taxes, participating in elections, taking part in public holiday events, and supporting Ukrainians suffering from the war. Only a few teachers are active in civic activities: they volunteer and get involved in support and aid projects.

The narrow understanding of citizenship is also evident in the practice of citizenship education: it is limited to familiarising children with state symbols, commemorating public holidays, and ethnocultural education. It can be said that children's citizenship in Lithuanian preschool education



institutions is developed in a fragmentary, superficial way, because teachers basically do not understand the content of the citizenship education programme and the components of citizenship competence. On the other hand, it can be seen that teachers understand the need to change existing practices, but they do not understand how to go about it.

The problematic context of citizenship education for preschool-age children presented in this article can be complemented by insights from the study by Saulėnienė and Trepekaitė (2023): in preschool education attention should focus on children learning about the rights and duties of citizens, activities for the benefit of society, and forming the internal dispositions of a person. The approaches and methods that should be used to impart democratic values in the process of citizenship education are, however, still lacking. The aforementioned scholars assume that it is appropriate to pay more attention to the development of citizenship competence in preschool education, by including interesting, unusual activities in the educational process that could help children focus better and adopt democratic values. Understandably, first of all, adults must see children as citizens, treat them as citizens, encourage them to participate as citizens, seek opportunities to develop active citizenship skills, and encourage children to express their opinions and make decisions, thereby teaching them about democracy and strengthening their political identity (Tsioumis, 2022). Child participation is defined as ensuring that children 'have a say' and are involved (independently or as a group) in decisions that have to do with the everyday activities of their lives, and that adults incorporate and respond to children's views (Theobald & Kultti, 2012). Developing an active citizen is possible through dialogue and through taking a collective approach to the problems of daily life and social actions. Such activities help children create their own image, solve their daily life problems, cooperate, discuss the importance of rules and good leadership, and develop empathy, critical thinking, and social responsibility (Tsioumis, 2022).

## Statement

The study was undertaken with the understanding and consent of each subject and conducted in full accordance with ethical principles.

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