

CO-OPERATION AND PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND UPBRINGING – PARENTAL SATISFACTION ^a

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Abstract

From the standpoint of a systemic approach, the paper considers the co-operation between families and pre-school institutions. It indicates the relevance and topicality of this issue in a time of reform which aims to build a quality pre-school education. The paper advocates the process supportive model of partnership between parents and pre-school teachers that places focus on the quality of their interrelations.

The research aim was to examine parental satisfaction with the co-operation with pre-school teachers. Research results have shown a high degree of respondents' agreement with the assertions relating to parental satisfaction with the co-operation with a pre-school institution. The research data obtained on a sample of parents with college and university degrees are indicative because they expressed the lowest level of satisfaction with such co-operation. However, respondents within this category have highly assessed the assertions relating to parental involvement in the work of a pre-school institution and pre-school teachers' acknowledgment of parental recommendations, which is encouraging form the standpoint of developing a partnership between parents and pre-school teachers. Pedagogical implications of the research can be observed from a theoretical standpoint in terms of inspiring other researchers to further delve into relationships between family and the system of pre-school education and upbringing, especially from a standpoint of numerous determinants which shape those relations. Implications for the pedagogical practice are reflected in perceiving that the category of highly educated parents comprises a significant force that can initiate changes concerning the co-operation between parents and pre-school teachers in terms of establishing and developing partner relationships and other topical changes in the field of pre-school education and upbringing.

Key words: pre-school teachers, parents, pre-school institution, co-operation, partnership.

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САРАДЊА И ПАРТНЕРСКИ ОДНОСИ У ПРЕДШКОЛСКОМ ВАСПИТАЊУ – ЗАДОВОЉСТВО РОДИТЕЉА

Апстракт

Рад са позиције системског приступа разматра тему сарадње породице и предшколских установа. Указује на значај и актуелност теме у време реформских промена које теже да изграде квалитет у систему предшколског васпитања и образовања. Наглашава се значај процесно-подражавајућег модела партнерства родитеља и васпитача, који потенцира квалитет односа родитеља и васпитача.

Циљ истраживања је испитивање задовољства родитеља сарадњом са васпитачима предшколских установа. Резултати истраживања су показали висок степен сагласности испитаника са свим тврдњама које указују на задовољство сарадњом са предшколском установом. Индикативни подаци истраживања добијени су на узорку родитеља са вишим и високим образовањем који су исказали најнижи степен задовољства сарадњом. Међутим, испитаници у оквиру ове категорије високо су вредновали тврдње које се односе на укључивање родитеља у рад установе и уважавање предлога од стране васпитача, што је охрабрујуће са аспекта развоја партнерских односа на релацији родитељ–васпитач. Педагошке импликације истраживања могу се сагледати на теоријском нивоу у смислу инспирације истраживачима за дубље проучавање односа породичног и система предшколског васпитања и образовања, посебно са аспеката бројних детерминаната које обликују ове односе. Импликације за педагошку праксу односе се на стицање увида у то да категорија високообразованих родитеља представља значајну снагу која може покренути промене у делу сарадње родитеља и васпитача у правцу успостављања и развоја партнерских односа и другим актуелним променама у области предшколског васпитања и образовања.

Кључне речи: васпитачи, родитељи, предшколска установа, сарадња, партнерски однос.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of the relations in pre-school education is determined by various factors, including the co-operation between a pre-school institution and family. The value of such co-operation has been recognized in various official documents such as those issued by the European Commission stating that family is one of the key quality determinants and the principal partner of educational institutions in children's education (ECEC, 2014). Article 6 of The Law on Fundamentals of Education System (2017) indicates that the co-operation between parents and pre-school teachers is one of the key elements of quality education. The Rulebook on Work Permits for Class Teachers, Pre-school Teachers and Professional Assistants (2005), in the part relating to the co-operation between colleagues, families and local communities, states that pre-school teachers need to understand the importance of fostering a partnership with families. The New Pre-school Curriculum Framework *Years of Ascent* (2018) advocates partnerships with families by building mutual trust, respect and constant open communication and dialogue.

In the current reform of the pre-school education system in our country co-operation with parents is a prerequisite for quality building (Krnjaja & Pavlović Breneselović, 2013; Pavlović Breneselović, 2015; Krnjaja, 2016). In our region, the co-operation between pre-school institutions and families has advanced from parental exclusion over co-operation and inclusion according to a previously defined form to the current partnership with parents and their active inclusion in the life and work of pre-school institutions (Jelić, Stojković, & Markov, 2018). In that context, the current practice is oriented towards the development of a partnership and it could be described as a transition period from a paradigm of parallel systems (whereby family and a pre-school institution are observed as two separate systems of different scope and functions) towards a paradigm of support whereby those two systems are observed through overlapping spheres of functions and influences, which results in education and upbringing based on a partner relationship (Pavlović Breneselović, 2014).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The recent relevant literature stresses the importance of co-operation between parents and pre-school teachers (Murray, McFarland-Piazza & Harrison, 2015; O'Connor et al, 2017; Vuorinen, 2020; Winder & Corter, 2016). Research by Jeon and associates (Jeon, McCartney, Richard, & Johnson, 2020) points to the existence of a connection between the co-operation between parents and pre-school teachers and the development of socio-emotional competences in children, which means that positive relationships contribute to better socio-emotional functioning of a child. Similarly, various study results show that there are multivariate relationships between the dimensions of parental involvement in the work of kindergartens and social and academic competences in children. Specifically, a study by McWayne and associates (2004) confirmed that children whose parents dedicate due attention to learning and maintain regular contacts with the kindergarten exhibit positive behavior in their contacts with adults and peers (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). According to assertions encountered in a study by Powell and associates (2010) active positioning of parents in the process of co-operation with a pre-school institution results in positive impacts on children's social skills and knowledge in the field of mathematics and it can prevent behavioral issues (Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010). Various authors indicate that a more intense engagement of parents and their good communication with the kindergarten constitute important predictors of better results and higher academic achievements in children, especially with regards to reading skills and mathematics (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Greater involvement of one's family in pre-school institution's ac-

tivities, according to Van Voorhis and associates (2013) significantly contributes to the development of literacy and mathematical abilities in children. The findings of this particular research confirm the stance that it is necessary to plan and strengthen the ties between family and a pre-school institution (Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). Thus, the co-operation between families and pre-school institutions becomes increasingly relevant and it requires more extensive research.

The theoretical ground for this paper is Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecosystemic approach. According to this theory, open systems are delineated by a wealth of relations with the environment, the exchange of information in both directions which helps harmonize the relationship between the system and the environment, and vice versa. In that context, pre-school institutions as open systems permanently build relations with local and wider social contexts and families, as the most immediate partners. In the process of partnership development, the role of pre-school teachers can hardly be exaggerated. They need continual professional improvement which enables one to gain critical insight into one's implicit pedagogy and practice (Pavlović Breneselović, Pavlovski, 2000). Pre-school teachers who display independence and creativity and undertake initiative in their work can establish relationships for an active positioning of parents and building qualitatively different relationships and true partnership and collaboration (Pavlović Breneselović, Pavlovski, 2012).

A more detailed definition of the ecosystemic approach in the domain of partnership development is found in Pavlović Breneselović (2010) who suggests two models of partnership development: utilitarian and process-oriented. According to the author, the first approach is more dominant in practice. It is based on complementary interests and concurrent goals which result in sharing common import prompting a process of joint activities. On the other hand, in the process-oriented model the abovementioned interests and goals form the basis for developing a partnership, while joint activities are necessary to build trust and common import resulting in a partnership as mutual support (Pavlović Breneselović, 2010). All through the pursuit of this model, a partnership is determined by the nature and character of the relationship itself. In that context, the partnership between a pre-school institution and family is seen as a process resulting in mutual support realized through mutual interaction. The second model, a process supportive partnership model, is especially significant from the standpoint of our research since the largest number of items, i.e. assertions stated in the instrument, is based on examining the relationships in the process of co-operation between parents and pre-school teachers. Interaction of the abovementioned subsystems is achieved through different forms: written and direct communication, direct participation of parents, parental activities (Pavlović Breneselović & Krnjaja, 2017). Various forms of co-operation between families and pre-

school institutions aim at securing a constant information flow to satisfy the needs of parents and pre-school teachers. Hence, it is important that parents and pre-school teachers are satisfied with the mutual co-operation.

Research studies dealing with the co-operation between parents and pre-school institutions examine different aspects, and numerous papers are oriented towards examining parental satisfaction with the co-operation (Edwards, 2018). Research is focused on parental satisfaction with pre-school education and education in general, or on examining specific topics such as parental expectations (Sollars, 2017), satisfaction with the curricula (McNaughton, 1994), the correlations between certain variables, such as the parents' education level and their satisfaction with pre-school education (Kelesidou et al, 2017) or parental satisfaction in rural or urban areas (Teleki & Buck-Gomez, 2002).

To establish a functional co-operation between family and a pre-school institution, pre-school teachers should be aware of parental expectations and parents should know how pre-school institutions work. Solaris Research (Solaris, 2017) showed that parents are often insufficiently introduced to pre-school education and that they mostly rely on the advice and previous experiences of close friends and relatives when opting for a kindergarten. Research studies show that parents have certain expectations from pre-school professionals: they want someone who cares about their children; they want to be appreciated and observed as active agents in their children's education; they wish to participate in planning activities and have their ideas recognized and used in shaping the quality environment for children; they expect that pre-school teachers are competent professionals who provide adequate services and satisfy their needs; they wish to have a close relationship with pre-school teachers (Swick, 2004). Based on established expectations it is possible to build strategies to successfully involve parents: pre-school teachers should build meaningful relations with all parents, mind the first contacts with parents, and resourcefully maintain permanent communication (Knopf & Swick, 2007).

Parental satisfaction is undoubtedly based on expectations that pre-school institutions/teachers will provide good care, education, and supervision of their children. To support this assertion, we provide data obtained from the research conducted in Finland which confirms that parents expect from practitioners to assume their obligations and responsibilities while children are in the kindergarten (Vuorinen, 2018). Parents are primarily focused on the wellbeing and safety of their children, and education outcomes become secondary if the former has not been provided. Research results obtained on a sample of 10 interviewed parents show that parents strive for continuity. They are satisfied if they have regular communication with pre-school teachers who are not frequently substituted. Parents perceive co-operation as a partnership and they are ready to

work with pre-school teachers to create favorable conditions for a child's growth and development (Vuorinen, 2018, p. 208-209).

Research performed during the 2000s (Fantuzzo, Perry & Childs, 2006; Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000), showed that families are included in their children's education in a manifold and complex manner and that, accordingly, one needs to move past one-dimensional estimates of family involvement and develop sets of instruments to examine multidimensional nature of family inclusion in pre-school education. In that context, there is a significant study that describes the development and assessment of a questionnaire regarding family inclusion in pre-school education (Fantuzzo et al, 2000). This study included a sample of 641 parents of children who attend kindergartens and schools, and the findings indicate three constructs of parental inclusion: a mutual exchange of information between parents and experts, parental inclusion in kindergarten and school activities and children's education at home. The findings indicate that there are correlations and statistically significant differences in parental attitudes towards the family structure and parents' education level. In that context, one should mention the research by Fantuzzo and associates (Fantuzzo et al., 2006) which resulted in developing an empirically tested scale of parental satisfaction with children's education. The research included a sample of 648 parents of children who attend kindergartens and initial grades of urban primary schools. Factor analysis indicated three significant dimensions: parental satisfaction with an educational experience in communication with pre-school teachers; satisfaction with communication in the classroom and satisfaction with the communication with the educational institution as a whole. The results of this research indicate that there are statistically significant differences concerning the demographic variables regarding marital status and parents' working status.

The scale by Fantuzzo and associates (Fantuzzo et al, 2006) was also applied in a research study (Hong, Zhu, Wu, & Li, 2020) on a sample of pre-school children and those attending the initial grades of primary schools (by 27515 parents in 12 Chinese cities). The data obtained through descriptive statistics indicate that parents in China are the most satisfied with experiences relating to communication in a pre-school group; this is followed by satisfaction with communication with pre-school teachers and class teachers and lastly, they are satisfied with the respective school or kindergarten.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research aims to examine parental satisfaction regarding their co-operation with a pre-school institution. Following the established goals we have defined research tasks: 1) To examine parental attitudes regarding their satisfaction with the co-operation with a pre-school institution,

as well as with space arrangement, parental meetings, daily regime, and forms of informing parents about the work of the respective institution; 2) To examine the impact of independent variables (sex, age, education, pedagogical group, and parents' workplace) on parental satisfaction with a pre-school institution.

The general research hypothesis assumes that parents are satisfied with the co-operation with pre-school institutions. Specific hypotheses have been formulated in the following manner: 1) It is assumed that parents are satisfied with the co-operation with employees in pre-school institutions, space arrangement, parental meetings, work regime, and manners of informing parents about the work in the institution; 2) It is assumed that independent variables (sex, age, education, pedagogical group, and parents' workplace) influence parental satisfaction with their co-operation with a pre-school institution in a statistically significant degree.

The research resorted to a descriptive method which was selected following the nature of the research subject. The sample comprises 763 parents on the territory of Serbia (Leskovac, Zaječar, Svrljig, Kraljevo, Smederevo, and Pirot) whose attitudes have been analyzed from the position of sex (female and male), age (under 35 and over 35), an education level (secondary school, college and university) and a pre-school group (nursery, kindergarten, preparatory).

The research study resorted to a five-point assessment scale ZRSPU (a Serbian acronym for Parents' satisfaction regarding the co-operation with a pre-school institution) which is a part of a larger instrument used to research into the quality of relationships in the pre-school education and upbringing (KOPVO). The assessment subscale comprises 16 items intentionally constructed for this research. The assessment scale ranges from number 1 (complete disagreement) to number 5 (complete agreement). To ascertain the reliability of the scale the authors resorted to Cronbach's α coefficient which indicates high reliability and internal consistency for this sample (0.92). The research was conducted in the course of 2019, i.e. from January to the end of November. The course of research unfolded in three phases. In the first phase, principals and pre-school teachers were introduced to the research, its goals, and implementation methodology. In this phase all principals accepted that the research be conducted in their institution. In the second phase, pre-school teachers were provided with instruments and they were given instructions on how to guide parents in the process of filling out the scale. Afterward, pre-school teachers provided the parents whose children attend the respective pre-school institution with the instruments. After providing their responses the parents were obliged to return the scales to pre-school teachers. In the third phase, the instruments were gathered from pre-school teachers, and they were prepared for data processing.

Statistical data processing was performed in the SPSS program. The results obtained through the research were entered into a universal database, which was followed by measurements of the arithmetic mean (M), standard deviation (SD), T-test, and F-test.

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Based on the analysis of research results showed in Table 1 one can conclude that as much as 84.4% of parents are completely satisfied, while 14.5% of parents are partly satisfied with pre-school teachers' attitudes towards children. The number of parents who believe that the child-pre-school teacher relationship is not satisfactory (completely: M-0.1 and partly: M-0.3), or are indecisive regarding the estimate (M-0.7) is considerable. The starting point is the assumption that parental awareness of pre-school teachers' attitude towards children can be acquired directly (by observing their relationships when they arrive or leave the kindergarten, when visiting the group that a child attends, etc.) or indirectly (when talking with their children or pre-school teachers). The obtained results indicate that parents are generally satisfied with the relationship between pre-school teachers and children, which is a significant piece of information from the standpoint of pedagogical theory and even more from a standpoint of practice in pre-school institutions. On the one hand, the information indicates that the state of practice is satisfactory. However, from the obtained data one cannot make a deduction about the nature of relationships between parents and pre-school teachers, or about potential issues that can occur in their relationships. Accordingly, this information can be significant for future research studies which may focus on the nature of relationships between parents and pre-school teachers.

Research results indicate that parents have positive attitudes towards space arrangement in the kindergarten (M-4.76). Partial or complete agreement is observed in the assertion that parents (98.8%) perceive pre-school teachers as available and co-operative. A large majority of respondents (95.1%) believe that their suggestions are adopted by pre-school teachers. A high degree of agreement (M-4.47%) is expressed regarding parental meetings and adequate attitude of pre-school teachers towards children. A large percentage of parents (95.6%) find themselves included in the work of a pre-school institution, satisfied with the work regime (M-4.70), and with the information flow regarding the work of the pre-school institution (M-4.63). They consider themselves partners (M-4.67) who are introduced to the goals and activities in the pre-school institution (M-4.58). It is reassuring that pre-school teachers are interested in parents' educational approach in the family setting and their pedagogical education (M-4.33), and in introducing parents to the developmental characteristics and potentials of pre-school children (M-4.56). Significantly,

Table 1. Parental satisfaction regarding the co-operation with a pre-school institution

Assumption	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. I am satisfied with pre-school teacher's attitude towards children	4.82	0.43	0.1	0.3	0.7	14.5	84.4
2. I am satisfied with space arrangement in the kindergarten	4.76	0.50	0.1	0.7	1.3	18.0	79.9
3. Pre-school teachers are easily available and ready to co-operate	4.78	0.45	0.1	/	1.0	18.7	80.1
4. Pre-school teachers always adopt parental suggestions	4.58	0.60	0.1	0.4	4.3	30.9	64.2
5. Pre-school teachers are ready to provide professional advice regarding education	4.77	0.48	0.1	0.1	2.0	17.2	80.6
6. At parental meetings in a pre-school institution current topics are regularly discussed	4.74	0.49	/	0.4	1.8	20.3	77.5
7. Relationships between pre-school teachers and parents are characterized by kindness, understanding and support	4.74	0.46	/	/	1.2	23.3	75.5
8. Pre-school teachers include parents in the work of pre-school institution	4.65	0.57	/	0.4	4.1	25.6	70.0
9. I am satisfied with the work regime in the pre-school institution	4.70	0.53	/	0.5	2.1	23.7	73.7
10. I am satisfied with the manner of informing parents about the work in the pre-school institution	4.63	0.59	0.1	0.4	4.1	26.2	69.2
11. Pre-school teachers foster partnership with parents	4.67	0.52	/	0.3	2.2	26.9	70.6
12. Pre-school teachers introduce parents to goals and activities in the pre-school institution	4.58	0.60	0.3	0.3	3.5	32.5	63.4
13. Pre-school teachers are interested in parents' educational approach and their pedagogical education	4.33	0.81	0.1	1.8	15.5	30.0	52.6
14. Pre-school teachers introduce us to the children's developmental characteristics and potentials	4.56	0.66	0.1	1.7	4.2	29.4	64.6
15. I would change nothing regarding the co-operation with pre-school institution employees	4.52	0.75	0.5	2.5	5.5	26.6	64.9
16. I am satisfied with the co-operation with pre-school teachers, professional services and principals.	4.61	0.59	0.1	0.5	3.1	30.5	65.7

as much as 91.5% of parents would not introduce changes to co-operation with pre-school teachers while 96.2% of them give positively assess the quality of relationship and co-operation with pre-school teachers, professional service, and institution principals. The data obtained through the research indicate that, from the parents' standpoint, the co-operation between parents and pre-school teachers is on a high level. Especially significant appears to be the fact that parents perceive themselves as partners which implies that parents are involved in solving all important issues relating to the work organization in a pre-school institution, especially in all those activities relating to children's well-being. It is indicative, however, that the largest number of respondents would not change anything about their co-operation with pre-school teachers. In that context, one can rightly pose the question of whether one truly deals with full co-operation based on the principles of partnership, or perhaps the respondents tend to provide socially desirable answers, which can constitute a weakness in this type of research.

Table 2 shows a statistically significant difference in respondents' replies from the standpoint of their sex. Average response analysis indicates a high degree of agreement with assertions examining parental satisfaction regarding their co-operation with pre-school institution employees.

Table 2. Statistically significant differences in parental attitudes in relation to their sex

Assertion	Sex	M	SD	T	df	p
Pre-school teachers are easily available and ready to co-operate	Female	4.81	0.44	2.34	420	0.02
	Male	4.72	0.46			
Pre-school teachers always adopt parental suggestions	Female	4.63	0.58	3.11	406	0.00
	Male	4.48	0.63			
Relationships between parents and pre-school teachers are characterized by kindness, understanding and support	Female	4.76	0.44	2.21	393	0.02
	Male	4.68	0.50			
I am satisfied with the manner of informing parents about the work in the pre-school institution	Female	4.60	0.62	-2.79	536	0.00
	Male	4.72	0.50			
I would change nothing regarding the co-operation with pre-school institution employees	Female	4.49	0.79	-2.15	537	0.03
	Male	4.61	0.64			

Research data show that mothers mostly assess pre-school teachers as available, ready to co-operate (M-4.81) and adopt parental suggestions (M-4.63), that they share a relationship characterized by kindness, understanding and support (M-4.76), unlike fathers, who have expressed a lower level of agreement with the aforementioned assertions. In contrast, research results show that fathers (M-4.72) are more satisfied with how parents are informed about the work in pre-school institutions and they

have less desire than mothers to change the manner of co-operation with pre-school teachers (M-4.61).

The obtained data relating to statistical differences in respondents' attitudes in terms of their sex can be considered expected, primarily because mothers of pre-school children are more engaged in all aspects of children's lives, including the aspect of co-operation with pre-school institutions. Female respondents highly assessed their relations with pre-school teachers characterized by politeness, understanding, and support, which is also expected because in some earlier research studies it had been shown that subtle aspects of trust play extremely important role in the co-operation between parents and pre-school teachers (Kikas et al. 2011). In contrast, fathers assessed more positively the assertions relating to the forms of informing parents of the work in pre-school institutions. Accordingly, one can assert that fathers are more oriented towards obtaining information from the institution and less towards their personal engagement, which is confirmed by the data that are more or less concurrent with the assertion that they would not introduce any changes in the process of co-operation.

Data presented in Table 3 show that younger parents (under 35 years of age) assess more positively the co-operation with pre-school institutions.

Table 3. Statistically significant differences in parental attitudes in relation to respondents' age

Assertion	Age	M	SD	T	df	p
Pre-school teachers always adopt parental suggestions	Under 35	4.63	0.57	2.38	611	0.01
	Over 35	4.52	0.64			
At parental meetings in the pre-school institution current topics are regularly discussed	Under 35	4.78	0.48	2.48	627	0.01
	Over 35	4.69	0.52			
Pre-school teachers are interested in parents' educational approach and their pedagogical education	Under 35	4.41	0.76	3.60	761	0.00
	Over 35	4.20	0.85			
Pre-school teachers introduce us to the children's developmental characteristics and potentials	Under 35	4.61	0.63	2.54	615	0.01
	Over 35	4.49	0.70			

Younger parents more readily agree with the assertion stating that pre-school teachers adopt parental suggestions (M-4.63), that they are interested in parents' educational approach and their pedagogical education (M-4.41) and that they introduce them to the developmental characteristics and potentials of pre-school children (M-4.61), unlike parents who are older than 35. Average response analysis indicates that parents younger

than 35 assess the quality of parental meetings at the pre-school institution more positively (M-4.78) than parents over the age of 35 (M-4.69). One can safely assert that respondents who belong to the category of parents younger than 35 more readily agree on the co-operation with parents, which is also an expected piece of information. The reasons could be traced to the fact that many of them enroll their children for the first time for a pre-school institution, that they do not have enough parental experience in co-operating with a pre-school institution or sufficiently developed parental competences in terms of recognizing the characteristics and potentials of children of a certain age. In that context, a child's age and order of birth play an important role. The younger the child, the parents show a bigger interest in his/her advancement in the kindergarten, which is especially noticeable when one deals with the first child in the family. It is important for the parents who belong to this category that pre-school teachers hear them, that their suggestions are acknowledged, and that they are introduced to developmental characteristics and potentials of children of a certain age, as well as to obtain specific pedagogical education. In contrast, those who belong to the category of parents older than 35 mostly have larger parental and life experiences, or they have their second child in the kindergarten, so they are well acquainted with the topics in the field of parental competences.

The data presented in Table 4 show that respondents with a college degree assess more positively the co-operation with pre-school institutions regarding the following aspects: adopting suggestions (M-4.67), providing professional advice about education (M-4.82) and including parents in the work of the institution (M-4.73). A somewhat lower level of agreement was expressed by parents with the lowest level of education, while the lowest level of agreement is expressed by parents with a university diploma.

The results show that parents with a lower level of education (secondary education: M-4.58 and college: M-4.63) would change nothing in co-operation with employees of the pre-school institution. They are, accordingly, largely satisfied with their communication with pre-school teachers, professional services and pre-school institution principals. The readiness to improve co-operation with pre-school institution employees is mostly dominant in parents with a university diploma.

However, despite stated differences, all three categories of respondents expressed a partial agreement with the presented assertion.

However, it is rather indicative that parents with the highest level of education, i.e. those who have university and college degrees, exhibit the lowest degree of agreement with the offered items. The reasons for this are different. One of them is most certainly reflected in high expectations of this category of parents concerning the pre-school institution and the offer related to development, upbringing and education of pre-school children. Namely, from the standpoint of their education level, these parents can exhibit a high level of aspirations towards their children's

achievements. Another reason, not less significant, lies in the fact that these parents are more educated both in general terms and in the domain of pedagogical competences, that they have more knowledge in comparison to other parents regarding the upbringing and development of children or regarding information about the manners in which parents can be involved in the work of a pre-school institution. Furthermore, one can assume that highly educated parents are more familiar with their rights and the rights of their children and they are ready to criticize and publicly show their dissatisfaction. From that standpoint, it is significant that parents with college and university degrees provided the most positive assessment of the co-operation with pre-school institutions with regards to the number of acknowledged suggestions given to pre-school teachers and obtained professional advice regarding pre-school education by pre-school teachers and professional associates. Likewise, it is especially important that parents from this category gave positive assessments to the involvement of parents in the work of a pre-school institution, which implies the development of the partnership, i.e. the positioning of parents as partners in education. This is corroborated by the research result indicating that parents who belong to this category showed readiness to improve their co-operation with a pre-school institution.

Table 4. Statistically significant differences in parental attitudes in relation to parents' education level

Assertion	Education level	M	SD	F	df	p
Pre-school teachers always adopt parental suggestions	Secondary school	4.59	0.60	5.42	762	0.00
	College	4.67	0.49			
	University	4.47	0.71			
Pre-school teachers are ready to provide professional advice about education	Secondary school	4.79	0.43	5.24	762	0.00
	College	4.82	0.44			
	University	4.67	0.60			
Pre-school teachers include parents in the work of their institution	Secondary school	4.62	0.59	3.19	762	0.04
	College	4.73	0.48			
	University	4.59	0.64			
Pre-school teachers are interested in parents' educational approach and their pedagogical education	Secondary school	4.43	0.74	8.83	762	0.00
	College	4.32	0.77			
	University	4.12	0.93			
Pre-school teachers introduce us to the children's developmental characteristics and potentials	Secondary school	4.63	0.61	5.67	762	0.00
	College	4.56	0.57			
	University	4.42	0.85			
I would change nothing regarding the co-operation with pre-school institution employees	Secondary school	4.58	0.68	13.7	762	0.00
	College	4.63	0.63			
	University	4.27	0.96			
I am satisfied with the co-operation with pre-school teachers, professional service and principals.	Secondary school	4.65	0.59	5.08	762	0.00
	College	4.62	0.52			
	University	4.48	0.65			

Data presented in Table 5 show that the quality of parental meetings is most positively assessed by the parents of children in the preparatory group (M-4.71). Parents of children in the nursery group express a lower level of agreement (M-4.71), while the parents of children in the kindergarten group express the lowest level of agreement (M-4.69).

Table 5. Statistically significant differences in parental attitudes in relation to the pre-school group attended by children

Assertion	Pre-school group	M	SD	F	df	p
At parental meetings in the pre-school institution current topics are regularly discussed	Nursery	4.71	0.49	3.61	762	0.02
	Kindergarten	4.69	0.53			
	Preparatory	4.79	0.47			
I would change nothing regarding the co-operation with pre-school institution employees	Nursery	4.34	0.84	6.73	762	0.00
	Kindergarten	4.58	0.65			
	Preparatory	4.57	0.75			

Parents of children in different pre-school groups would not change anything in the co-operation with pre-school employees, considering that their answers have a numerical range interpreted as a high level of partial agreement leaning towards the complete agreement. Parents of children in the kindergarten group (M-4.58) and preparatory group (M-4.57) show less tendency and desire to change something in the co-operation with the pre-school employees, unlike parents of children in the nursery group (M-4.34).

One can assess as expected the presence of statistically significant differences in parents' responses with regards to the pedagogical group that a child attends. Parents of children who attend preparatory pre-school groups expressed the highest level of agreement with the organization and the quality of parental meetings. The obtained results can primarily be interpreted from the standpoint of a child's age and topics of parental meetings. Namely, parents of children who attend the preparatory pre-school program, find parental meetings significant primarily because of the topics which they impose (issues connected with preparing children for school) because they believe that they can obtain useful information regarding the child's enrolment for primary school, though it is well known that children are being prepared for primary school throughout their pre-school period. In that context, it is interesting that parents of children in preparatory groups, as well as in the kindergarten, show more tendency towards changes in their co-operation with the institution, unlike parents of children in nursery groups. Namely, these data confirm that with the increase in children's age parents tend to become more involved in the work of pre-school institutions because the range of children's interests becomes wider and their focus is moved from basic issues related to health and hygienic habits towards the issues of children's growth, education and upbringing.

CONCLUSION

Based on research data one can conclude that both specific research hypotheses have been confirmed. Namely, it has been established that there is a high level of parental agreement with all assertions indicating satisfaction with the co-operation with the pre-school institution, which confirms the first research hypothesis. Likewise, independent research variables show that there are statistically significant differences, which confirms the second hypothesis.

Although the obtained results point to satisfaction of parents with the cooperation with a pre-school institution, one rightfully faces the dilemma regarding the quality of the current relationship with a pre-school institution, especially if one bears in mind that satisfaction with the cooperation does not imply the partnership whose importance is emphasized in modern theoretical approaches and the current legislation. In that context, one is encouraged by the research results showing that parents with college and university degrees most positively assess the co-operation with pre-school institutions regarding the acknowledgment of suggestions that they share with pre-school teachers, professional advice about children's education offered by pre-school teachers and professional associates, as assertions which relate to the involvement of parents in the work of the pre-school institution, which indicates a possible presence and development of partner relationships, i.e. positioning of parents as partners in education. In favor of partner relationships whose significance is emphasized in modern theoretical concepts, one can provide research results stating that parents who have the highest education showed great readiness to improve the co-operation with a pre-school institution.

Research results can have significant implications for the field of pedagogical theory and practice. In the field of pedagogical theory, the results can be inspirational for future research studies in the domain of co-operation with parents and development of partner relationships, especially from the standpoint of a larger number of variables which determine the relationships between parents and pre-school teachers, as well as from a standpoint relating to the structure of a family and interrelations and relationships within a family system. In the domain of pedagogical practice significant implications of the research results can relate to the examined parental categories, especially concerning the parents' education level. In that context, it is important to know that highly educated parents constitute a significant force and potential for changes in the field of co-operation with parents and even beyond that, in the field of changes in the pre-school education as a whole. Bearing in mind that parents' education is a significant determinant for parental partnership, it is possible to organize different training sessions with parents at the level of practice to strengthen parental competences for responsible parenthood, as well as for active involvement in the work of pre-school institutions. From that

standpoint, in the process of developing relationships between parents and pre-school institutions one can expect positive changes regarding the development of partnerships in education.

This paper provides insight into the parental perception of the co-operation with pre-school institutions in terms of their satisfaction with the quality of relationships with pre-school teachers, professional services and principals. The research also indicates the significance of independent variables which offer insight into how different categories of parents perceive the co-operation with pre-school institutions and the extent to which they are satisfied with it. The limitations of the conducted research are in its exclusive quantitative methodology and the fact that the respondents are parents alone. It is well-known that an objective assessment should also consider pre-school teachers' perspectives, which can be a recommendation for future research. Considering the importance of the co-operation with parents for improving the quality of pre-school education, and the knowledge that points to the correlation between the co-operation and the development of children's competencies, one can assume that the research into this topic shall become more intensive in the future.

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САРАДЊА И ПАРТНЕРСКИ ОДНОСИ У ПРЕДШКОЛСКОМ ВАСПИТАЊУ – ЗАДОВОЉСТВО РОДИТЕЉА

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Резиме

У првом делу рада указује се на значај сарадње породице и предшколске установе, разматрају се теоријска полазишта и релевантна истраживања. У методолошком делу рада приказани су резултати истраживања о задовољству родитеља квалитетом односа са васпитачима, стручном службом и директорима. Узорак истраживања чини 763 родитеља са територије Србије чија деца похађају државне предшколске установе. Ставови родитеља анализирани су у односу на независне варијабле истраживања: пол, године старости, степен образовања и васпитну групу. Општа хипотеза истраживања: родитељи су задовољни сарадњом са предшколском установом, а посебне хипотезе су: 1) родитељи су задовољни сарадњом са васпитачима и другим запосленима у предшколској установи; 2) независне варијабле (пол, године старости, степен образовања, васпитна група деце и место рада родитеља) статистички значајно утичу на ставове родитеља о задовољству сарадњом са предшколском установом. У анализи резултата истраживања коришћена је дескриптивна статистика (т-тест и ф-тест).

На основу података добијених истраживањем, установљен је висок степен сагласности испитаних родитеља са свим тврдњама које указују на задовољство сарадњом са предшколском установом. Утврђене су статистички значајне разлике у одговорима испитаних родитеља у односу на независне варијабле, при чему је утврђено да мајке позитивније процењују квалитет односа са васпитачима у односу на очеве, да су родитељи до 35 године живота задовољнији сарадњом у односу на старије; да су родитељи са факултетским образовањем мање задовољни сарадњом у односу на родитеље са нижим степеном образовања, као и да су родитељи деце која похађају припремне предшколске групе задовољнији сарадњом са предшколском установом у односу на родитеље чија деца похађају млађе и средње групе. Сматра се да добијени резултати могу да представљају полазиште за будућа истраживања сарадње породице и предшколске установе и њихових корелата ради унапређивања квалитета рада.