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## ***Parental Involvement in the Work of Preschool Institutions<sup>2</sup>***

### **Extended summary**

Parental involvement in the life and work of preschool institutions is an issue that is becoming increasingly relevant as the reform of the system of preschool education unfolds. With the introduction of the *New Preschool Curriculum Framework - Years of Ascent* (2018), this matter has become fairly significant because the new curriculum perceives parents as key partners in achieving the goals of the institutional preschool education. Accordingly, there is a clear need to thoroughly study this topic and examine all relevant factors which determine an active positioning of parents in the process of preschool education. In that context, it is very important to establish parents' self-assessment of their involvement in the process of preschool education.

This paper aims to examine parents' attitudes towards their involvement in the work of preschool institutions. The paper constitutes a part of a more extensive research that deals with the field of parents' co-operation with preschool institutions. In this paper, the authors present the results of a subscale that examines parents' attitudes regarding their involvement in the work of preschool institutions. The research included 763 parents whose children attend public preschool institutions on the territory of Serbia (Leskovac, Zaječar, Svrljig, Kraljevo, Sme-

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derevo, and Pirot). Parents' self-assessment was analysed in relation to independent variables: sex (male and female), age (up to 35 and over 35 years of age), education level (secondary education, college degree, university degree) and a preschool group (nursery, kindergarten, preschool preparatory programme). The research proposes a general hypothesis that assumes that parents believe that they are involved in the work of the preschool institutions. The specific hypotheses are as follows: (1) it is assumed that parents are active and informed members of the preschool institutions and that they believe that preschool teachers contribute to their direct involvement in the process of education, (2) it is assumed that independent variables (sex, age, education level, place of work and a preschool group) are statistically significant determinants of the parents' self-assessment of their involvement in the work of the respective preschool institutions.

Based on the results obtained in the course of the research, one can assert that we have established a high level of agreement of surveyed parents with all the assertions indicating the involvement of parents in the work of preschool institutions, whereby the general hypothesis has been confirmed. The largest percentage of the surveyed parents believes that preschool institutions are open to the exchange of experiences between parents and teachers, as well as to the direct involvement of parents in the educational process. Based on the obtained results, it can be concluded that the first research hypothesis has been confirmed.

The research results also indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the respondents' replies regarding independent variables, which confirms the second research hypothesis as well. Statistically significant differences in parents' responses show that mothers provide a more positive assessment of their involvement in the work of preschool institutions, as well as that the level of parents' agreement with those items which indicate involvement in the work of preschool institutions decreases with the increase in the respondents' age. Interesting results have been obtained with relation to the respondents' level of education. Namely, parents with university degrees express the lowest level of agreement with the assertions regarding their involvement. The reasons can be traced to the fact that parents with higher educational levels also exhibit greater ambitions and expect to be involved in the work of the preschool institutions in various ways. Another notable research result indicates that parents of younger children exhibit the highest level of agreement regarding the items dealing with involvement, which can be explained by the fact that their expectations are mostly directed towards child care, and less towards the actual educational process.

Generally speaking, the conducted research provides insights into the current state of practice regarding parents' involvement in the work of preschool institutions based on parents' self-assessment. The research limitations mostly relate to the nature of the applied instrument in terms of the insufficient coverage of a larger number of independent variables that can be relevant for this topic, such as structure, socio-economic status, or socio-cultural characteristics of families. On the other hand, the obtained results can be relevant for theoretical analyses, as well as for educational practice, but first and foremost for employees in preschool institutions in terms of reviewing the situation and planning the further steps towards greater involvement of parents in the work of the preschool teachers and institutions in general.

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Following the obtained results one can conclude that parents' self-assessment regarding their involvement in the work of preschool institutions gives reasons for optimism and supports the attitude that parental involvement is of immense significance for the quality of the preschool education.

**Keywords:** parents, involvement, preschool institutions, education, preschool children.

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