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## ***Preschool Teacher Education Students’ Assessment of Their Own Views on Parents and Teacher-Parent Cooperation***

### **Extended summary**

Education for cooperation and partnership with parents is an integral part of preschool teacher education. The assumption is that it contributes to competencies that enhance the cooperation of parents and preschool teachers. For the purposes of this paper, the competencies for cooperation with parents were considered as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable preschool teachers to establish and maintain satisfactory relationships with parents of children involved in early childhood and preschool education (Višnjić Jevtić, 2018b). Earlier research (Visković, Višnjić Jevtić, 2017a) showed that during professional development it is possible to influence the development of knowledge and skills. The same research showed that attitudes do not change. It can be assumed that education has to influence the development of positive attitudes towards parents and cooperation with parents. This paper therefore questions students’ attitudes about parents as well as collaboration with parents.

The aim of the research was to determine, taking into consideration students’ age and their year of university studies, if there are differences in the views among the preschool teacher education students regarding parents, the role they play, and the characteristics that may enable or hinder positive relations with parents. The research was conducted among the undergraduate students (N=190) on the first year (42,6%, f=81) and the third year (24,7%, f=47) of Early and Preschool Education, as well as among the students on the 1st year of the Master’s

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Course at the Teacher Education Faculty of the University of Zagreb. The students' age was between 18 and 25 ( $M=21,5$ ;  $SD=1,93$ ).

The research instrument was a questionnaire for parents adapted in accordance with the Meehan and Meehan instrument (2017) and with the permission of the authors. The self-assessment questionnaire consists of eighty-one statements classified under four dependent variables: *Perceptions of the role of parents*, *Perceptions of parents*, *Perceptions of the characteristics of parents that support positive collaborative relationship*, and *Perceptions of the characteristics of parents that can impede collaboration*. The students rated the statements on a five-point scale, and the responses offered to the research participants ranged from 1 – “completely disagree” to 5 – “completely agree” with a neutral grade 3 – “neither agree nor disagree”. The reliability coefficient of the instrument used in this study is  $\alpha = 0.734$ , which corresponds to the reliability of the original instrument ( $\alpha = 0.737$ ).

The descriptive indicators for the parent perception scale show that the majority of the respondents feel that being a parent requires a high level of responsibility ( $M = 4.91$ ;  $SD = ,311$ ). The research results indicate that the research participants positively evaluate their expectations of parents regarding their involvement in education. The research showed that the respondents would like if parents asked them questions to learn more about their children's education or care ( $M = 4.37$ ;  $SD = ,628$ ). The respondents almost completely agree with the statement: *I would like parents to respect my decisions as a professional* ( $M = 4.61$ ;  $SD = 0.531$ ), which may indicate that they perceive themselves as members of the professional community, although they have not officially become its part yet.

A high score for the descriptive indicators for the variable *Perception of the characteristics that support a positive relationship with parents* indicates positive evaluation ( $M = 4.26-4.75$ ) relative to the characteristics that support positive relationships with parents. An opportunity to work with parents who are honest was most positively evaluated ( $M = 4.75$ ;  $SD = 0.471$ ).

Different attitudes were expressed regarding the variable *Perception of characteristics that impede a positive relationship with parents*. The respondents worry about parents who may get into conflict with them ( $M = 3.63$ ;  $SD = ,955$ ), but also they worry whether they can handle parents who are addicted to alcohol or drugs ( $M = 3.87$ ;  $SD = 1.034$ ). The respondents expressed a neutral attitude towards parents who are too involved in their children's lives ( $M = 2.91$ ;  $SD = 0.971$ ) and parents who have too high expectations of education ( $M = 3.20$ ;  $SD = 1.019$ ).

The correlation between the self-assessment of the dependent variables and the age of the respondents was examined by using Pearson's correlation coefficient. At the significance level  $p = ,00$ , a slightly positive correlation between the respondents' age and the *Perceptions of Parents* variable was observed. For other variables, no statistically significant correlation was found with respect to the respondents' age.

A one-way analysis of variance revealed a statistically significant difference between the dependent variables (*Perceptions of the role of parents*,  $p \leq ,01$ ; *Perceptions of the characteristics of parents that may impede a positive relationship with parents*,  $p \leq ,05$ ) and the respondents' year of study.

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The conducted research has shown that there is a correlation between the respondents' age, the year of university study, and the perceptions of the preschool education students of parents and teacher-parent cooperation. Given the importance of this cooperation and of establishing a good relationship between the educational institution and the family, it is important to empower the students of preschool education to establish this cooperation through different forms in their future work.

**Keywords:** early childhood and preschool education, parents, self-assessment, students, teacher-parent cooperation.

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