



TRAINING OF FUTURE EDUCATORS TO WORK WITH PARENTS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE AREA OF PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION AND FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this research was to determine whether and to what extent educational programs and curriculums for preschool education develop competences in students that are needed for establishing partnership with parents. The basic research technique is the analysis of syllabus documentation. The analysis was created for the preschool education educational programs in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (University in Tuzla, University in Zenica, University in Bihac, University in Sarajevo), and it showed that there are differences between institutions in the aspect of presence of study courses that prepare future educators for the work with parents. The results of the research have shown that there are differences in relation to the examined units of analysis and that the degree of conformity of syllabus contents for the course subject Family Pedagogy and Partnerships with parents varies in relation to the examined areas.

Keywords: *educator, partnership, professional competence of educators.*

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of how well preschool education educational programs are prepared, required success cannot be achieved unless family is included in that process. The basic prerequisite for optimal child development and an important aspect of the quality of preschool education is joint action between educators and parents, through mutual informing, support and appreciation (Visnjic Jevtic, 2018). A continuous exchange of information about a child between parents and educators leads to a better understanding of the child, and a more complete education and upbringing in accordance with the child's individual needs (Nenadic-Bilan and Zlokovic, 2015). Therefore, an educator's profession requires interdisciplinary approach in all areas of

education and upbringing in nursery school, and aside from all the competences, an educator must also acquire competences necessary for partnership with parents already during studies (Rogulj, 2018). However, aside from the fact that values of partnership are well known, according to Epstein (1985) a great number of educators has little or no training on including parents into the educational process. Many educators lack necessary skills and knowledge on how to work with families efficiently. According to Ljubetic and Mandaric Vukusic (2012) in order to acquire necessary knowledge and skills, a modern educator must have multidisciplinary education and qualifications to solve problems in everyday practice, one of which is the approach to the questions of

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partnership with parents. In order for the students of preschool education during their formal education to acquire necessary competences for the development of partner relationship with parents “which becomes one of the fundamental challenges for the science, profession and parents, the existence of compulsory course subjects Family pedagogy and Partnership between family and educational institution is necessary (Ljubetic, 2014, pg. 99). For Hornby (2000) two key educator’s characteristics are essential for the development of partner relationship with parents, and those are:

- when communicating with parents, educators must be authentic, because that is the only way they can be open and acknowledge their mistakes, then, show respect to others, because only that way educators show parents that they take their opinion seriously and into consideration, and to be emphatic which enables them to see the child’s situation from the parent’s perspective.
- Secondly, an educator must be optimistic and realistic regarding a child’s development, and not hesitate from an open and honest conversation with parents, but with a certain amount of sensitivity.

In order to understand a parent’s different perspective, it is very important for an educator to possess active listening skills, as well as skills of non-verbal communication (Castle, 2004). Therefore, educator’s expertise is important in order for them to achieve quality and successful partnership with parents, as well as their competences, knowledge and skills for establishing effective communication with parents. The results of the research by Smith and Sheridan (2019) indicate that initial education of educators has a significant influence on the development of competencies of educators for creating partnership with parents, as well as forming attitudes on the partnership. Positive attitudes of educators and parents towards the partnership reflect on the achievement, behaviour, and socio-emotional development of children (Orillosa, Magno, 2013). Precisely during initial education educators must be trained to establish partnerships with parents through development of professional knowledge and skills for providing support to parents as their children’s first educators (Klisanic et al., 2020). The concept of competencies Weinert (2001) describes as a complex system of, not only knowledge and skills, but also strategies that are necessary for application of those skills and knowledge, corresponding attitudes and emotions, as well as successful self-regulation of those competencies. Visnjic Jevtic (2018, pg. 96, 97) finds that educators’ professional competencies for establishing and maintaining

partner relations with parents require knowledge on certain strategies and techniques for parents’ inclusion, on different family dynamics and functioning, on work with parents, on obstacles and support system provided to parents by the society, communication, organisational and collaboration skills. Attitudes and beliefs of both sides influence the development of a quality partnership between educators and parents.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the research is to analyse course curriculums to determine the possibilities of the initial education programs for the development of future educators’ competences for partnership with parents. In accordance with the goal, the following research assignments have been set:

1. To determine the representation of course subjects for the preparation of future educators for partnership with parents at public universities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
2. To analyse program structure of course subjects that contribute to the development of competences of future educators for partnership with parents.

In order to achieve the aim, the analysis included course curriculums of preschool education at four public universities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as follows: University in Sarajevo, University in Tuzla, University in Bihac and University in Zenica. For the analysis of course curriculums the following official documents were used, downloaded from the faculty’s internet web sites:

- Course curriculum from the first cycle of studies at the department of Preschool education with the application from the academic year 2018/2019, Faculty of Philosophy in Tuzla;
- Course curriculum from the undergraduate studies at the department of Preschool education (2018), Islamic pedagogical faculty, University in Zenica;
- Course curriculum at the department of Preschool education with the application from the academic year 2018/2019, Faculty of pedagogy, University in Bihac;
- Course curriculum from the undergraduate and graduate studies at the department of Preschool education with the application from the academic year 2011/2012, Faculty of Pedagogy, University in Sarajevo.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After completing an insight into course curriculums at the study programs of preschool education at public universities in the Federation

of Bosnia and Herzegovina, an analysis of the planning structure of the studies was undertaken within which the focus was placed on the analysis of representation of course subjects aimed at studying family upbringing and partnership between the educational institution and family,

and on the analysis of the status of those course subjects according to the criteria: obligation (obligatory or elective), how many semesters they are studied, and what number of lectures and practice hours a week and what number of ECTS points was stipulated for these course subjects.

Table 1. Representation of course subjects from the area of partnership with parents and course subjects aimed at studying family upbringing at the study programs of preschool education at public universities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

| Faculty | Name of the course subject | Semester | ECTS | Status | P | S | V |
|-------------------------------------|---|------------|------|--------|---|---|---|
| Faculty of pedagogy, Sarajevo | Family pedagogy | Semester 6 | 2 | O | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Faculty of philosophy, Tuzla | Family Pedagogy | Semester 5 | 5 | O | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| | Family pedagogy | Semester 3 | 4.5 | O | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Islamic pedagogical faculty, Zenica | Partnership between family and nursery school | Semester 8 | 4.5 | O | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Faculty of pedagogy, Bihac | Family pedagogy | Semester 2 | 4 | O | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Note: Status: O-obligatory course; I-elective course/ P – lectures; S – seminars; V – practice

From the results shown in Table 1 it is noticeable that the course subject from the area of partnership between educational institution and family is only represented at the study program of preschool education at the Islamic pedagogical faculty in Zenica (*Partnership between family and nursery school*). At the Faculty of pedagogy in Sarajevo, Faculty of philosophy in Tuzla and Faculty of pedagogy in Bihac, course subjects that primarily relate to acquiring competences for partnership with parents are not represented at the study programs of preschool education. Course subject *Family pedagogy* is only represented at the Faculty of pedagogy in Sarajevo and Faculty of pedagogy in Bihac, and the course subject called *Family pedagogy* at the Faculty of philosophy in Tuzla and Islamic pedagogical faculty in Zenica. The results of the analysis of course curriculums within the study program of preschool education at public universities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina presented in Table 1 show that all course subjects aimed at studying family upbringing (*Family pedagogy*) and partnership between educational institution and family

(*Partnership between family and nursery school*) are represented as obligatory courses in course curriculums. Considering the number of semesters in which course subjects aimed at studying family upbringing and partnership between educational institution and family are represented at study programs of preschool education, according to the indicators from Table 1, all mentioned course subjects are represented for one semester. At the Faculty of pedagogy in Sarajevo, students take *Family pedagogy* in semester 6, at the Faculty of pedagogy in Bihac in semester 2, whereas *Family pedagogy* is represented in semester 5 in Tuzla, and semester 3 at the Islamic pedagogical faculty in Zenica. The course subject *Partnership between family and nursery school* is represented at semester 8 at the Islamic pedagogical faculty. According to the data from Table 1, the mentioned course subjects carry from 2 to 5 ECTS points. Thus, at the Faculty of pedagogy in Sarajevo the course subject *Family pedagogy* carries 2 ECTS points, and at the Faculty of pedagogy in Bihac 4 ECTS points. At the Faculty of philosophy in Tuzla the course subject *Family of pedagogy*

carries 5 ETCS points, and at the Islamic pedagogical faculty in Zenica 4.5 ETCS points. The course subject *Partnership between family and nursery school*, which is also taught at the Islamic pedagogical faculty in Zenica, carries 4.5 ETCS points.

There is also a difference regarding weekly number of lessons stipulated for the mentioned course subjects at certain universities. Therefore, the course subject *Family pedagogy* at the Faculty of pedagogy in Sarajevo is represented with one hour of lectures and one hour of practice. At the Faculty of philosophy in Tuzla, the course subject *Family pedagogy* is represented with three hours of lectures and two hours of practice. The course subject *Family pedagogy* at the Islamic pedagogical faculty is represented with two hours of lectures and two hours of practice, as well as the course subject *Partnership between family and nursery school*. At the department for preschool education at the Faculty of pedagogy in Bihac *Family pedagogy* is represented with two hours of lectures and one hour of seminars. The results of the analysis of the orientation of program contents of course subjects from the area of family upbringing on the partnership between educational institution and family, and the compliance of course contents, aims, learning outcomes and literature within those course subjects, and which are taught at study programs of preschool education at the public universities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, indicate that the aim, outcomes and program contents of the course subject *Family pedagogy* at the Faculty of pedagogy in Sarajevo, aside from the orientation to general knowledge from the area of family upbringing, are also oriented towards development of competences of educators from the area of partnership between educational institution and family. Aims, learning outcomes and appropriate contents in that part, are oriented towards development of competences of educators for organising advisory work with parents, children, as well as family as a whole. Within obligatory literature one source is stipulated that is partly aimed towards studying partnership between educational institution and family (Pasalic-Kreso, A. (2011). *Coordinates of family upbringing, a contribution to the systemic approach to understanding the family and family upbringing*. Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga). The course subject *Family pedagogy* that the students of preschool education are taking at the Faculty of philosophy in Tuzla aims for the future educators to get acquainted with the most important determinants of family pedagogy and to

be trained to recognise fundamental educational questions and problems within the family, as well as for their practical resolution. Aims, contents and learning outcomes, aside from the directionality towards general knowledge from the area of family upbringing, are aimed towards familiarising students with basic starting points in building partnerships between educational institution and family, with the emphasis on advisory work with parents. Within obligatory literature a source is stipulated that is partly directed towards studying partnership between educational institution and family (Pasalic-Kreso, A. (2012). *Coordinates of family upbringing*. Sarajevo: Jez). Aims, outcomes and program contents stipulated within course subject *Partnership between the family and nursery school* at the studies of preschool education at the Islamic pedagogical faculty in Zenica, are primarily aimed towards studying partnership between educational institution and family, on the development of competences of educators for the growth of partnership between family and nursery school, i.e. to monitor and analyse the effects of the partnership on the development of a child of preschool age and to work as strongly motivated and professionally trained individuals on building all forms of inclusion of parents in nursery school activities. Based on the set aim, indicative contents and learning outcomes it can be derived that course subject *Partnership between family and nursery school* contributes to the development of competences of future teachers for the partnership with parents. Obligatory literature within this course includes sources that are primarily oriented towards partnership of educational institution and family, namely: Rangelov-Jusovic, Radmila (2007). *From collaboration to partnership. How to build partner relationships between nursery school, school and family*. Sarajevo: COI Step by Step; Wilson, L. (1997). *Partnerships Families and Communities in Canadian Early Childhood Education*, ITP Nelson. Aims, outcomes and program contents stipulated within course subject *Family pedagogy* at the studies of preschool education at the Islamic pedagogical faculty in Zenica, are aimed towards fundamental knowledge about the family and family upbringing, but one part of the contents covers the role of partner relationship between family and school/nursery school, and advisory work aimed towards improving family relations and child upbringing. The intention is for the students to be trained to follow and assess preschool children's family situations through various activities, and, accordingly, organise their own educational work, and to help parents as

professionals with a more quality organization and practice of family upbringing organizing advisory work with parents, children, as well as their families as wholes. Within stipulated literature for this course there are sources that partly relate to the partnership between educational institution and family. When it comes to the course subject *Family pedagogy* that students of preschool education take at the Faculty of pedagogy in Bihac, the aim is to provide students with acquiring basic professional competences from the area of family pedagogy and mastering the skills of application of acquired knowledge in practice (Table 1). Aside from the contents relating to family and family upbringing, students are, also, introduced to basic starting points in building partnerships between educational institution and family. Accordingly, aims, course contents and expected learning outcomes are aimed towards development of competences for creating a plan of improvement of partnership between family and school. Obligatory literature includes one source that is partly aimed towards studying the partnership between educational institution and family (Pasalic-Kreso, A. (2011). *Coordinates of family upbringing, a contribution to the systemic approach to understanding of family and family upbringing*. Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga). The indicators that relate to study programs of preschool education at public Universities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and regard the representation of course subjects from the domain of family upbringing and their directionality towards the development of competences of teachers/educators from the area of partnership between educational institution and family, indicate that the course subjects *Family pedagogy* at the University in Sarajevo, *Family pedagogy* at the University in Tuzla, *Partnership between family and nursery school* at the University in Zenica, and *Family pedagogy* at the University in Bihac are partly aimed towards development of educators' competences for partnership with parents. Researching the representation of course subjects of family pedagogy and working with parents at the preschool education studies at Teaching faculties in the Republic of Croatia and the status that these course subjects have according to the criteria: existence of the course, status of the course, number of ECTS points, aims of the course, course contents, forms of lesson realization, grading and expected competences, Males et al. (2008) arrived at the results which are similar to the ones presented in this paper. Namely, the indicators that the authors arrived

at showed the existence of great diversity at certain universities considering the representation of study courses aimed at studying family upbringing in programs of teacher education, and considering the status that these subjects have according to the obligation criteria, number of semesters they are taken, anticipated hours per semester and number of ECTS points. The same is confirmed by results reached by Ljubetic et al. (2008). Visnjic Jevtic (2018) also came to similar conclusions examining educator's self-assessment of competencies for cooperation with parents and its correlation with education for cooperation with parents, age and work experience. By analysing study programs for educators in the Republic of Croatia it was determined that only three higher education institutions have obligatory course subject that enables students to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for partnerships with parents, and that at other higher education institutions these contents are mostly represented within the course subject Family pedagogy. Within her research, Pree (2018) examined educators' opinions on obstacles in establishing partner relations between parents and preschool institution, and came to the results that educators are dissatisfied with the quality of cooperation with parents, but also with their own competencies in this area, which they find as one of the barriers for establishing a successful partnership with parents. The author attributes the mentioned educators' shortcoming to insufficient dedication to the development of educators' competencies for partnership with parents during initial education.

CONCLUSIONS

Previously completed analysis of the study programs of preschool education shows that only one higher education institution has one obligatory course subject (Partnership between family and nursery school) the aim of which is introducing students with theoretical starting points in the area of partnership with parents. It is the Islamic pedagogical faculty in Zenica. The course subjects that are aimed toward studying family upbringing and partnership between educational institution and family in programs of initial education of educators at certain universities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina have a different status, regarding their obligation, number of semesters they are taught, as well as number of hours of lessons and practice and the number of ECTS points that are stipulated for them. The analysis of program structure showed that there are courses within which contents of family upbringing and partnership with parents are

covered at faculties that educate future educators in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Due to the scope of other contents within those course subjects, the contents aimed at developing competences of educators for partnership with parents cannot be considered sufficient because there is no space for a greater number of thematic units from that area. This is also confirmed by literature, where analysis has shown that within these courses literature aimed towards acquiring knowledge from family pedagogy is dominant, which is in compliance with the course contents, where analysis determined disproportion of contents aimed at family pedagogy and contents relating to partnerships between educational institution and family. The presented research results can be the basis for redesigning course curriculums and programs at public Universities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the purpose of including a greater number of course subjects aimed at preparing future educators for the building of partner relationships with parents. The need for introducing courses that offer adequate education for future educators in establishing partner relationships with parents clearly exists and work should be done on its fulfilment as soon as possible.

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