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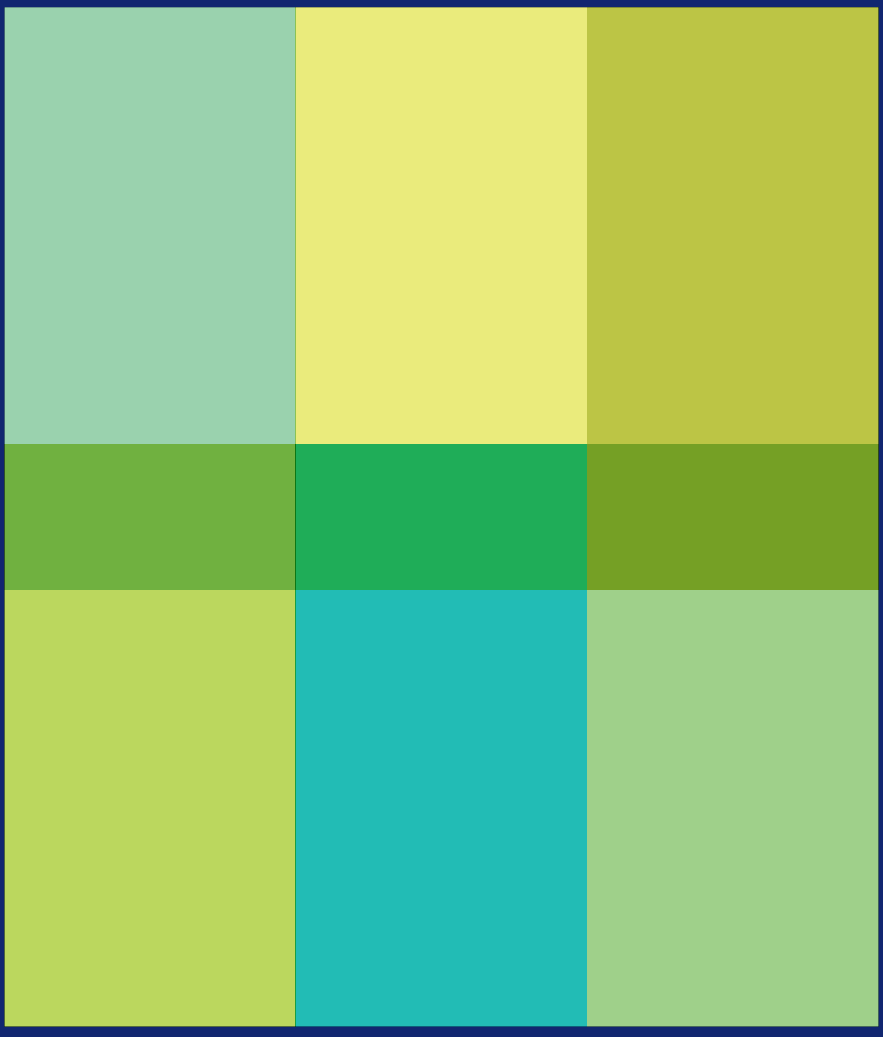

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C·E·P·S *Journal*

Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal
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The CEPS Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal devoted to publishing research papers in different fields of education, including scientific.

Aims & Scope

The CEPS Journal is an international peer-reviewed journal with an international board. It publishes original empirical and theoretical studies from a wide variety of academic disciplines related to the field of Teacher Education and Educational Sciences; in particular, it will support comparative studies in the field. Regional context is stressed but the journal remains open to researchers and contributors across all European countries and worldwide. There are four issues per year. Issues are focused on specific areas but there is also space for non-focused articles and book reviews.

About the Publisher

The University of Ljubljana is one of the largest universities in the region (see www.uni-lj.si) and its Faculty of Education (see www.pef.uni-lj.si), established in 1947, has the leading role in teacher education and education sciences in Slovenia. It is well positioned in regional and European cooperation programmes in teaching and research. A publishing unit oversees the dissemination of research results and informs the interested public about new trends in the broad area of teacher education and education sciences; to date, numerous monographs and publications have been published, not just in Slovenian but also in English.

In 2001, the Centre for Educational Policy Studies (CEPS; see http://ceps.pef.uni-lj.si) was established within the Faculty of Education to build upon experience acquired in the broad reform of the national educational system during the period of social transition in the 1990s, to upgrade expertise and to strengthen international cooperation. CEPS has established a number of fruitful contacts, both in the region – particularly with similar institutions in the countries of the Western Balkans – and with interested partners in EU member states and worldwide.

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Revija Centra za študij edukacijskih strategij je mednarodno recenzirana revija z mednarodnim uredniškim odborom in s prostim dostopom. Namenjena je objavljanju člankov s področja izobraževanja učiteljev in edukacijskih ved.

Cilji in namen

Revija je namenjena obravnavanju naslednjih področij: poučevanje, učenje, vzgoja in izobraževanje, socialna pedagogika, specialna in rehabilitacijska pedagogika, predšolska pedagogika, edukacijske politike, supervizija, poučevanje slovenskega jezika in književnosti, poučevanje matematike, računalništva, naravoslovja in tehnike, poučevanje družboslovja in humanistike, poučevanje na področju umetnosti, visokošolsko izobraževanje in izobraževanje odraslih. Poseben poudarek bo namenjen izobraževanju učiteljev in spodbujanju njihovega profesionalnega razvoja.

V reviji so objavljeni znanstveni prispevki, in sicer teoretični prispevki in prispevki, v katerih so predstavljeni rezultati kvantitavnih in kvalitativnih empiričnih raziskav. Še posebej poudarjen je pomen komparativnih raziskav.

Revija izide štirikrat letno. Številke so tematsko opredeljene, v njih pa je prostor tudi za netematske prispevke in predstavitve ter recenzije novih publikacij.

The publication of the CEPS Journal in 2019 and 2020 is co-financed by the Slovenian Research Agency within the framework of the Public Tender for the Co-Financing of the Publication of Domestic Scientific Periodicals.

Izdajanje revije v letih 2019 in 2020 sofinancira Javna agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije v okviru Javnega razpisa za sofinanciranje izdajanja domačih znanstvenih periodičnih publikacij.

Contents

Reviews

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Editorial

The first issue of volume nine of CEPS journal consists of six papers, which are not a part of a specific theme, but they reflect specific educational problems from various fields. The issue concludes with a book review presenting a monograph about pre-school education.

The first paper, by Mohammad Mohammadi and Ziba Mahdivand, entitled 'Is Willingness to Communicate a Reliable Predictor of Learner Autonomy in an EFL Context?' represents the relationship between willingness to communicate (WTC) and learner autonomy in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. In addition, it illustrates the probable effect of gender on the relationship between learner autonomy and WTC. Furthermore, it explores whether WTC could predict learner autonomy. In total, 142 upper-intermediate and advanced EFL learners participated in the study, and two questionnaires were used to gather data (the Learner Autonomy Questionnaire and the WTC Scale). The results indicate that WTC correlated significantly and positively with learner autonomy. Moreover, a correlational analysis revealed that the relationship between WTC and learner autonomy was stronger and more positive among female learners. The paper concludes that WTC was a partial predictor of learner autonomy in this EFL context.

The second paper, entitled 'The Influence of In-Service Preschool Teachers' Education on their Perceived Competences for Counselling Parents', by Sanja Skočić Mihić, Danijela Blanuša Trošelj, and Vesna Katić illustrates preschool education in the Republic of Croatia as a highly organised system with a half-century of tradition in which preschool teachers meet high professional standards. Among all of their professional requirements, preschool teachers have been legally required to counsel parents since 2008. However, there are no other documents or papers in Croatia describing and specifying what counselling entails. The presented study surveyed 136 preschool teachers, investigating their self-assessment of their competence in counselling parents. The results indicated that preschool teachers rate themselves as moderately competent in counselling parents and that joining in-service training is related to a higher level of self-assessment in counselling parents. Although it is evident that the preschool teachers had acquired competence for counselling parents during their personal and professional development, in-service training plays the key role in ensuring such competence.

The next paper, by Mateja Rek, with the title 'Media Education in Slovene Preschools: A Review of Four Studies', deals with the problem of how the concept of media literacy has been integrated into the formal education system, including early childhood education in Slovenia. The Preschool Curriculum sets certain

goals to be followed in educating preschool children on media-related topics. Research shows that the actual implementation and delivery of media education is both fragmented and inconsistent, as well as dependent on the interests and motivation of individual preschool teachers. They are the ones who, in accordance with their professional capacity and autonomy, include the goals set in the curriculum into an actual learning process in preschools, also determining the timing and manner of this. This paper aims to review, compare, and analyse the data from recent research on the media education of preschool children in Slovenia. This could lead to the better understanding of how preschool teachers in Slovenia assess their capacity to work with media as well as their media literacy levels, which media they use, and how media education is conducted in the groups of preschool children.

The fourth paper in this varia issue of CEPSj, by Shalva Tabatadze, entitled 'Bilingual Educational Policy in Georgia: Can it Benefit the Process of Integration of Society', reviews the educational policy for the integration of ethnic minorities in the society in Georgia. The problems and opportunities of bilingual education policy are analysed in this paper, using the content analysis method. The author argues that bilingual education is a crucial tool for the integration of Georgian society; however, local control, involvement, and context are crucial in the implementation of a national bilingual educational programme. The changes in the political, institutional, and pedagogical levels of bilingual education are necessary for the successful implementation of bilingual education reform.

The fifth paper, by Jelena Stamatović and Jelena Žunić Cicvarić, with the title 'Child Rights in Primary Schools – The Situation and Expectations', discusses that school is the most suitable environment for students to learn about child rights and that it a place these rights are to be respected. The objective of the study presented in this paper was to examine the knowledge of primary school students about the rights of the child and to obtain insight into how these rights are respected. The authors used an interview-scaling technique, and gathered data from 351 final year primary school students and 231 teachers. The students did not rate their knowledge of child rights highly: they mostly expect teachers to provide them with information on this topic; the students obtain the majority of such information in the civic education classes, which is an optional subject and is not attended by all students, as well as in homeroom sessions. Teachers believe that it is the responsibility of homeroom teachers to familiarise students with the rights of a child. The rights to freedom of expression of students and their participation in decision-making are the least respected, according to both students and teachers. Furthermore, all believe that some forms of discrimination exist in schools. The authors especially identified significant suggestions and recommendations

given by students and teachers to overcome the existing problems and provide better access to the rights of the child in school.

The last paper, written by Miloš Tul, Bojan Leskošek, and Marjeta Kovač, entitled 'The Professional Competences of Physical Education Teachers from North-Eastern Italy', evaluates the self-perceived professional competences of Italian physical education (PE) teachers. For this purpose, a self-administered questionnaire has been designed to examine a broad scope of general and subject-specific competences. A total of 484 Italian PE teachers from the north-eastern part of Italy evaluated their professional competences on a four-level Likert scale. Factor analysis was used for the examination of the internal structure of the competence field. The results showed that the self-perception of their competence profile was quite complex, consisting of 13 factors, which together explain 51.1% of the total variance. Didactic approaches, which represent the first factor and explain 31.3% of the total variance, seem to be the most informative for their estimations of how effectively they can teach their specific subjects. The teachers feel insufficiently competent in some general areas, such as the use of information and communications technology, communication in foreign languages, scientific research work, initiative, and entrepreneurial spirit. They do not have sufficient abilities to bring to PE the recent sports activities in which teenagers currently participate in their free time. The outcomes of the presented study may, according to authors, aid in the future updating of PE teacher education study programmes and the designing of a creative system of lifelong training programmes.

This issue of CEPS journal ends with a review of the book 'Education of preschool child (In Slovene: Vzgoja predšolskega otroka)' by Tatjana Devjak and Sanja Berčnik, published by University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education in 2018 (ISBN 978-961-253-219-2), written by Jurka Lepičnik Vodopivec. The book review presents the contents of the monograph as a deeper insight into the understanding of the education of pre-school children and is, as such, useful as a reference work and as a book for the professional public.

To conclude, the new issue of the CEPS journal brings a variety of papers from various education research fields, reporting and discussing several open research questions. We believe that information available in this issue will cause the reflection of the research problems and raise new research ideas.

Iztok Devetak

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Is Willingness to Communicate a Reliable Predictor of Learner Autonomy in an EFL Context?

Mohammad Mohammadi[1] and Ziba Mahdivand*[2]

The present quantitative study investigated the relationship between willingness to communicate (WTC) and learner autonomy in an EFL context. In addition, it explored the probable effect of gender on the relationship between learner autonomy and WTC. Furthermore, it investigated whether WTC could predict learner autonomy. The data were collected from 142 upper-intermediate and advanced EFL learners (72 males and 70 females) by means of two questionnaires, the Learner Autonomy Questionnaire and the WTC Scale. The findings indicated that WTC correlated significantly and positively with learner autonomy. Moreover, correlational analysis revealed that gender modified this relationship in that the relationship between WTC and learner autonomy was stronger and more positive among female learners. The results revealed that WTC was a partial predictor of learner autonomy in this EFL context.

Keywords: communication, EFL learners, learner autonomy, willingness to communicate

1 *Corresponding Author. Urmia University, Iran; z.mahdi70@gmail.com.
2 Urmia University, Iran.

Ali je pripravljenost za sporazumevanje zanesljiv napovednik učenčeve avtonomije v kontekstu učenja angleščine kot tujega jezika?

Mohammad Mohammadi in Ziba Mahdivand

Kvantitativna študija je preučevala razmerje med pripravljenostjo za sporazumevanje (ang. WTC) in avtonomijo učenca v kontekstu učenja angleščine kot tujega jezika. Preučevala je tudi mogoč vpliv spola na odnos med avtonomijo učenca in pripravljenost za sporazumevanje. Poleg tega je preučila, ali bi na osnovi pripravljenosti za sporazumevanje lahko predvideli stopnjo avtonomnosti učencev. V raziskavi je sodelovalo 142 učencev, ki so bili na srednji oziroma višji ravni znanja angleščine (72 anketirancev moškega in 70 ženskega spola). Izpolnili so dva anketna vprašalnika, in sicer vprašalnik o avtonomiji učencev in lestvico o pripravljenost za sporazumevanje. Izsledki so pokazali statistično pomembno pozitivno povezanost med pripravljenostjo za sporazumevanje in avtonomijo učencev. Poleg tega je korelacijska analiza pokazala, da je glede na spol povezanost med pripravljenostjo za sporazumevanje in avtonomijo učencev višja in bolj pozitivna pri učenkah kot učencih. Pomembna ugotovitev je tudi, da je pripravljenost za sporazumevanje delni napovednik avtonomije učencev v kontekstu učenja angleščine kot tujega jezika.

Ključne besede: sporazumevanje, učenci angleščine kot tujega jezika, učenčeva avtonomija, pripravljenost za sporazumevanje

Introduction

Throughout language learning experiences, there are a plethora of situations in which learners are not provided with ample opportunities to use the target language communicatively. Most often, learners have the required language knowledge but lack communicative skills to express themselves. As Little (2007) indicates, students are not just language learners but also active users of the language for communicative purposes. Furthermore, more often than not, language learners are not capable of using language independently in foreign language (L2) environments. The majority of EFL classes in Iran including secondary schools, universities, and language institutes are conducted in a lockstep style in which very few opportunities are provided for language learners to use English independently of the help of their teachers. In addition, rarely are language learners provided with the chance to use their own understanding and knowledge of the language communicatively in and outside of the classroom. Learners' need for interaction and transmission of their ideas and purposes has highlighted the undeniable role of using language to communicate in second and foreign language teaching and learning in recent decades.

To augment the above-mentioned issue, MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998, p. 547) further stated that, 'language learning should engender the learners' willingness to seek out communication opportunities and their willingness actually to communicating in them'. Thus, as far as willingness to communicate is concerned, the concept of motivation and freedom that seem necessary and effective to initiate communication should be taken into consideration. Hence, McCroskey (1992) maintains that willingness is a phenomenal aspect that an individual opts for setting off communication when s/he feels free to do so. In pursuing what MacIntyre et al. (1998) hold, willingness to communicate refers to getting involved in a discourse at a specific setting, including time and person, when one intends to use the L2 as a means of communication.

Therefore, it seems that motivation and autonomy are two essential requisites to initiate WTC. To support this argument, Deci (1971) suggests that autonomy is a significant factor in assisting any individual to resolve the problems he/she faces in daily life. The need for emphasis on WTC and making learners autonomous in learning has long been acknowledged. In fact, one should bear in mind that in the 21st-century individuals should have such required skills as problem-solving, autonomous learning, and enthusiasm to communicate willingly and autonomously. Therefore, to help learners become autonomous and communicate appropriately in different language settings, these issues should be probed meticulously.

To develop more mindful and responsible learners, learner autonomy appears to be a requisite factor in improving learners' capabilities in recognising and analysing their real-life needs. Furthermore, acquiring such abilities can assist learners in obtaining the essential confidence to initiate and become involved in communicative situations more willingly. As Kumaravadivelu (2006) suggested, learner autonomy and WTC are highlighted in post-method pedagogy in a way that the instructors may examine those concepts and transfer them to the learners. Furthermore, the key components of WTC including context and receiver types have been an under-investigated area in the literature in regard to the roles they can serve in predicting learner autonomy. The present study is an attempt to determine the possible correlations between gender and its effects on WTC and learner autonomy.

Willingness to communicate (WTC)

The notion of willingness to communicate (WTC) was first put forward by McCroskey (1992) to illuminate the different personalities individuals demonstrate in their communication in their first language. He points out that among different aspects of behaviour, shyness might cause inefficient communication. If it is detected in a sound way, it might lead to WTC from unwillingness to communicate. Hence, WTC is supposed to pave the way for an efficient order of thinking and ultimately for higher language proficiency and sound communication. According to Brown (2007), WTC has been interpreted as a cornerstone displaying the tendency toward or away from communicating and has been considered pertinent to the issue of shyness as most learners are unwilling to communicate in L2.

Most researchers have attempted to research the concept of WTC from different perspectives. Primarily, McCroskey and Richmond (1991) conceptualised WTC as a 'personality trait reflecting a stable predisposition to initiate communication in different situations' (p. 95). From this, it can be understood that WTC is a process (whose elements include context, receiver, and fillers) the should be encouraged among learners in order to use L2 in different settings. However, contrary to what McCroskey and Richmond (1991) claimed, MacIntyre et al. (1998) argued that WTC comprised both trait (stable) and state (transient) properties. Thus, according to MacIntyre et al. (1998), various situations are conceivable in which WTC might be affected. This would accordingly have consequences for learners. MacIntyre et al. (1998) further claimed that L2 teachers should make WTC a priority in their classes and that learning context should induce learners' willingness to look for opportunities for communication and their willingness to become involved in it. Skehan (1989) believed that

utilising WTC not only predicts L2 use but also facilitates its development. Skehan defined WTC as 'willingness to talk in order to learn' (p. 48).

In MacIntyre's (1994) model, WTC appeared to be meaningfully and significantly influenced and predicted by the two concepts of perceived competence and communication anxiety. Later, MacIntyre and Charos (1996) revised MacIntyre's (1994) model of WTC, utilising Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model to examine the relation among personality characteristics, such as self-esteem, language anxiety, motivation, and perceived competence and social constructs, such as attitudes, motivation, WTC, and authentic language use, through a model called the 'Path Model'. The outcome was that learners with high motivation and perceived communication competence displayed greater WTC. Moreover, it was found that anxiety had an indirect effect on WTC through perceived communication competence and motivation whereas context directly influences the frequency of L2 communication. Furthermore, a number of studies revealed direct and indirect effects of motivation in relation to WTC (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003; Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Conrod, 2001; Yashima, 2002).

Kang (2005) explained WTC as 'an individual's volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation, which can vary according to interlocutor(s); learners with higher WTC are of higher L2 achievement and have a greater inclination to communicate in real classroom contexts'.

In a study carried out in an Iranian context, Alemi, Tajeddin, and Mesbah (2013) investigated the effect of Iranian EFL individual differences on their L2 WTC and, based on the results, this effect was partially confirmed. The study was conducted among three groups of junior high school, senior high school, and university students. The results revealed that female students were more willing to communicate than males were, particularly in the junior high school group. Furthermore, they found no significant difference among the participants in terms of academic major, age, and personality types.

In another study on Iranian students' WTC, Hamzehnejad and Shariati (2014) examined the difference in the degree of willingness to communicate among azad (or private) and state (the non-state universities are supervised by the ministry of Higher Education) universities. The data were gathered via a questionnaire on WTC, exploring twelve contexts in which the students would choose to communicate. The result of the study showed no difference in the degree of WTC between two groups of students.

Aliakbari, Kamangar, and Khany (2016), in their study on the willingness to communicate in English among Iranian EFL students, concluded that

learners' willingness to communicate is directly related to their attitude toward the international community, their perceived linguistic competence and self-confidence. In other words, learners' view of linguistic competence and their feeling of autonomy and confidence influence the degree of willingness to communicate that they show in learning contexts.

Learner Autonomy

According to Little (1995), autonomy can be explained as a capacity for critical reflection, decision making and independent action. He regarded autonomy as 'interdependence rather than independence' (p. 5). Indeed, no particular mode of practice was implied by learner autonomy and it does not appear to be an isolated concept. Instead, learner autonomy is dependent upon the quality of the pedagogical dialogue between teacher and learner. Some scholars claimed that autonomy is a buzzword that can be considered an educational goal that can be appropriately pursued in different contexts and not a specific method to be used in classes (Little, 1999; Littlewood, 1996; Nematipour, 2012). Considering learning a 'lifelong process', Jacob and Farrell (2001) stated that, as a concept, learner autonomy highlighted the role learners played in the learning context, and not the role teachers played, by encouraging learners to improve their learning. They noted that learner autonomy concentrates on process rather than product.

Cotterall (1995) defines learner autonomy as the extent to which learners display their capabilities to employ some strategies to feel responsible for their learning and notes that the difference in the level of autonomy among learners is, to some extent, due to the beliefs they hold about language learning. According to Higgs (1988), autonomy is 'a process in which the learner works on a learning task or activity and is largely independent of the teacher who acts as a manager of learning programme as a resource person' (p. 41). Additionally, Benson (2001) holds that learner autonomy is the capacity of the learners to take charge of or feel responsibility for their own learning in different forms and in various contexts. Recently, researchers investigated learner autonomy with regard to diverse factors including critical thinking abilities, learning styles, learners' perceptions in autonomy, and motivation (Ahmadi, 2013; Fahim & Behdani, 2011; Nematipour, 2012; Peng & Woodrow, 2010).

Ahmadi (2013) examined Iranian ESP learners' perceptions of autonomy in language learning. She investigated whether law students attending English for specific purposes were ready to be involved in autonomous language learning. Analysis of the results revealed that ESP students were not ready for autonomy, and they left most of the important decisions of their learning to their teachers. Mohammadpour (2013) conducted a study in which she investigated

the relationship between autonomy and proficiency in the Iranian context. The results showed that English proficiency and learner autonomy had a significant relationship. That is, the students with similar autonomy had similar proficiency scores while students with different autonomy levels had different proficiency levels.

Considering the aforementioned issues and studies, the present study sets out to a) determine the probable relationship between WTC and learner autonomy in EFL contexts, b) identify the influences of gender on the abovementioned relationship, and c) discover the predictive power of willingness to communicate in terms of learner autonomy.

Method

Participants

The participants of the present study were selected from a language institute via convenience sampling. In such a method of sampling, the researcher selects participants who happen to be available for the study (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Convenience sampling was used in this study since it was not practical to run a homogeneity test among the learners due to the regulations of the institute where the participants studied. Thus, the researcher asked those participants who were learning English at advanced levels in that language institute in Urmia, Iran, to participate. Due to numerous practical and administrative issues, the researcher was not allowed to use a proficiency test for homogenising the sample. Therefore, an in-house achievement test was considered as the main criterion to identify the participants' initial differences and to ensure the comparability of the sample. As the results of the in-house achievement test suggested, nearly all of the respondents were upper-intermediate and advanced language learners in the language institute. They came from various linguistic backgrounds and native languages including Turkish, Kurdish, and Persian. Out of 170 questionnaires distributed among participants, only 142 (83 % response rate) were deemed appropriate for the analysis of the data since the rest were incomplete or replied without being attentive to the content of the present study. Out of 142 participants, 72 were males and 70 were females. Almost all learners were within the age range of 17–28. The respondents were assured that the data would be kept confidential and would be used for research purposes only.

It is noteworthy to mention that, in Iranian settings, learners pay high amounts of tuition for attending language institute in order to remain current with ongoing international issues. In the Iranian context, students normally attend private language school after they pass their basic school courses (10–12

years). A typical language institute includes about 15 intensive terms for children and adults separately that mainly aim to enhance learners' communicative capacities in line with global ELT developments. In the same vein, the language institutes do their best to assist their learners to accomplish their real-life learning objectives via employing up-to-date and interactive teaching techniques that are implemented by highly knowledgeable and skilful teachers. This is achieved through carefully-designed teacher training programmes that are mostly held at the beginning of the courses in order to update instructors' knowledge in regard to the current theoretical and practical teaching-related aspects.

Instruments

The participants' WTC level was measured using the willingness-to-communicate scale, developed by McCroskey and Richmond (1987). This instrument measures a learner's willingness to initiate communication and includes 20 items including eight referring to distract attention from the scored items (fillers) and 12 items covering four context-type scores (public, meeting, group, interpersonal) and three receiver-type scores (i.e., strangers, acquaintances, friends). While filling out the questionnaires, the participants were supposed to write appropriate percentages from 0% (never) to 100% (always) according to their opinions. The initial version of the WTC questionnaire was administered to thirty EFL learners to assure the reliability of the scales. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the scales of fillers, context-type, and receiver type were analysed to be .77, .79, and .82, respectively. The reliability analyses for WTC questionnaire confirmed acceptable internal consistency for the three scales.

In addition, the questionnaire enjoyed a high level of face validity and the results of extensive research indicated the predictive validity of the instrument. Furthermore, the questionnaire underwent expert validation to ensure the appropriateness of the content. The researcher asked two experts in the field to go through the scales and report the existed inconsistencies, if any. It is worth mentioning that an additional factor analysis was run in order to analyse the total variance explained by each factor of the scale. It must be noted that the first component (context-type) accounted for 56.36% of the variance, the second (receiver-type) 42.33%, and the third (fillers) 1.31%.

The second data collection tool was the Learner Autonomy Questionnaire designed by Kashefian (2002). It includes 40 items in a five-point Likert scale, which are about the role of autonomy in L2 learning. Previous research (e.g., Dafei, 2007; Khabiri & Heidari, 2011) demonstrated that this questionnaire enjoys high content validity and high reliability of .82. However, the researcher conducted a separate pilot analysis to ensure the context-specific

reliability of the instrument. The results of the pilot study were congruent with the previous studies in reporting the high reliability levels. The reliability value of the learner autonomy questionnaire was analysed to be .80 using Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates.

Procedure

The WTC Scale and Learner Autonomy Questionnaire were distributed among 170 advanced level language learners in a language institute of Urmia in Iran. As the proficiency level of the participants was upper-intermediate and advanced, they had no trouble comprehending and completing the items of the questionnaires. As a result, there was no need to translate the items into their mother tongues. The questionnaires were distributed to learners in a period of two weeks and they were supposed to answer them in their break time in their classrooms. There was no time limitation for filling the questionnaires. As the questionnaires were not time-consuming, both were filled simultaneously. Participants handed them in after almost 20 minutes. Having collected the questionnaires, the researcher checked the appropriateness of the questionnaires; only 142 of the returned questionnaires were suitable for the purposes of the study. Therefore, the researcher decided to exclude the remaining 28 questionnaires due to incomplete answers. Correlational and regressions analyses were carried out using SPSS software (version 21) to analyse the data.

Results

Learner Autonomy and WTC

The relationship between learner autonomy and WTC was investigated using the Pearson-product-moment correlation coefficient. To ensure the normality and linearity of the data, preliminary analysis was performed. The outcome revealed a strong positive relationship between the two variables ($r=.83$, $n=142$, $p< .05$). In fact, a high level of learner autonomy correlated with a high level of willingness to communicate. This means that the higher the level of autonomy in learners, the higher the WTC they feel.

Table 1
Pearson Correlation for learner autonomy and willingness to communicate

r	N	*p*
0.83	142	.000

Gender, Learner Autonomy and WTC

To answer the second question, which deals with the effect of gender on the relationship between learner autonomy and WTC, correlational analysis was carried out. As Table 2 shows, the levels of relationship among gender, learner autonomy and WTC appears to be different for male and female participants. In fact, this relationship is more significant and strong in the case of female participants ($r = .81$, $n = 70$, $p < .005$) than in that of male learners ($r = .73$, $n = 72$, $p < .05$). Thus, the relationship between learner autonomy and WTC is stronger among female learners.

Table 2
Gender effects in the relationship between WTC and leaner autonomy

Gender	*r*	N	*p*
Male	0.73	72	.000
Female	0.81	70	.000

Predictive Power of WTC on learner autonomy

A standard regression analysis was run to predict learner autonomy through learners' WTC. Learner autonomy was entered as the dependent variable and WTC as the independent variable. As shown in Table 3, willingness to communicate is the predictor entered into the regression model.

Table 3
Regression model summary of willingness to communicate and learner autonomy

Model	Sum of Squares	df	*F*	R^2	Adjusted R^2	*P*
Regression	988.44	1	8.04	0.78	.064	.000
Residual	9591.81	141				
Total	11580.26	142				

The R-square for WTC is .078, meaning that willingness to communicate can nearly predict 8 per cent of learner autonomy. The result of ANOVA indicated that WTC can partially predict learner autonomy ($F = 8.04$, $P = <.05$, $\omega^2 = .07$).

Discussion

In the present study, a significant positive relationship was found between learners' autonomy and their WTC. The higher the degree of autonomy they perceived, the greater the WTC they felt. The findings of this study are in line with the results of previous studies (Cameron 2013; Kang, 2005; Khaki, 2013; Zarrinabadi & Abdi, 2011). Partially similar to the present study, Khaki (2013) found a significant strong relationship between learner autonomy and *trait-like WTC* in Iranian EFL learners and a significant but weak correlation between learner autonomy and situational WTC in Iranian EFL learners. Based on these findings, it can be postulated that both WTC and learners' autonomy may serve a significant role in language learning and can lead to a successful learning experience.

The results of the present study also agree with two other studies. First, Egel (2009) noted that collaboration and interaction are key factors in developing learner autonomy in classroom context and class participation is mainly based on the learners' high levels of inclination toward communication acts, that is, trait-like WTC (Zarrinabadi & Abdi, 2011). Second, Cameron (2013) recognised that both trait and situational factors have a great effect on students' WTC. She also concluded that factors such as self-perceived competence, personality, motivation, the importance of English and the learning context significantly influence learners' success.

However, the findings obtained from this study are in contradiction with what Scharle and Szabo (2000) stated. They claimed that the goal of autonomous learners is just to learn the subject and benefit from this so that they may not be eager for group work or even willing to communicate. Additionally, unlike Khaki (2013) who found no significant influence by gender on the relationship between learner autonomy and WTC, the results of this research are in the same vein with the findings of the study carried out by Deci and Ryan (2002).

This potential relationship between learner autonomy and WTC could be related to instructors, learners, and syllabus designers' tendency toward moving the learning environment from the traditional artificial atmosphere to a more real-life experience. Accordingly, Zarrinabadi and Abdi (2011) highlighted that both WTC and learner autonomy are prerequisites for being successful in the language learning arena which means that in order to be successful, an individual needs enhanced levels of learner autonomy and WTC. Similarly, Kang (2005) concluded that the potential relationship between WTC and learner autonomy may result in more active and autonomous learning on the part of the learners.

Another explanation for the strong correlation between learner autonomy and WTC can be the fact that autonomy has frequently been considered in terms of its appropriateness in educational contexts and the related aspects such as learners' willingness to take part in communication processes. As Candy (1991) explains, learner autonomy is not a *static product* reached once and for all due to independence from teachers but is a perennial *dynamic process* amenable to *educational interventions* that help learners to assume more responsibility over their learning and become more willing to be involved in their learning process.

Moreover, many scholars highlighted the above-mentioned roles of autonomy in education and language learning and provided their interpretations of autonomy based on those facts. Besides, the findings of a plethora of studies substantiate the vital role of learner autonomy in language learning (Haghi, 2009; Little, 2007; Scharle & Szabo, 2000), and the effects of WTC (Riasati & Noordin, 2011; Yashima, 2002; Zarrinabadi & Abdi, 2011) on language learners' success. For instance, Littlewood (1996) stated that one of the domains of autonomy is the concept of autonomy as a *communicator*, which implies an individual's communication in specific situations. In this regard, autonomy involves the concept of WTC and, more specifically, situational WTC.

The second objective of the study was to investigate the roles of gender in affecting the relationship between learner autonomy and willingness to communicate. In this regard, female learners revealed a strongly more positive relationship than their male counterparts had. In fact, the relationship between learner autonomy and WTC is stronger among female learners than male ones.

This finding is in line with the previous research conducted on learner autonomy (Crookall & Ho, 1995; Najeeb, 2013; Tanyeli & Kuter, 2013) and WTC (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Donovan, 2002; Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004) that highlighted the influential role played by gender on the relationship between learner autonomy and WTC. Similar to this study, Smith (1997) confirmed that adolescent female learners showed more willingness to initiate communication than their male counterparts did. This outcome disagrees with Tannen (1990), who determined that men are more willing to communicate than females in classrooms and in discussions

Given the similar findings of the previous studies, the question remains as to why female learners are more enthusiastic about engagement in communicative learning experiences. It can be postulated that female learners appear to have developed high levels of motivation particularly intrinsic motivation. This, in turn, may be related to their individualistic characteristics that lead them to demonstrate more willingness to become involved in communicative

events. Those individualistic characteristics can include self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and risk-taking capabilities. For instance, female learners may feel more confident and are convinced to take risks while learning a foreign language. In fact, in Iranian settings, female learners are offered fewer opportunities to be involved in decision-making policies in comparison to their male counterparts. Hence, they endeavour to express themselves as soon as they find an appropriate site make their voices heard as members of society.

The result of regression analysis was an endorsement for the previous findings (Zarrinabadi & Abdi, 2011) regarding the possibility that learners with higher levels of WTC can manifest more autonomy in different learning and communicative situations. The outcomes revealed that WTC could weakly predict the existence of learner autonomy in language learners in the context of EFL. This finding is in line with Khaki (2013), as he recognised a weak-to-moderate value of prediction. He indicated that a learner may have a high level of WTC, but when put in a situation in which that can use their newly acquired language, they may not show sufficient eagerness to communicate due to some situational variables.

Thus, being more willing to communicate in the target situation does not necessarily mean that learners have developed higher levels of autonomy. In fact, there may be other possible reasons that contribute to their great reluctance for communication only one of which can be autonomy, as indicated in this study. In the case of high WTC, for example, motivation, topic familiarity, and the context may have contributory effects. With respect to learner autonomy, there can be predictors other than willingness to communicate, including different language learning styles, such as field-independence. Therefore, any action that leads to the development of these two concepts should be taken into consideration

Conclusion

Learner autonomy can help language learners make sound decisions in language learning. It also assists learners in acting autonomously which, in turn, will make them feel responsible, interactive and cooperative. Hence, autonomy paves the way for language learners to not only succeed in language learning but also motivates them to generate new ideas to improve their overall language proficiency in L2. The significant positive relationship between learner autonomy and WTC in this study indicates that these two variables go hand in hand in Iranian EFL context. On the positive side, the positive role of gender in this relationship might suggest that males and females react differently

regarding the feeling of autonomy and WTC in Iran. Female learners with high level of autonomy displayed more WTC in this study. However, this was not totally true in case of male participants as some male learners with a high level of learner autonomy demonstrated a low level of WTC. This indicated that the female participants with high levels of autonomy are more willing to communicate in Iranian language learning context whereas this is not so with the male participants. Not all the male participants with high levels of autonomy showed great degrees of WTC in their language learning performance. It is worth mentioning that the Iranian female population is almost entirely marginalised in the majority of social and economic aspects and mostly males adopt the most prestigious societal and occupational opportunities. This may be one reason for female learners' high levels of willingness to communicate via showing more autonomous behaviours.

Thus, it can be said that learners with high levels of WTC generally tend to be autonomous learners. However, this relationship was not shown to be significant in this study. In conclusion, regarding the importance of learner autonomy and willingness to communicate, the findings of this study should be considered by teachers, material developers, curriculum designers and policy makers in giving the learners more freedom and providing more inspiring contexts to make them more willing to communicate in learning. The major finding of the present study is that WTC does not predict learner autonomy significantly, which, in practical terms, means that teachers are recommended to improve their learners' WTC as one contributing factor if they aim to boost their autonomous language learning and use.

Like most studies, the present study was limited in a number of aspects. First, it was quantitative in design. It is suggested that qualitative research methods such as interviews and observations be utilised to gather more in-depth data. Next, no proficiency test was administered to accurately assess the participants' proficiency level. More accurate results are likely to be obtained if future research is based on assessments gained from the administration of a proficiency test. It is noteworthy, however, that the participants' proficiency was not a major obstacle in the current study as it was not taken into account as a significant factor or as a focus of attention. Finally, studies with a greater number of participants are recommended for the purposes of the generalisability of the findings.

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Biographical note

Mohammad Mohammadi, PhD, is an assistant professor in TEFL from Urmia University, Iran. He is a specialist in phonetics and phonology and discourse analysis.

Ziba Mahdivand is an MA graduate in TEFL from Urmia University and has been teaching general and TOEFL iBT preparation courses for five years. She is interested in language teaching methodology to implement different ways of teaching to learners in order to see their effects. Her interest is also fostering general English skills in EFL classes.

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Influence of In-service Preschool Teachers' Education on their Perceived Competences for Counselling Parents

Sanja Skočić Mihić*[1], Danijela Blanuša Trošelj[2] and Vesna Katić[2]

With a half-century of tradition, early and preschool education in the Republic of Croatia is a highly organised system in which preschool teachers meet high professional standards. Among their professional requirements, they have been legally bound to counsel parents since 2008. However, no other documents or papers in Croatia describe or specify what counselling entails.

The present research explored 136 preschool teachers and their self-assessment of competence in counselling parents. The results indicate that: (a) preschool teachers rate themselves moderately competent in counselling parents; (b) joining the in-service training is related to a higher level of their self-assessment in counselling parents. Although it is evident that they had acquired the competence for counselling parents during their personal and professional development, the in-service training plays the key role in providing it.

Keywords: competence, counselling parents, preschool teachers

1 *Corresponding Author. Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka, Croatia; sskocicmihic@gmail.com.

2 Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka, Croatia.

Vpliv programov izpopolnjevanja za vzgojitelje na njihovo predstavo o kompetencah za svetovanje staršem

Sanja Skočić Mihić, Danijela Blanuša Trošelj in Vesna Katić

Zgodnje in predšolsko izobraževanje je v Republiki Hrvaški visoko organiziran sistem s polstoletno tradicijo. V njem se vzgojiteljice in vzgojitelji spoprijemajo z visokimi profesionalnimi standardi. Od leta 2008 so vzgojiteljice in vzgojitelji pravno zavezani, da svetujejo staršem, kar je ena izmed njihovih številnih nalog. Kljub temu na Hrvaškem ne obstajajo izvedbena pravila ali dokumenti, ki bi opisovali ali podrobneje določali sestavine svetovanja. Ta študija je vključila 136 vzgojiteljic/vzgojiteljev in je ocenjevala njihovo predstavo o kompetencah za svetovanje staršem. Rezultati so pokazali, da: a) vzgojitelji sami sebe ocenjujejo kot zmerno kompetentne za svetovanje staršem; b) da je vključevanje v programe izpopolnjevanja povezano z višjo ravnjo samoocene pri svetovanju staršem. Čeprav je očitno, da so vzgojiteljice pridobile kompetence za svetovanje staršem med osebnim in profesionalnim razvojem, programi izpopolnjevanja kljub temu igrajo ključno vlogo pri zagotavljanju tovrstnih kompetenc.

Ključne besede: kompetence, svetovanje staršem, vzgojitelji

Introduction

Croatian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), known as 'preschool education', is governed by the Law of Preschool Education (1997). It is a unique system under the aegis of the Ministry of Science, Education, and Sport and is financed by the local community. Unlike most European countries, e.g. Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Ireland (Oberhuemer, Schreyer, & Neuman, 2010), Croatian preschool institutions include children from the age of six months to the start of primary school (average 6.5 years). These institutions are called *preschools*[3] and the professionals who work there are called preschool *teachers*.[4] They spend 5.5 hours a day working directly in a same-age or mixed-age group of children, with a weekly total of 27.5 hours (68.25%) of work (The State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education, 2008; a29). Other weekly duties in the remaining 12.5 hours (31.25%) include their preparation for work, cooperation with parents, and in-service training. The qualifications of almost all employed preschool teachers range from college to master's degrees. Their education has a long tradition and has been organised at the university level since 1969/70 (Babić & Kuzma, 2003). It has gone through numerous transformations of institutions providing programmes,[5] curriculums, and degree levels.[6] According to the Bologna process, the current education system in Croatia is 'based on competence and student achievement/learning outcomes' (Curriculum of study programs, 2013; National Curriculum Framework for Primary Education and General and Compulsory Secondary Education, 2011, p. 9). Recently, preschool teachers have been required to improve their competences in cooperation with parents by using counselling skills, since these are recognised as a part of their work. Although their obligation to counsel parents is obvious (The State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education, 2008, a.29, p. 2), no document or paper specifically describes what counselling is in the domain of preschools teachers' work.

Counselling, as a broad term, includes a variety of approaches and processes depending on the social context in different communities. Counselling has many definitions and meanings and depends on many different fields of which it is a part, such as psychology, social work, mental health, the private sector, politics, etc. In human service professions, it is closely connected to

3 In Croatian language – 'vrtić'.
4 In Croatian language – 'odgajatelj'.
5 (1) Pedagogy Academy, (2) Faculty of Pedagogy, (3) Teacher Education College Rijeka, (4) Faculty of Teacher Education (Vujičić, Čepić, Lazzarich, 2010).
6 (1) 1969/70–2000 /2001, 2-year college program; (2) 2001/02–2008/09, 3 years university study; (3) 2009/10 until the present moment as a 3-year university study; (4) 2010 /11 started the Master's level, 2-year graduated program for preschool teachers.

terms such as guidance and psychotherapy. Guidance and counselling differ more clearly (Idowu, 2004; Ipaye, 1995) than counselling and psychotherapy do (Janković, 1997; Nelson-Jones, 2003; Resman, 2000). 'Both counseling and psychotherapy represent diverse rather than uniform knowledge and activities, and both use the same theoretical model' (Nelson-Jones, 2015, p. 3). Psychotherapy is longer-term and deeper; it is associated with medical settings and deals with mental disorders, 'whereas counseling relates more to activities in non-medical settings' (Nelson-Jones, 2015, p. 4).

A unified definition adopted by the majority of counselling associations in the United States at the ACA Conference in Pittsburgh 2010 sees counselling 'as a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals' (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014, p. 366). According to Nelson-Jones (2003, p. 9), various considerations that define counselling include 'viewing it as a relationship, a repertoire of interventions, a psychological process, and in terms of its goals and clients'. In the theoretical context, there are more than 400 approaches that can be reduced to five dominant fields: psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural, humanistic, transpersonal, and systemic (Hackney & Cormier, 2012).

Counselling may be found in different professions, fields, societies, and scopes. Nelson-Jones (2007, p. 4) defines four categories of people who might offer help: '(1) professional counsellors and psychotherapists, (2) counsellors volunteers and helpers, (3) those who use counselling and helping skills as part of their work, and (4) informal helpers'. Counsellor education is a formal discipline with a century of tradition in America (Savickas, 2011). In contrast, there is no counsellor profession in Croatia (National Classification of Occupations, 2010) and counselling is only mentioned in the domain of social workers in the nomenclature of human service professions. In educational settings, counselling is provided by experts such as psychologist and pedagogues in preschools and schools (Resman, 2000). Generally, counselling as a way of seeking quality outcomes in resolving problems is common in Croatian society (Janković, 1997), but there is a resistance to institutional engagement.

Counselling in educational settings can be directed to children and parents (Doikou & Diamandidou, 2011). This paper is focused on the provision of counselling as a support to parents of preschool children. The social responsibility of early and preschool institutions in providing support to families has been legally acknowledged (The Council of the European Union, 2009, 2011; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2002; The Council of Europe, 2006; The Council of the European Union, 2006). Formally, findings in neuroscience

on the family and environment influence on child development (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Rushton & Larkin, 2001; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000) have been increasingly significant. Family support is based on informing and educating parents in an educational institution (The Croatian National Family Policy, 2003) as part of the concept of partnership with parents. Recently, this concept has been a leading topic of education in the European Union. Moreover, in Croatia, regular and ongoing cooperation with parents is considered to be a parameter of quality preschool institutions (National Curriculum Framework for Primary Education and General and Compulsory Secondary Education, 2011).

Collaboration with parents requires high standards from the preschool teachers' profession (Tankersley et al., 2012; Tuna et al., 2011). The society has assumed a part of the responsibility by assigning parents the right to information, counselling, financial and other assistance, and support in caring for children (Pećnik & Starc, 2010). Counselling is a possible way of parent support in preschools, but just how preschool teachers can provide counselling is vague. It is evident that preschool teachers belong to the third category of counsellors, according to Nelson-Jones (2003), whose primary focus in work is teaching and the use of counselling skills is limited in terms of time if they are to provide maximum efficiency.

It should be taken into consideration that training/university programmes for preschool teachers are focused mainly on their preparation for educational work with children and less with parents. Teacher faculties in Croatia include one mandatory course on collaboration with parents and no mandatory/elective courses for counselling parents at the undergraduate level. The graduate part-time master's programme at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Rijeka only offers one elective counselling course in the first semester for which students gain five credit points for specific competences, such as (1) explaining the basic theoretical framework of counselling: its process, phases, and framework of a non-directive approach, (2) implementing counselling skills in specific preschool situations, and (3) demonstrating communication skills in counselling parents. Teachers are expected to competently conduct high-quality counselling of parents over the entire spectrum of general and specific competences (Osgood, 2010; Zambo, 2008). New trends in the professional development of teachers are moving towards the gradual shift away from the traditional notions of knowledge as being a linear and simple transfer process, and toward the development of research and reflective skills, which lead to the awareness and additional work in developing the qualities of personal and professional activity (Slunjski, 2008). Self-reflection is the major topic in

the professional development of preschool teachers, and it is the key feature in responding to the new paradigm of childhood.

Obviously, without pre-service training preschool teachers gain counselling skills predominantly through in-service training. Foreign-language sources of counselling are abundant (Agbaje & Eyo, 2011), but when it comes to Croatia, there is a lack of sources (Janković, 1997; Resman, 2000), especially in the context of preschool education, in which there is neither research nor theoretical analyses. Therefore, the aim of this research is focused on the preschool teacher's self-assessed ability to counsel parents and on the effects of their age, the experience of teaching, the degree of qualification, and pre/in-service training in counselling on the level of self-assessed ability.

Method

Participants

A sample of 136 preschool teachers was selected in accordance with the cluster sampling system. The first cluster included preschool teachers who attended a part-time university graduate study of Early and Preschool Education at the Faculty of Teacher Education, the University of Rijeka in Croatia. Research with the graduate students was conducted on two occasions: the first in December, in the 2010/2011 academic year, and the second in 2011/2012. Due to the small number of participants in the study belonging to the preschool teacher category, who enrolled in the graduate level in the first (N = 46) and the second (N = 26) generations, the sample was expanded. The sample of preschool teachers in the second cluster was extended to preschool teachers who were willing to participate, but they were not students on the graduate study level.

The questionnaires were distributed among the students on two occasions at the beginning of the study programme in the first week of lectures. Other preschool teachers filled out the questionnaires in preschools at which they were employed in January 2012. They were informed that they were free to refrain from completing the questionnaires.

All preschool teachers were female, of average age 35 (range: 22–60) and with 12 years of experience in teaching (range: 0–40). One-half of the preschool teachers had received a two-year college initial education and the other half a three-year education. Teachers were asked if they had any pre/in-service training for counselling parents. The resulting data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Preschool Teacher Demographics

		Frequency	Percentage	Total
Degree of qualification	2 years	67	49.3	131
	3 years	64	47.1	
Pre-service training for counselling parents	No	105	77.8	135
	Yes	30	22.1	
In-service training for counselling parents	No	97	71.3	132
	Yes	35	25.7	

Measures

A questionnaire was developed with the aim of testing whether preschool teachers recognise the concept of counselling parents in their work. Due to the lack of study in this field and its vague concept, the scale of preschool teachers' ability to counsel parents was constructed only with its fundamental dimension: preschool teachers' knowledge, education, experience, and feeling of competence for counselling parents. Self-perceived competence for counselling parents on these four items was measured with a Likert-type scale where 1 is no, 2 is very little, 3 is moderate, 4 is a lot, and 5 is entirely competent. One factor was obtained with high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = .90) (Skočić Mihić, Blanuša Trošelj, & Katić, 2015). Furthermore, the preschool teachers' demographic data, such as age, teaching experience, level of degree, and pre- and in-service education about counselling were explored.

Data analysis

The statistical analyses incorporated a variety of techniques for exploring research questions. Descriptive statistics are presented in the form of frequencies, means, and standard deviation to describe the teachers' perceived competence for counselling parents. Regression analysis was used to predict to what extent the preschool teachers' demographic aspects affect their level of perceived competence for counselling parents. Data were analysed using SPSS for Windows.

Results

Teachers were asked to estimate the importance of counselling parents in preschool teachers' work and their motivation for it. The results indicated that they see counselling parents as a significant aspect of their professional work (M = 4.61, SD = .53) and that they are largely motivated to counsel parents (M = 4.29, SD = .76). There is a significant correlation between the teachers' opinion about the importance of counselling parents in preschool teachers' work and the motivation to counsel parents ($r = .23$; $p < .01$). Those teachers who are more convinced that counselling parents is an essential part of their job are highly motivated to implement it.

Preschool teachers (N = 136) perceived themselves to be moderately capable of counselling parents in terms of their feeling of competence (M = 3.00; SD = .87), knowledge (M = 2.87; SD = .81), experience (M = 2.86; SD = .95), and training (M = 2.38; SD = 1.04). They assessed themselves as moderately capable of counselling parents according to the arithmetic mean 2.78 (SD = .81). The responses were factor-analysed, and the obtained factor is called *Factor of self-perceived competence for counselling parents* (Skočić Mihić et al., 2015).

We did not find a correlation between the teachers' perceived competence for counselling parents and their opinion of the importance of counselling in their professional work and motivation for its implementation ($r = .058$; $p > .05$, and $r = .108$; $p > .05$).

Hierarchical regression was used to predict the preschool teachers' level of self-assessed competence for counselling parents.

Table 2

Results of Multiple Regression Analysis in Predicting Teachers' Perceived Competence for Counselling Parents

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Age	-.019	.018	-.226			
Experience teaching	.049	.017	.621**			
Degree of qualification	-.300	.117	-.206*			
Age				-.004	.468	-.049
Experience teaching				.027	.016	.351
Degree of qualification				-.181	.015	-.124
Pre-service training				.241	.106	.122
In-service training				.73	.135	.423***
R^2		.274			.438	
F for R^2		15,849***			19,349***	

Note. *p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .00

In the first step, teaching experience and the level of degree yield a significant relationship ($R = .523$, $R^2 = .278$, $p < .00$) and explain 16% of the total variance. Pre- and in-service education for counselling parents (1 = had education), entered in the second step, predicted a statistically significant ($R = .662$, $R^2 = .278$, $p < .00$) level of preschool teachers' competence to counsel parents, over and above the variance explained in the first step. Once they were entered, teaching experience ($p = .079$) and degree level ($p = .092$) ceased to be significant, as pre-service training ($p = .077$). Only in-service training for counselling parents can significantly ($p = .00$) predict preschool teachers' level of ability.

Discussion

This research indicates that preschool teachers in Croatia consider counselling parents to be an essential aspect of their professional work, and this is connected with their motivation for counselling. Those who considered counselling parents to be a more important aspect of their profession also had a higher level of motivation for counselling parents. 'Competence' is a crucial and broad term in the teaching profession, usually described by knowledge, skills, and abilities. Teachers' experience, knowledge, education in the field of counselling parents, and personal feeling of competence are fundamental concepts, which in the Croatian language is described with the word 'sposobnost', which means 'ability to do'. The closest terms in the English language are 'competence' and 'ability', and the term 'ability' is used in the context of this study as representing the teachers' sense of ability. Self-assessment is a subjective phenomenon and not an easy task for a person to report how much he/she knows and can successfully carry out his/her work (Ricijaš, Huić, & Branica, 2006). Furthermore, self-assessment is the only effective way to 'start a change in the behavior, because analysis comes from the internal and not some external source' (Ljubetić, 2007, p. 87).

The results have illuminated the teachers' role as professionals who support children and parents with their moderate ability to do so. In line with these findings, counselling parents should be considered to be a very unclear concept in the Croatian preschool context. Apparently, no relevant general specification exists. However, counselling is recognised as a part of cooperation with parents, and its interpretation varies among preschools in Croatia. Cooperation with parents is elaborated in their annual curriculums and covered with approximately 1.5–2% of work hours (Annual curriculum of preschool, 2013/14a, Annual curriculum of preschool, 2013/14b) through various forms, including group parent meetings, individual consultations, workshops, celebrations, etc.

Obviously, preschool teachers in Croatia spend a small amount of time in counselling parents as a part of cooperation with them, mostly through individual consultations.

Unprofessional and incompetent counselling may lead to questionable ethical situations that benefit no one. The effect of counselling becomes questionable when the one who provides counselling knows a lot about the problem, but little about education, strategies, and approaches (Brown, 1997; according to Stričević, 2011). Research conducted by Mlinarević and Thomas (2010) and Skočić Mihić and Srića (2016) has shown that parents prefer to first confide in the preschool teacher and only then in experts (psychologist, pedagogic expert, and others). Generally, parents are interested in collaboration with preschool teachers (Petrović-Sočo, 1995).

In contrast, preschool teachers consider themselves to be the parents' supporters (Hirsto, 2010). It is necessary to understand that both stakeholders recognise the benefits, necessity, and possibility of counselling parents. Therefore, the competences of preschool teachers should be strengthened. The present research suggests that it is necessary to develop a concept of counselling in the field of preschool teachers' work with parents. Clearly, the preschool teachers' main focus is the task of educating; they are not counsellors, but 'use counselling skills as part of their jobs some of the time if they are to be maximally effective' (Nelson- Jones, 2007, p. 4). It takes a small number of the preschool teachers' work schedule, but its effect is significant. In line with this, preschool teachers are professionals who use counselling skills in helping and supporting parents of early and preschool-aged children to ensure appropriate conditions for the fulfilment of the children's potentials and optimal growth and development.

According to the concept of supporting parenting embedded in the legal and theoretical foundations of contemporary childhood, this definition sees the preschool teacher as a partner in strengthening responsible parenting. Giving support to parents by using helping and counselling skills in preschool settings is crucial for the development of the parents' competences. A competent parent sees difficulties as temporary and possible to be overcome; he deliberates and detects 'critical' points of his parenting and uses all available resources to improve his parenting competences (Ljubetić, 2012). It is obvious that counselling can be viewed as one of the organisational forms of parent education. The level of the parents' needs differs from occasional, brief, and single instances of teacher's advice and information to more systematic and long-term assistance (Longo, 2005). The preschool teachers can deal with daily developmental and educational issues in supporting parents. In some specific situations, they must deal with complex issues that require linking multiple experts. Therefore, in

these situations, a long-term and systematic process of joint action of teachers, experts, and parents is required (Resman, 2000). Thus, counselling parents becomes the teamwork of experts in preschools and preschool teachers as unavoidable stakeholders due to their role in the child's life. However, the point at which preschool teachers and experts unite is unclear, and it has not been formally specified. Generally, preschool teachers perceived inefficient cooperation with experts in counselling parents (Srok & Skočić Mihić, 2012, 2013), probably due to the unclear professional roles in supporting parents.

Preschool teachers' competence to counsel parents is not related to their perceptions of the importance of counselling parents in preschool teachers' work and their motivation for it. It seems that their competence for counselling parents is strongly associated with the level of knowledge they assess themselves to have about the subject, experience in this area, and their sense of competence for its implementation. It is known that preschool teachers obtain very poor professional knowledge for counselling parents during their tertiary education. It is questionable as to what extent these competences can be acquired during their in-service training in institutions of early and preschool education. Slunjski (2008) discusses the competences approach to professional development, which verifies the knowledge in their daily educational activities and leads to change and development in their own competences, as these results prove. Generally, preschool teachers' competence is associated with their pre- and in-service education. Knowledge and skills for counselling parents acquired throughout education affect the positive image of teachers and supports better self-understanding as well as an understanding of the intergenerational relationships, fostering personal, and family relations, and relations with other significant persons in the life of students (Lin, 2011). Janković (1997) states that knowledge is a crucial factor in the counselling work, although it is not always easily proved by the results of action when resolving the problem.

Preschool teachers' moderate competence to counsel parents correlates with other assessments of their competence, such as competences to work in inclusive settings or competence for collaboration with parents (Erčulj, 2008; Skočić Mihić, 2011). This opens space for the further development of various forms of professional development aimed not only at the advances in knowledge but also at the 'changes in the teacher's beliefs and behavior' (Slunjski, 2008, p. 193).

Ability is obtained throughout in-service training, which raises the question of how and when the novice educators obtained the necessary competences that should be an integral part of their formal undergraduate study. Preschool teachers are entering their careers without adequate training for

counselling parents, even though it is part of their daily work, as prescribed in one of the key documents.

Conclusion

The Croatian national policy framework in early and preschool education changes the image of the preschool teachers' profession as well as his/her professional roles on a daily basis. One important area of activity for a new professional is collaboration with the family. Unquestionably, preschool teachers cooperate with parents to further children's social, emotional, and intellectual growth. Therefore, their ability to counsel parents is crucial, not merely because of ethical, professional, and legal obligations for it. It is a truly effective way of helping children, parents, and themselves in everyday challenges. The more the teachers develop their ability to counsel parents, the better the target (child's welfare) is achieved.

Based on the reported moderate ability for it, their competence to counsel parents should be enhanced. It is indisputable that competences to counsel parents should be carefully embedded in pre-service training. This research opens the way for further reflection and creation of the theoretical construct of counselling from the perspective of the preschool teacher as well as for defining the most appropriate forms of cooperation in which the preschool teacher applies counselling, knowing his or her personal competences and with respect to various professionals who are engaged in consulting within their profession.

Lastly, the concept of counselling parents as a professional role of preschool teachers remains quite a vague concept in Croatia, and the findings of this research point to training for counselling as a key role, especially during in-service training. Therefore, is vital to provide a mandatory course to gain competences for counselling parents.

Although the findings of this research have significant implications for supporting preschool teachers' education for counselling parents, there are a few limitations that must be considered. First, the convenience sample for the research includes preschool teachers enrolled at the graduate level of education and their colleagues who were willing to voluntarily take part in the survey, thus limiting the generalisation of the findings. It is possible that the findings may have been different if a larger sample was used across different preschools. In addition, the scale is restricted to the basic concepts of being capable or qualified to counsel parents, as it was measured by just four items.

Another limitation of the present research is that the assessment of the preschool teachers' competence to counsel parents was based on the

participants' self-reports. Although self-reports have been used for the assessment in different relevant studies, the assessment of parents and experts could lead to a clearer image. However, this research is focused on identifying the areas of counselling parents.

The examinees (i.e., the sample of the preschool teachers in this research) did not participate in any pre-service training on counselling; an elective course has been offered in academic education since 2010. It would be interesting to explore its effect on the competence of preschool teachers in further research.

Further research is needed to: (a) explain the skills and abilities of preschool teachers applied in counselling parents, (b) determine other personal characteristics, (c) form the curriculum during pre-service education to influence their self-assessed ability, and (d) define what kind of skills and abilities they need for counselling parents.

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Biographical note

Sanja Skočić Mihić, PhD, is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka, Croatia. Her teaching and scientific interest include inclusive and gifted education, teacher competencies for inclusive teaching, counseling, bibliotherapy and classroom management.

Danijela Blanuša Trošelj is an assistant at the Faculty of Teacher Education and doctoral student at Faculty of Education in Ljubljana. Her scientific interest includes professional development and professional ethics in education, gifted children, media and children, and a neurocognitive perspective in educational sciences.

Vesna Katić is a Higher Lecturer, and currently teaches students at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka, Croatia. Her contemporary research interests include early and pre-school education (curriculum, collaboration with parents, observation, monitoring and assessment of child development, documentation of training - educational process, etc.). She is also a trainer of the Open University Step by step in Croatia on the application of quality child centered methodology and application of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards.

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Media Education in Slovene Preschools: A Review of Four Studies

Mateja Rek[1]

In Slovenia, the concept of media literacy has been integrated into the formal education system, including early childhood education. The Preschool Curriculum sets certain goals to be followed in educating preschool children on media-related topics. Research done in other Member States of the EU points to the conclusion that the actual implementation and delivery of media education is both fragmented and inconsistent as well as dependent on the interests and motivation of individual preschool teachers. They are the ones who, in accordance with their professional capacity and autonomy, include the goals set in the curriculum into an actual learning process in preschools, also determining the timing and manner of this. The aim of this article is to review, compare, and analyse the data from recent research on the media education of preschool children in Slovenia in order to better understand how preschool teachers in Slovenia assess their capacity to work with media as well as their media literacy levels, which media they use, and how the media education is conducted in the groups of preschool children.

Keywords: media literacy, media education, preschool children, preschool teacher, early childhood education

1 Faculty of Media in Ljubljana and School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica, Slovenia; teja.rek@fame.si.

Medijska vzgoja v slovenskih vrtcih: pregled štirih študij

Mateja Rek

V Sloveniji je koncept medijske pismenosti vključen v sistem formalnega izobraževanja, tudi na ravni predšolske vzgoje. V Kurikulumu za vrtce so opredeljeni posamezni cilji, ki se nanašajo na področje medijske vzgoje. Raziskave, opravljene v več državah članicah Evropske unije, kažejo na to, da je dejansko izvajanje medijske vzgoje v predšolskem obdobju razdrobljeno, nedosledno in odvisno od zanimanja posameznih vzgojitejic za medijske tematike, njihovih kompetenc in motivacije. Vzgojitelji so tisti, ki se avtonomno in skladno s svojimi strokovnimi kompetencami odločajo, kako bodo cilje, opredeljene v kurikulumu, vključili v dejanski učni proces v vrtcih, določijo način implementacije in čas, ki ga bodo doseganju posameznega cilja namenili. Namen tega članka je pregledati, primerjati in analizirati podatke nedavnih raziskav o medijski vzgoji predšolskih otrok v Sloveniji, da bi bolje razumeli: a) kako vzgojiteljice v Sloveniji ocenjujejo svojo sposobnost dela z mediji; b) kako ocenjujejo raven svoje medijske pismenosti; c) katere medije uporabljajo pri delu z otroki; č) kako se medijska vzgoja izvaja v skupinah predšolskih otrok.

Ključne besede: medijska pismenost, medijska vzgoja, predšolski otroci, predšolska vzgoja, vzgojitelji predšolskih otrok

Introduction

Mass media have become a daily fixture in people's lives. They have become indispensable tools of communication, a lever for spreading ideas, and a formation of concepts about the world, lifestyles, and behavioural patterns. The stronger the use and impact of mass media consumption in societies are, the more necessary it becomes in the framework of the formal education system to identify and develop the knowledge, competences, and skills required to use media in a meaningful manner. The results of surveys on the media exposure of preschool children (see, for instance Ciboci, Kanižaj, & Labaš, 2014; Duch, Fisher, Ensari, & Harrington, 2013; Farrel, Kagen, & Tisdall, 2016; Hesketh, Hinkley, & Campbell, 2013; Holloway, Green, & Livingstone, 2013; Lemish, 2015) show that media are increasingly an integral part of preschool children's every day lives, which creates numerous issues regarding the impact of media. Observing and understanding the media usage patterns of preschool children and the environment they are being raised in during this period (family, preschool, or other forms of daycare, broader society, etc.) and researching the effects of media use on various aspects of children's lives (health, social aspects, consumption, etc.) may offer us further understanding and guidelines about adequate media education for them.

Adults, through different social roles, perform various tasks in the media education of small children (Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2011). As parents or family members, they influence the child's knowledge of media through examples, conversations, and experience. They are the role models that children imitate. Thus, it is not surprising that several correlations have been found (as regards the amount of TV watching, reading habits, smartphone and internet use, etc.) between media habits of parents and their children (see for instance Anand & Krosnick, 2005; Boddum, 2013; Ciboci, Kanižaj, & Labaš, 2014; Genc, 2014; Ofcom, 2015; Vittrup, 2009). Furthermore, preschool teachers who use, reflect on and discuss media in the educational process can play an essential role in fostering the child's media literacy.

'Media education is the process of teaching and learning about media; media literacy is the outcome – the knowledge and skills learners acquire' (Buckingham, 2003, p. 4). The concept of media literacy is partly integrated into the formal education system in Slovenia. However, an assessment carried out by the European Commission in 2009 (EC, 2011) showed that even though the topic is included in the national curricula in 23 European countries (Slovenia included), the actual delivery of such education is fragmented and inconsistent. While increasing integration of media literacy and awareness-raising in school education is beneficial, the universal coverage of all children and parents, as well as consistency across all schools, remain significant challenges.

The Preschool Curriculum in Slovenia (1999) sets goals to be followed in educating preschool children on media-related topics. These are partially covered under the area of Arts as a part of audio-visual media, in which it is outlined that children should learn about films, games, educational programmes, and television programmes for children and adults. Children are supposed to observe, record, explore, take photos, identify, comment, use media, etc. and through these activities, the children should shape their first experiences with media and acquire media literacy (Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2011). Within the area of Languages, the majority of goals refer to literature, reading, and books. Electronic media are intended for listening to fairy tales, stories, puzzles, and songs; it is planned for the children to visit the cinema, watch cartoons, and listen to audio and watch video materials containing various literary texts for children. Preschool teachers should also give children the opportunity to independently create a book and a cartoon. Media-related topics are also included in the Preschool Curriculum within the area of Society, in which it is planned that a child should have an opportunity to discuss prejudices, stereotypes, fashion trends, commercials, etc., which are commonly transmitted by media messages.

The Preschool Curriculum encourages the participation of parents in the planning of activities as it is assumed that this may affect both parents' and children's attitudes towards media. However, preschool teachers are the ones who, in accordance with their professional capacity and autonomy, consider which goals will be included in teaching processes, also determining the timing and manner of this.

The aim of this article is to review, compare, and analyse the data from recent research on the media education of preschool children in Slovenia to better understand how preschool teachers in Slovenia assess their capacity to work with media and their media literacy level, which media they use, and how the media education is conducted in preschool children's groups. We present the data collected in our survey titled 'Media and preschool children in Slovenia' (Rek & Minlavoski Brumat, 2016), which we conducted in 2015 on a national representative sample of preschool children's parents and teachers. Additionally, we have used the results of other available surveys conducted in recent years in the field of preschool media education in Slovenia (Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2011; Madronič, 2014; Usar & Stritar, 2012) to better substantiate the arguments. The surveys we refer to in this article were performed on diverse samples, using different methodologies (quantitative and qualitative). For this reason, we did not opt for the use of quantitative methods to summarise the results from multiple samples in the form of a meta-analysis, but we have presented the research results of the surveys as a systemic review.

Recent research conducted in Slovenia in the field of media education of preschool children

We will draw the data from four surveys recently conducted in Slovenia in the field of media education of preschool children:

Table 1

Recent research conducted in Slovenia in the field of media education of preschool children

Authors	Year	Sample size	Data collecting methods	Summary of the research aims	Summary of the data that we refer to in this article
Rek & Milanovski Brumat	2016	1087 parents of 1–6-year-old preschool children and 265 preschool teachers	Survey	The purpose of the survey was to gather data on media exposure of preschool children and selected elements of educating preschool children about media, either in their home environment or in preschools. The survey includes parents' opinions and the opinions of preschool teachers of children aged 1 to 6 years of age about the impact of media on the mood, health, weight, speech development, aggressive behaviour, and consumption habits of children. It also presents the opinions of parents and teachers of preschoolers on the importance of setting the rules and restrictions to preschool children regarding the use of media.	- media exposure of preschool children - accessibility of different media devices to preschool children - aspects of the use of media in Slovene preschools - the ability of preschool teachers to develop media literacy competences in preschool children
Madonič	2014	100 preschool teachers	Survey	The survey focused mainly on media education planning and implementation by teachers in preschools. The survey also included the questions regarding the type of media used in the education process and the activities of media education in preschools.	- media education planning and implementation by preschool teachers - types of media used in education process - activities of media education in preschools
Usar & Stritar	2012	158 preschool children groups, in which preschool teachers use ICT	Participant observation	The aim of this research was predominantly in mapping the state of the use of information-communication technologies (ICT) in educational processes in Slovene preschools. Researchers focused on the conditions, safety, and meaningfulness of the ICT use in preschool children groups. They wanted to understand the rules referring to children's use of ICT in preschools and safety measures.	- frequency of the use of electronic devices in preschool children groups

Authors	Year	Sample size	Data collecting methods	Summary of the research aims	Summary of the data that we refer to in this article
Lepičnik Vodopivec	2011	39 parents and 22 preschool teachers	Survey	The survey aimed to gather data on two aspects of fostering media literacy. One is the media-technical competence of parents and educators, while the other is the media-didactic competence of educators.	- parents and teachers' opinion on teachers' media literacy from the viewpoint of media technical competence - parents' and teachers' opinions on fostering media literacy in kindergarten - teachers' opinions on the role of media in teaching preschool children - teachers' opinions on the integration of media into the kindergarten education process - teachers' opinions on the frequency of media use in kindergarten - whether, according to teachers' opinion, children in kindergarten have the opportunity to use media actively.

Note. Adapted from Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2011; Madonič, 2014; Rek & Milanovski Brumat, 2016; Usar & Stritar, 2012.

The surveys listed above use different methodological approaches and questionnaire designs and are targeting different samples, which makes a direct comparison of the data gathered questionable, even in cases where the surveys address the same issue. However, the added value of multiple perspectives and methodological approaches to the same phenomenon is in creating possibilities to understand better the phenomenon of media literacy and education in all its complexity, which is a typical characteristic of (post)modern concepts.

Analysing media literacy of preschool teachers

In a survey conducted by Lepičnik Vodopivec (2011), parents and teachers of preschool children were asked their opinions on media literacy of preschool teachers. Parents have expressed great trust in preschool teachers with 64.1% stating that they are media literate. In contrast, many preschool teachers do not consider themselves to be sufficiently media literate. As many as 77.3%

of preschool teachers were not satisfied with their media literacy or thought it to be too limited (68.3%). Only two preschool teachers (9%) were satisfied with their media literacy (ibid.). When self-assessing their media literacy, preschool teachers responding in a survey conducted in the Dolenjska Region (Madronič, 2014) were asked to simply choose between 'yes' and 'no' when responding to the question whether they are media literate; 78 % of them responded that they were. The results of both surveys (Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2011; Mandonič, 2014) showed that self-assessment of the preschool teachers regarding their media literacy was affected by their age and level of education. Younger preschool teachers as well as those with higher levels of education were more confident regarding their media literacy and vice versa.

In the research done by Lepičnik Vodopivec (2011), an overwhelming majority (94.9%) of parents supported the idea of fostering media literacy in preschool, while 5.1% thought that it was less important. In Croatia, for instance, a research study including the issue of supporting the idea of media education by parents of preschoolers was conducted in 2013 (Ciboci, Kanižaj, & Labaš, 2014). The research used a survey methodology. It was conducted in Zagreb and included 837 parents of preschool children. Most such parents (68.1 %) believed that media education was needed for children, starting at a very early age, for them to learn how to use media and how to separate positive media content from the negative. Only 17.4 % of parents did not agree with this view, while 13.5 % said that they did not know. As much as 69.1% of parents of preschool children thought that media education should start in preschool (Ciboci, Kanižaj, & Labaš, 2014).

Interestingly, only 54.5% of preschool teachers in Slovenia (Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2011) supported fostering media literacy, while 45.5% of them rejected it. Judging by the data from our survey (Rek & Malinovski Brumat, 2016), preschool teachers in Slovenia are relatively reserved when it comes to including electronic media into educational processes. The majority do not agree with the statement that children should learn how to use electronic devices in preschools (Mean=1.88 on a 1-5 scale); 92.6 % of preschool teachers also stated that a child could never use an electronic device of his/her own in a preschool children's group. This attitude may be related to teachers' assessment of the appropriate frequency of media use in educational processes in preschools. Results from a survey by Lepičnik Vodopivec (2011) show that preschool teachers do not use media often in education processes: 31.8% of them do not use media at all (57.1% of them being younger than 35) or merely use them once per month, and 18.2% of preschool teachers use media every day (Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2011).

Which media are preschool children exposed to in preschools?

In our survey among parents and preschool teachers (Rek & Milanovski Brumat, 2016), we learned that there were significant differences between exposure of the preschool children at home and in preschool, where children spend more than a half of their waking time on weekdays. In their home environment, children aged 1-3 years, on average use various media (TV, DVD or video, radio, computer or tablet, mobile phone, magazines or newspaper) for 2 hours daily. The amount of time spent using media increases in the age group 4-6 and is on average 2 hours and 40 minutes per day.

The average daily media exposure of preschool children aged 1-6 years to screens (TV, computer, tablet PC, mobile phone) in Slovene preschools is 7.6 minutes daily, and they watch either educational programmes or entertainment programmes. Among the more time-consuming activities of preschoolers in preschool are playing in playrooms, which in the opinion of preschool teachers takes on average and hour and a half daily, and playing outdoors, which on average lasts one hour a day. The most common media-related activity is listening to songs/ music. CD or MP3 players are on average switched on for half an hour daily, more precisely 33.1 minutes. Only rarely do children listen to radio programmes: on average, 2.4 minutes daily (Rek & Milanovski Brumat, 2016).

Madronič (2014) explored how often the media activities prescribed by the Curriculum for Preschools (1999) were conducted and showed that activities that include reading and 'paper media' were much more common compared to activities that included electronic devices (ibid., 129). Books are also the most commonly used mass media as all the surveyed preschool teachers stated that they used books often (on a scale ranging from often, to occasionally, to rarely, and to never). All of them also use CD players. According to this study, digital cameras, printers, radios, posters, and computers are also used either often or occasionally by a majority of respondents (Madonič, 2014). Most preschool teachers never use interactive boards (70%) and newspapers (70%). The use of TV, which is the main media that children in Slovenia are exposed to in their home environment (Kovačič & Rek, 2016; Kovačič, Mavri, & Rek, 2016), is limited; 23% of preschool teachers never use it, while 40% use it very rarely. Only 7% of respondents reported that they used TV regularly.

In a survey titled *Ne/smiselna uporaba IK sredstev pri delu z otroki v vrtcu* ('Un/reasonableness of ICT use while working with children in preschool') (Usar & Stritar, 2012), conducted by the National Education Institute in Slovenia, we find different results regarding the use of electronic devices in education

process in Slovene preschools. Preschool teachers who are skilful in the use of ICT were selected to participate in the research (ibid., p. 1). One of the selection criteria of preschool children groups included in the research was that the use of ICT by the preschool teacher working with children was performed in the previous four years (ibid., p. 5). Using participant observation, a selected preschool teacher's ICT-related activities in 158 preschool children groups were observed during a limited time frame of 150 minutes. The results show that the computer was the most commonly used electronic device during the observed teacher's activities. It was used 453 times in all observed preschool groups and was more frequently used in the second age group (3-6 years old). The computer was used independently or in combination with LCD projector and I-whiteboard. According to the frequency of use, the computer is followed by a digital camera (used 381 times), CD player/radio (176 times), LCD projector (145 times), camera (96 times), I-table (33 times), phone (31 times), etc. TV was used only 15 times (Ibid., 13). These electronic devices were used both in the first and the second age groups as well as in combined groups. The frequency of the use of most of the above-mentioned digital devices grows with the age of children. The data gathered on the availability of digital devices for children pointed the authors of the study to a conclusion that preschool children in groups, where the research was conducted, have good conditions to use information and communication technologies. One of the issues that the survey identified was that digital devices are not adapted for the use of children (e.g., smaller mouse to fit child's hand). Also, when assessing whether a computer is placed in an appropriate place (furniture, light, room, etc.), a great number of respondents chose the option 'I cannot assess.' The authors of the study assumed that the level of knowledge regarding the correct placement of a computer is low and that additional knowledge regarding this should be provided.

How can we explain the seemingly contradictory claims of various surveys? On the one hand, the survey done in 2011 (Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2011) shows that preschool teachers in preschools do not often include media in educational processes. Also, the survey from 2016 (Rek & Milanovski Brumat, 2016) shows that the daily media exposure of children to screens in Slovene preschools is low. From a 2014 survey (Madronič, 2014), we can see that activities that include reading and 'paper media' are much more common compared to the activities that include electronic devices. However, the 2012 survey initiated by the National Education Institute in Slovenia points to the conclusion that the use of electronic devices in Slovenian preschools is common. We must, however, keep in mind that this survey was not conducted on a random sample as preschool teachers who were 'skilful in the use of ICT' (Usar & Stritar,

2012, p. 1) were selected to be included into the research and findings may not represent the state of ICT use in preschools on a broader national sample. The participation observation methodology used did offer valuable information regarding the way 'preschool teachers that are skilful in the use of ICT' can use electronic devices in the preschool children groups and their opinions regarding implementing guidelines and instructions from the curriculum. We should also keep in mind that the sole presence of observers in the preschool children group (even though they were a combination of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', which raises the probability of the objectivity of participant observation) can influence the behaviour of the observed preschool teacher (DeWatt & DeWatt, 2011; Murchison, 2012). One way to reduce the shortcomings of the qualitative methodological design is triangulation, which increases the reliability and validity of research evidence. This is also a significant argument for conducting several surveys using various methodological approaches, which allows for the triangulation of the data gathered and makes our claims about the state of the media literacy of preschool teachers and their use of media in educational processes in Slovenia more reliable and valid.

The results on the state of media education in preschools are highly dependent on the types of media the authors of the research choose to observe. If a survey involves 'paper media', such as books or magazines (see, for instance, Madronič, 2014), the results show that paper media are used most commonly during activities in teaching processes in preschools. If a survey focuses more on the use of electronic mass media (see, for instance, Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2011; Rek & Milanovski Brumat, 2016), the most common media-related activity is listening to songs/music as CD or MP3 players are on average switched on for half an hour daily. Here we would like to highlight an observation concerning collecting data regarding the use of radio in preschool children groups. We believe that the differences in research results we observed in data collected on the use of radio between the surveys included in our analysis occur due to differences in the formation of questions. In Slovenia, the word 'radio' is commonly used to refer to a device that may also include CD or MP3 player and not just a radio receiver. We would suggest making a distinction between the use of CD and MP3 players and listening to radio programmes in further studies to obtain accurate data on the source of the media content that preschool children listen to as well as focus on the media content listened to on the radio, CD or MP3 players.

Finally, if a survey focuses more on the use of ICT (see, for instance, Usar & Stritar, 2012), the computer and digital camera are listed as the most used electronic devices in the educational process in preschools.

We should be well aware that the way we see and understand the state of media use in preschools heavily depends on the conceptual and theoretical backgrounds we use to build our surveys.

Are children active participants in preschool media education?

Lepičnik Vodopivec (2011) found that merely 13.6% of preschool teachers regarded pedagogic work with electronic media as the active use of media, e.g., playing an audio or video recording with the teacher's assistance. Most children play a passive role (watching, listening). If watching or listening to a particular media text is followed by a discussion in a preschool children's group on what the children saw or heard, then this contributes to their activity. Mandonič (2014) collected data on watching media content and discussing it for the case of cartoons.

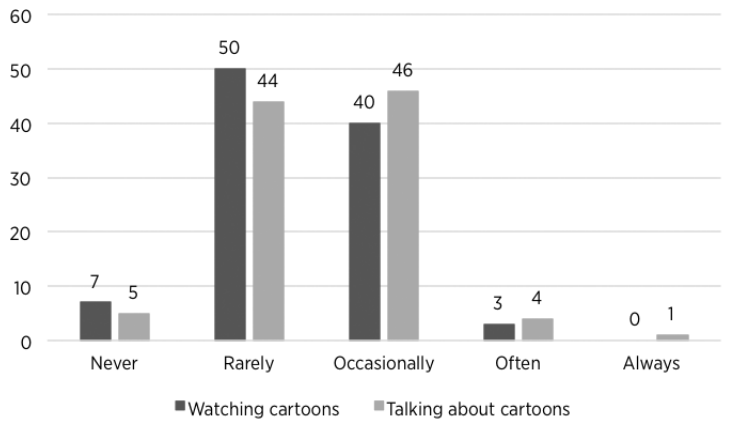

Figure 1. Watching and discussing cartoons in the educational process (expressed as a percentage of responses). Adapted from Madronič, 2014, p. 129.

The large majority of preschool children's media use takes place in their home environment (Kovačič & Rek, 2016). However, the media reception process is not limited to the act of watching TV, playing a video game or listening to a song. It also takes place afterwards through role-play, games, owning products or identifying with characters from media texts or other activities. Among preschoolers, media-related talk emerges mostly in play, which is an important

component of their relationship to media. They display their media knowledge when playing or acting together. Preschoolers do not just simply internalise and reproduce the ideas received from media, but they actively integrate them into their peer relations through thought and action (Roine, Valkonen, & Lahikainen, 2005; Suoninen, 2001). This is one of the reasons that giving an opportunity to discuss the media content children see or hear on television, videos, on the computer, tablet PC or in apps is an essential element of media education.

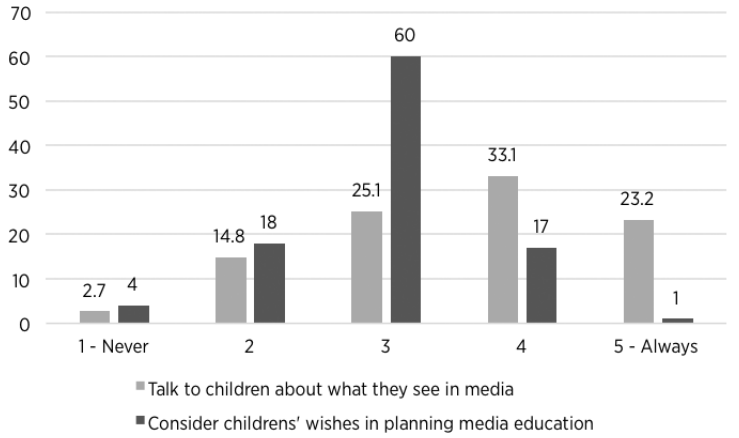

Figure 2. Talking to children about what they see in media and considering their wishes in planning media education activities (expressed as a percentage of responses). Adapted from Madronič, 2014; Rek & Milanovski Brumat, 2016.

From Figure 2, we can see that many preschool teachers state that they do consider the media contents the children bring to the preschool and that they do discuss media contents with children; however, there is no unique pattern of behaviour regarding this issue. As communication processes about the media use and media contents individuals engage in with others are important elements of media message reception, we should also continue to research this in preschool environments. Understanding the setting, causes, contents, impacts, judgments, and values involved in the communication that takes place about the media content between peers among preschoolers as well as the discussion between preschool teachers and children would give us an important insight not just into teaching the pragmatic competences of media literacy, but also the reflexive and creative ones (Hobbs, 2010). Further studies, also employing in-depth interviews or focus group methodology could provide such insights.

Conclusion

Media literacy is defined by a vast circle of policymakers and academics as the ability to access, analyse, and evaluate media in multiple forms and communicate competently within these forms (EC, 2011a). Media education should include not only the activities where children play a passive role in learning how to use media but also age appropriate teaching that will help them develop skills to analyses media codes, interpret and evaluate diverse media meanings and messages and develop an understanding of a constructive nature of media messages. In addition, considering the explanations of how media work, even young children should be (age appropriately) introduced to complex realms of cultural and social implications of mediated reality as they daily take part in it. Media messages and reference frameworks are exposed to affect children's perceptions of reality, their attitudes, their identity, peer-relations, consumer habits, etc.

The Preschool Curriculum in Slovenia (1999) does set goals to be followed in educating preschool children on media-related topics. These are not just goals that refer to skills of how to use various media, but also to activities that would promote reflexivity and some skills of media message creation. However, referring to the data presented in this article, we can agree with that opinion of the European Commission that even though the concept of media literacy is partly integrated into formal educational systems, the actual delivery of such education is fragmented and inconsistent. We can establish that researchers (Bahovec & Kodelja, 1996; Erjavec, 2005, 2010) in Slovenia have been arriving at similar conclusions for the last twenty years even though the use of digital media expanded greatly in this period, and the media landscape has changed significantly. The authors of a study titled 'Preschools for Today' (Bahovec & Kodelja, 1996) showed that the activities connected to media in preschools were rare. Erjavec (2005, 2010) found that preschool teachers mostly develop the production level of media education and much less the reflexive one. Her research also showed that the inclusion of media education in the everyday practice of preschool activities is dependent upon the individual preschool teacher (his / her interests and motivation). The Curriculum for Preschools is designed as an open syllabus and provides directions for content and objectives for separate fields of curriculum, but the number of daily or weekly hours and the frequency of learning activities in a particular field depends on choices made by preschool teachers (Zupančič, Čagran, & Mulej, 2015).

The future focus of both research and policy processes should, therefore, be on the actual implementation of curriculum guidelines in preschool

children's groups. Referring to our analysis, we would especially outline the following: a) developing the reflexive and creative componence in children and b) preschool teacher training in the field of media messaging. Additionally, as children are mostly exposed to media in their home environment, the implementation of events in preschools that would raise the awareness of parents regarding their attitude towards their own and their children's media habits, which are correlated (Rek & Milanovski Brumat, 2016), can have a positive effect on the extent of media exposure, the selection of media messages preschool children are exposed to, and their understanding.

The variety of conceptual and methodological approaches in researching media education and media literacy in Slovenia offer us an opportunity to perceive these complex phenomena from various viewpoints and, to a point, also to increase reliability and validity of research findings and conclusions. At the same time, we can benefit from a broader discussion on a more systematic way of measuring media literacy that would make longitudinal and cross-national comparative analysis. Furthermore, the broader use of qualitative research methods in the preschool environment could provide us with a more in-depth insight into children's reception, analysis, reflexion, and evaluation of media texts.

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Biographical note

Mateja Rek, PhD, is a professor and head of the Infrastructure program of the Faculty of Media - Collecting, Managing and Archiving data on Media Literacy funded by the Slovenian Research Agency. She was a dean (2009-2013) at the Faculty of Media in Ljubljana and a dean of School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica (2016 – 2018). Her research interest is interdisciplinary directed, with focus on social change and development, (media) construction of reality and media literacy.

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Bilingual Educational Policy in Georgia: Can it Benefit the Process of the Integration of Society?

Shalva Tabatadze[1]

This article reviews the educational policy for the integration of society in Georgia. It is an analytical research paper on the current situation of ethnic minority education in Georgia. The problems and opportunities of bilingual education policy are analysed in the article. The content analysis research method was utilised in the study. The author argues that bilingual education is a crucial tool for the integration of Georgian society; however, local control, involvement, and context are crucial in the implementation of a national bilingual educational programme. The changes on the political, institutional and pedagogical levels of bilingual education are necessary for the successful implementation of bilingual education reform.

Keywords: bilingual education, ethnic minorities, non-Georgian language schools, Georgia

1 East European University, Georgia ; stabatadze@cciir.ge.

Ali lahko politika dvojezičnega izobraževanja v Gruziji prispeva k integracijskim procesom v družbi?

Shalva Tabatadze

Članek obravnava izobraževalno politiko za integracijo družbe v Gruziji. Gre za analitični znanstveni članek o trenutnem stanju izobraževanja etničnih manjšin v Gruziji. V njem so analizirane težave in priložnosti dvojezične izobraževalne politike. V raziskavi je bila uporabljena raziskovalna metoda, ki zajema analizo vsebine. Avtor trdi, da je dvojezično izobraževanje ključno orodje za integracijo gruzijske družbe, čeprav so lokalni nadzor, vključenost in kontekst ključnega pomena pri implementiranju nacionalnega dvojezičnega izobraževalnega programa. Za uspešno izvajanje dvojezične reforme izobraževanja so nujne spremembe na politični, institucionalni in na pedagoški ravni.

Ključne besede: dvojezično izobraževanje, etnične manjšine, negruzijske (tuje) jezikovne šole

Introduction

Bilingual education policy is an essential issue for multi-ethnic states. Every multi-ethnic state attempt to implement appropriate educational policy that will enable it to solve the issue of minorities' education and their integration in the state's economic, political and social life. The political, economic, civil and social participation of ethnic minorities is a primary goal of all democratic state policies. However, the instruments, strategies, policies, and values to achieve this goal are different for different countries and even more different within the country, based on political, locational and situational contexts.

The research findings on the effects of bilingual education on children's language awareness and cognitive functioning are mostly positive (Bekerman, 2005). The effects are summarised by Skugtnabb-Kangas and Garcia (1995): (1) competence in at least two languages; (2) equal opportunity for academic achievement; (3) cross-cultural and positive attitudes toward self and others. Despite the encouraging research findings and proved benefits of bilingual education, it remains a controversial and misunderstood field in educational policy (Bekerman, 2005).

Based on existing research studies, this analytical article reviews the educational policy for the integration of ethnic minorities into the Georgian mainstream. The first section underlines the importance of bilingual education based on the political, demographic, and educational context of Georgia. The second section analyses the problems of bilingual educational policy in Georgian reality. The third discusses the possibilities of promoting the implementation of proper bilingual educational policy. The author argues that bilingual education is a crucial tool for the integration of ethnic minorities; however, political, structural, institutional, and pedagogical changes are necessary to have the benefits and the positive effect of bilingual education.

Georgian Context for Bilingual Education

Diversity of Georgia

Every educational policy needs its political context to be started and implemented (San Miguel, 2003). This is true, then, of the political context for the bilingual educational policy of Georgia, which is a multi-ethnic country with 3.7 million inhabitants. According to the 2014 census, ethnic Georgians account for 86.8% of the total population, and ethnic minorities are 13.2% of it (Gorgadze, 2016; State census, 2014). Ethnic minorities are compactly settled in

four regions of Georgia: Abkhazia, South Ossetia (Shida Kartli), Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. Kists are settled in Kakheti (including the Pankisi Valley), but in total, they comprise only 7% of the region's population. Apart from compact settlements, ethnic minority groups are settled in different territories of the country. These groups are Russians, Greeks, Kurds and/or Yezidis, Assyrians, Jews, Ukrainians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis (Beridze, 2013; Gabunia, 2014; Svanidze, 2002; Tabatadze, 2016).

The Soviet heritage and the collapse of the Soviet Union

Georgia gained independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Communist policies of forced migration have engendered difficult multilingual problems in the former Soviet Union countries (Hogan-Brun & Ramonlene, 2004). The language of communication of ethnic groups between and within the republics was Russian during the Soviet Era. As a result of Soviet educational and language policy, the residents of the Republic of Georgia with a different ethnic origin (Russians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Greeks, Kurds, and others) became members of the Russian political and language society.

Post-Soviet republics have been implementing new language and educational policies since 1991. Pavlenko (2008) emphasises several challenging factors for the implementation of an educational language policy in post-Soviet area: (1) large number of Russian speakers; (2) Russification of dominant cultural groups in former republics of the former Soviet Union; (3) working with non-integrated ethnic minority groups; and (4) functional limitations of some of the languages of dominant cultural groups in post-Soviet republics. Based on these challenges, the republics of the former Soviet Union started with language policy reforms in the educational system. Three main policy directions can categorise these reforms: (1) bilingual education to strengthen the knowledge of the state language in minority groups; (2) substitution of Russian language with the language of dominant cultural groups; and (3) bilingual education to respond to the functional limitation of languages of dominant cultural groups and empower this language while supporting functioning in the Russian language. There are significant directions absent in these bilingual educational reforms, including designing and implementing bilingual educational programmes to support minorities' education in their native language in schools with state language instruction, implementing bilingual education programmes for dominant cultural groups to learn minority languages in the regions of compact settlements of ethnic minorities, and implementing bilingual

education reform based on the foreign policy of the countries.

Georgia used the experience of Latvia during the initial design and implementation of bilingual education reform. Latvian specialists, as well as various governmental and non-governmental organisations, actively cooperated with both the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and other stakeholders (Grigule, 2009). The Latvian experience was significant and, accordingly, it is necessary to provide an overview of bilingual educational reform in Latvia, with its shortcomings and successes. The educational reform in Latvia mostly focused on reforming Russian schools and increasing facilitation of the teaching of the Latvian language in the Russian-speaking population. Unlike too many bilingual educational reforms worldwide, in Latvia, the objective of minority educational reform was not supportive of minority languages (Batelaan, 2002).

Bilingual educational reform in Latvia started in primary school in 1999 and secondary school in 2004 (Kļava, Kļave, & Motivāne, 2010). Four different models were developed for bilingual educational programmes in the primary schools of Latvia. In all four types of programmes, there were certain amounts of hours allocated for Latvian and the native languages of minority groups (Dilāns & Zepa, 2015). Minority schools could select from amongst four different types of bilingual education programmes. The results and effects of bilingual educational programmes are controversial. As Dilāns and Zepa (2015) stated: '[The] Latvian case shows that the implementation of the four types of bilingual education was criticised for its authoritarian nature, the lack of readiness among minority school teachers, the lack of information among policy participants and target audiences.' (p. 640). At the same time, many researchers agree that bilingual educational reform achieved 'the improvement of Latvian language skills among minority students and enhanced competitiveness in higher education and the labor market' (Kļava, Kļave, & Motivāne, 2010 as cited in Dilāns & Zepa, 2015, p. 641).

Like other post-Soviet countries, the collapse of the Soviet Union and independence required that Georgia build a language policy in an educational system as well as to develop a new strategy toward ethnic minorities.

The educational system and the challenges of quality education in minority schools

The educational system in Georgia comprises preschool, general, and tertiary education, as well as secondary vocational education and training. General education is offered at three levels: primary education (grades 1 to

6), basic education (grades 7 to 9), and secondary education (grades 10 to 12). There are 2,084 public and 230 private schools in Georgia with approximately 560,000 students (Tabatadze & Gorgadze, 2014).

Article 4 of the Law on General Education of Georgia states that 'citizens for whom Georgian is not a native language have the right to acquire general education in their native language'. According to data from 2013, there are currently 213 non-Georgian language schools and 77 non-Georgian language sectors in Georgia (Tabatadze, 2015a):

Table 1

Non-Georgian language public schools by region, developed from the data of Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2013

Region	Azerbaijani	Russian	Armenian	Total
Adjara				0
Tbilisi	1	2	1	4
Imereti				
Kakheti	4	1		5
Samegrelo- Upper Svaneti				
Samtskhe- Javakheti		4	96	100
Kvemo Kartli	80	4	20	104
Total	**85**	**11**	**117**	**213**

Statistical data about the ethnic minorities' integration into the Georgian mainstream reveal a dire situation. For example:

(1) The enrolment of ethnic minorities in higher education is very low (Tabatadze & Gorgadze, 2016);

(2) The number of ethnic minorities failing the Unified National Exams for University entrants is very high. Those who did not fail received the lowest grades at the test;

(3) The dropout rates are the highest in minority students at higher educational institutions. For example, 14,7% of ethnic minority students enrolled at Tbilisi State University in 2010 completed undergraduate studies in 2015 (Tabatadze & Gorgadze, 2016);

(4) The representations of ethnic minorities in the central and local legislative, executive or judicial branches of government are very low (Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civil Equality 2014);

(5) The number of failing students in school exit exams from non-Georgian language schools is below the average countrywide results. For example, approximately 29% of the non-Georgian language schools graduates from compact settlements failed in the physics school exam, while the average number of failed students is 4% countrywide (Tabatadze, 2016);
(6) The Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) 2009 confirms the problems of ethnic minority students in literacy, math, and science in comparison to their Georgian counterparts. According to the PISA 2009 results, the Georgian students have low results in reading, math and science compared to international averages; however, the results of minority students are even lower in comparison to those of their Georgian counterparts (Tabatadze, 2016).

The statistical data and research results mentioned above directly indicate the inefficiency of non-Georgian schools. These schools are the direct heritage of the Soviet educational system. The Georgian government started to reform these schools, specifically:

(1) On December 15, 2010, amendments were made to the Law on General Education; multilingual education was defined as 'education, which aims to develop a student's linguistic competence and understanding in a variety of languages…' (Law on General Education, 2005);
(2) The Georgian government adopted the policy goal of implementing multilingual education (MLE) reform in 2009. MLE policy has been included in the action plan and concept on 'Tolerance and Civil Integration of the Government of Georgia';
(3) Multilingual Educational Programme Regulations were adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia (MoES) in 2010;
(4) A professional standard of teachers of Georgian as a second language was adopted in 2010;
(5) MoES of Georgia adopted bilingual teacher standard in 2012 (Tabatadze, 2015 b).

Research Methodology

The study explored the existing situation of bilingual educational reform of Georgia. In analysing the content of the study, a qualitative research method was utilised. The following approaches were used for content analysis: (1) study of the legislation in the field of bilingual education in Georgia; (2) study of existing research on minority education in Georgia; (3) review of statistical

data on minority education in Georgia. The present study poses the following research question: What political, institutional and pedagogical aspects of bilingual education have to be changed for the successful implementation of bilingual education reform in Georgia?

Research Results

The problems of the implementation of bilingual educational policy in Georgia

The content analysis demonstrated important factors on different levels that affect the effective implementation of bilingual educational reform. The problems impacting such policy can be divided into two parts: (1) political and structural issues, and (2) institutional/pedagogical issues. Both will be briefly reviewed below

Political/Structural challenges for bilingual educational reform

Political problems of bilingual educational policy in Georgia have several fundamental reasons. It is necessary to understand the differences in the political context of bilingual education in Georgia and, for example, in the United States, where bilingual education was part of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and demand for bilingual education came from the civil rights leaders of representatives of ethnic minorities (Crawford, 2000). In Georgia, the initiative for bilingual educational comes from the government, and it is mainly perceived as a violation of the educational rights of ethnic minorities by their representatives (Kurbanov, 2007). As mentioned earlier, we can describe the ethnic minorities of Georgia as 'Involuntary Minorities'. As John Ogbu points out, it is not unusual for these groups to engage in so-called *cultural inversion*, that is, to resist becoming integrated into the dominant culture. Instead, involuntary minorities can be engaged in *oppositional behaviour,* encouraging behaviours that are different and in opposition to the majority culture (Giroux, 1983; Ogbu, 1987). Thus, the problems of bilingual educational policy can be highly complex in the Georgian context and refusing to learn the Georgian language and study in bilingual schools can become a form of political resistance on the part of ethnic minorities.

One problem with planning minority educational policy is that it focuses on teaching the state language rather than reforming minority schools and improving the quality of education in them. The real concern, often ignored,

is the general quality of education in non-Georgian schools, which can have a significant impact on the teaching of the state language. Policy documents do not focus on non-Georgian language school reform that improves the overall quality of education (Monitoring Reports of Public Defender of Georgia 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013; Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civil Equality, 2014; Strategy on Tolerance and Civil Integration of Government of Georgia 2009-2014; Strategy on Tolerance and Civil Integration of Government of Georgia 2015-2020).

Inconsistencies in bilingual education reform are a significant barrier to the effective implementation of bilingual educational programmes (Ministry of Reconciliation and Civil Equality, 2014). The leadership of the Ministry of Education and Science constantly changes, with nine ministers between 2008 and today. The absence of 'heritage' in policy implementation is characteristic of political reform in Georgia; even members of the same ruling parties change the policy directions of their previous colleagues. As a result, the bilingual education reform started in 2009 was completely discontinued in 2011, and almost the entire burden of reform shifted to bilingual textbooks (Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civil Equality, 2014). Accordingly, the ministry failed to establish bilingual education reform that could be implemented consistently and realised fully.

Institutional problems for bilingual educational reform

The institutional problems are significant as well, which implies how teachers and schools care for students and how the lack of resources for bilingual education will be overcome by the state and schools (Nieto, 2005). There are several problems on the institutional level, but the most urgent is the lack of human resources and textbooks, which seems to be the most crucial and problematic in Georgian context (Monitoring Reports of Public Defender of Georgia 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013; Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civil Equality, 2014).

Teacher's qualification

The problems of teacher professional development persist in non-Georgian language schools. Tabatadze and Gorgadze (2015) identified the most pressing and challenging issues of teachers' qualification in non-Georgian language schools, specifically: First, both private providers and the Teacher's House only conduct professional development programmes in the state language.

Accordingly, these programmes are not available to teachers of non-Georgian language schools, as the number of teachers speaking the state language in regions densely populated by ethnic/national minorities is very low (Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civil Equality, 2014). Second, the certification exam is only administered in the state language, and teachers of non-Georgian language schools are deprived of the right to pass exams in their native language. They are unable to use the benefits associated with the certification. The existing statistical data clearly demonstrates the low level of accomplishment in certification for non-Georgian-speaking teachers since most of them were not able to pass the certification exam (Tabatadze & Gorgadze, 2015).

Table 2
Certified teachers of non-Georgian language schools (Except language teachers)

City	2013	2012	2011	2010	Total
Akhaltsikhe	0	0	1	0	1
Gardabani	2	1	0	0	3
Dmanisi	0	1	0	0	1
Bolnisi	1	1	0	0	2
Marneuli	9	0	1	0	10
Rustavi	0	4	3	1	8
Tsalka	0	1	0	0	1
Akhalkalaki	8	0	0	0	8
Ninotsminda	3	0	0	0	3
Total	**23**	**8**	**5**	**1**	**37**

The number of those registered for the certification exam is numerically very low in relation to the number of teachers in these schools. It should also be noted that only 5% were able to pass the exam and acquire the status of teacher. Only 37 out of 6830 teachers from densely settled regions were certified in 2010-2013 (Tabatadze & Gorgadze, 2015). The statistical charts showcased above clearly demonstrate the problems existing with the certification of non-Georgian-language teachers.

Teachers of Armenian and Azerbaijani as native languages do not have the opportunity for professional development, or certification, which, on the one hand, has a negative effect on the quality of education in non-Georgian language schools and, on the other hand, is discriminatory towards the teachers of these subjects. They do not have the opportunity to benefit from the teacher certifications or other social benefits

Teachers in non-Georgian language schools are, on average, older than their Georgian counterparts. There 6830 teachers in non-Georgian language schools (Tabatadze & Gorgadze, 2015). Sixty per cent of the teachers in non-Georgian language schools are over 46 years old while 24.1% are over 61 years old. This means that most of them will have to be replaced during the next 20 years. The chart below clearly illustrates the problem of the ageing of non-Georgian-language school teachers.

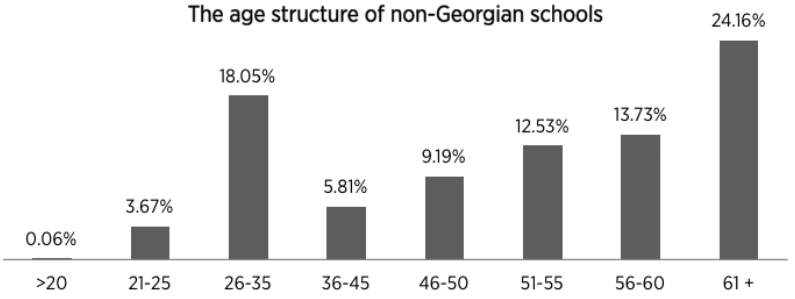

Figure 1. The Age Structure of Teachers in Non-Georgian Language Schools.

Qualification of school principals

According to the official results of the professional examinations provided by the Ministry of Education and Science, only eleven out of 175 candidates from Javakheti public schools managed to pass the test, eight of them being ethnic Georgians. In Kvemo Kartli, out of 659 candidates, 273 managed to pass the exam, but only eight of them were ethnic Azeris. In total, in Georgia, there were 5,197 candidates for the school principal tests in 2007 with 3,427 candidates successfully passing the test (Mekhuzle & Roche, 2009). Non-Georgian language schools faced a serious problem because the number of candidates nominated to direct each of them was insufficient. The number of nominations for non-Georgian language schools averaged 0.3 candidates per school. For instance, candidates were nominated only to two (one candidate in each) out of the 55 schools in the Akhalkalaki municipality, two schools of the Ninotsminda municipality out of the total of 33, and two schools of the Tsalka municipality, of a total of 13. In these regions, 79% of the candidates failed qualification exams, while another 19% were rejected after interviews. The functional writing test proved to be the main stumbling block for the candidates: most of them failed the test because of their poor knowledge of Georgian (Tabatadze, 2010 a).

Due to the above-mentioned reasons, directors were elected only in 26 out of the 265 non-Georgian language schools of the country), namely in 16 schools of Kvemo Kartli, six schools in Tbilisi, and four schools in Samtskhe-Javakheti Only 10% of non-Georgian language schools had elected school principals while the countrywide result was 53% (Tabatadze, 2010a).

In 2013, all school administrators of non-Georgian-language schools from the Akhaltsikhe district participated in the school principal certification process. Out of 14 school principals, none managed to pass certification exams.

The school principals are not prepared to design and implement bilingual education programmes. The study conducted in 2011-2012 revealed that 98.6% of the school principals have no information about the bilingual programmes in general, as well as in the context of their school. At the same time, 90% of the principals indicated that they had participated in the training related to bilingual education. This evidence once again suggests that school principals have no readiness for the implementation of the bilingual programmes despite certain professional development opportunities (Tabatadze, 2015b).

The quality of bilingual school textbooks

The problem of textbooks for minority schools seems to be one of the essential hindering factors for bilingual educational reform. In 2012, within the framework of the agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science, and publishers, one approved textbook from each subject for the 1st to 6th grades was translated into the Armenian, Russian and Azerbaijani languages. The translation process of textbooks has changed since 2011. According to the ministry's decision, only 70% of the material in textbooks is translated, while the remaining 30% is left in the state language. The purpose of this initiative was to promote bilingual education reform; in fact, significant problems accompanied the process of the introduction of bilingual textbooks. Specifically, the following shortcomings of the reform are identified by studies (Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civil Equality, 2014; Tabatadze, 2015c; Tabatadze, 2016):

(1) The 70%/30%, translation principle of textbooks was not based on any scientific evidence and did not correspond to the principles of content and language integrated learning (CLIL). Accordingly, the artificial percentile division turned out to be absolutely ineffective and to have only an adverse effect (Tabatadze, 2015c);

(2) Subject teachers who do not speak the state language are unable to use the textbooks properly since they do not understand the content of the 30% of the textbooks left in the state language (Office of the State

Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civil Equality, 2014);

(3) The parents of non-Georgian language school students were not able to assist their children in learning since they have not mastered the state language and did not understand the textbook materials (Tabatadze, 2016).

Discussion of Research Results/Practical Implications

The previous chapter of the article analysed the factors influencing the effectiveness of bilingual educational programmes in the Georgian context. In this part of the article, the possible solutions for successful implementation of the bilingual educational reform and programme will be presented and analysed on the systemic, institutional, and pedagogical levels.

Systemic Bilingual Education

Systemic bilingual educational policy implies a political level of implementing bilingual educational policies. The most important strategy on a systemic level can be the implementation of the programme in a step-by-step manner. There are two options for implementing bilingual educational policy. The first is implementing it in a step-by-step manner and the second is designing and starting implementation in all ethnic minority schools. The step-by-step policy is appropriate for the Georgian context. San Migual (2003) divides the implementation of the bilingual educational programme into two parts in the United States: voluntary and mandatory. Georgia can follow the experience of the United States and for the first stage establish voluntary bilingual education programmes and, at the same time, prepare for the second, mandatory stage.

The second important issue on a political level is that bilingual educational policy should not be an isolated policy implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. It should be a part of a major civil integration strategy. Local populations need specific examples of how ethnic minority students can succeed in the Georgian state. The specific examples and strategies will be the facilitation of the enrolment of ethnic minority students in higher educational institutions and the promotion of the employment of population of ethnic minorities, who master the state as well as minority languages. The specific examples and practical importance of state language acquisition are essential preconditions for the successful implementation of bilingual educational policy. Thus, bilingual educational policy should be linked to employment and economic policies. The consistency of integration policy, as well as bilingual educational reforms, is crucial.

The third important topic on the political level is the development of a clear message about the objectives of bilingual educational policy. As Hornberger points out, bilingual education should be defined 'as a resource to be developed rather than a problem to be overcome' (2000, p. 173). Varghese (2004) distinguishes between two perceptions about bilingual education. The first is the belief that the objective of bilingual education is a transition from Native to the second language. The second is the belief that the goal of bilingual education is to achieve dual enrichment in two languages. Thus, the policy of bilingual education should clearly underline the five important goals of bilingual education proposed by Trillos (1998): ' biculturalism, or the ability to act appropriately both in the national society and in [one's] own community; bilingualism, or proficiency in more than one language; knowledge of the main values of both cultures; positive attitudes to different linguistic and cultural groups; and equality of opportunity for children from minority communities' (in Mejia, 2004, p. 394).

At the same time, bilingual education should not be 'compensatory but an enrichment program' (San Miguel, 2003, p. 30) and, thus, dominant ethnic group students can participate in it. This is especially necessary if we take into account the fact that the majority ethnic groups are in the minority in the regions compactly resided by ethnic minorities. Clarity in objectives is crucial for successful implementation of the bilingual educational programmes (Nieto, 2005).

Bilingual education on the institutional level

At the institution level, there are three essential components for the effective implementation of bilingual education: (1) school, (2), community, and (3) parental involvement in the process of both designing and implementing of the reform (Tabatadze, 2015b). The first component is school involvement in the implementation of bilingual educational policy. Opponents can argue that it is unquestionable that school should be involved as they should implement the policy. However, involvement does not mean simply an implementation of imposed bilingual educational policy. School involvement is participation in designing such policies. The first step toward the involvement of schools can be introducing the above-mentioned voluntary and mandatory stages of the implementation of bilingual educational policy. The second step is the involvement of schools in the adoption of specific bilingual models. As Mejia (2004) pointed out, it is recognised that each institution should adapt the type of bilingual education offered based on the particular context of implementations. Furthermore, it is important not to adopt 'any single model, no matter how well-tried, without the necessary modifications to specific local circumstances

[…] merely because research background proved effectiveness' (Beardsmore, 1995, p. 140). Georgia can use the very successful experience of one of the Baltic states, where five different bilingual models were proposed by the Ministry of Education for adoption for schools. Even more, schools can develop their own models and adopt them their contexts (Hogan-Brun & Ramoniene, 2004). The similar choice should be given to the schools in Georgia, which will increase the degree of their involvement and thus the effectiveness of the programme.

The second essential component of the effective implementation of bilingual education programmes is the involvement of local communities. The involvement of communities can be achieved by either direct management or by consultations. Local commitment can lead to democratic and relational management. Community involvement is essential for communicating the message clearly to ethnic minorities that students from ethnic minorities are offered equal chances to succeed to those of the majority of students (Hogan-Brun & Ramoniene, 2004).

'Parental involvement' is the third essential component for the success of such programmes related to ethnic minority education (Swail & Perna, 2000). On the one hand, parents are important factors for successful implementation of the programme as they can influence the profoundly political situation for bilingual education and ensure the readiness of ethnic minority students to prepare for bilingual educational programmes. On the other, parental education and involvement are part of social capital, which is necessary for ethnic minorities for success not only in education but also in their future lives (Perna & Titus, 2005). The study of Perna and Titus (2005) revealed a positive relationship between the parent involvement as social capital and ethnic minority students' educational achievements. Thus, bilingual educational programmes that can involve parents are a promising approach to addressing the problem of the non-achievement of ethnic minority students due to lack of state language proficiency. School, community, and parental involvement are crucial factors for the successful implementation of bilingual educational policy. As Nancy Hornberger pointed out 'In every case, what is needed for successful language maintenance is […] autonomy of the speech community in deciding about the use of languages in their schools' (1987, p. 224).

Bilingual Education on the pedagogical level

Bilingual education at the pedagogical level is essential. Only school-based effective programmes can guarantee the success of the bilingual educational programme. On a pedagogical level, the issues of curriculum and

textbook development, teachers training and education, effective school administration are the most crucial factors among others.

There are significant changes in educational theories about the development of curriculum, especially for bilingual schools (Mejia & Tejada, 2003). Nowadays, more focus is made on the development of curriculum by the professionals and experts in the field, but by the practical teachers are 'more representatives of social interest and […] process a greater capacity of real connection with the interests and needs of students in specific educational situations' (Mauri et al., 1993, p. 27 in Mejia & Tejada, 2003). Thus, Ricento and Hornberger (1996, p. 417) recommended putting 'classroom practitioners at the heart of 'curriculum development. This assumption is especially true for the Georgian context, in which the issue of ethnic minority education is politically sensitive and requires more careful attitudes. The development of the curriculum of specific subjects should not be concentrated only in the hands of 'experts' in the field as done for the curriculum of Georgian public schools. It is better to facilitate the collaboration of experts and practitioner teachers from the region. They will balance each other, and the curriculum will reflect expertise in the field as well as social interest and local context. The culturally responsive curriculum is the second important issue for the effective development of curriculum for bilingual schools. As Smith –Madox (1998) emphasises: 'The use of culturally responsive instructional strategies changes the form and content of instruction […] the conceptions of culture in educational practices also need to become more constructivistic and less essentialistic' (p. 313–314).

Along with the curriculum, the development of school textbooks for minority schools is an essential issue. This topic is one of the challenging issues in the Georgian context. Teachers very much depend on school textbooks in Georgian public schools. In many cases, they are the only resource for schools (Tabatadze et al., 2013). Bilingual editions of textbooks should be revised, and effective mechanisms developed in this direction. The revised textbooks should be based on the existing methodology of integration content and language teaching (Mehisto, Marsh, & Frigols, 2008). It is also crucial to integrate native languages of national minorities as a part of the National Curriculum, and for Georgia to be aware of benchmarks in native as well as in second languages for bilingual educational reform. The development of school textbooks in minority language and literature and improvement of the quality of translation of subject textbooks into minority languages can be a significant precondition for bilingual educational reform.

Teacher's preparation and training are another essential component of bilingual education reform. As Varghese (2004, p. 223) points out 'The highly politicized and debated nature of bilingual educations serves [sic] a determining

factor in the formation of the professional roles of bilingual teachers'. At the same time, professional roles of bilingual education teachers are influenced by societal forces created by local context and their personal life and experience (Varghese, 2004). If we take all these assumptions into account in the Georgian context, it will be clear how bilingual teacher's professional roles are complicated. Bilingual education context is very much politicised. Local societal context is complicated, as there are many local 'players', who are against bilingual educational policy. At the same time, teachers in ethnic minority schools are not bilingual (they cannot speak the state language) themselves and bilingual educational policy are additional pressure for them. They should start learning the state language to be able to teach in public schools of ethnic minorities. Thus, their personal history and experience will not be positive towards bilingual education and the formation of professional roles of bilingual educational teachers will be quite complicated in this context.

School leadership needs several essential traits and knowledge to lead bilingual programmes effectively. First, the school principal should be an instructional leader, should know curriculum approaches and language teaching methods, and should be able to deliver such approaches to the teachers (Shaw, 2003, in Baker, 2006). Being instructional leaders is directly linked to developing an effective system of school-based professional development of teachers. The research shows that school-based professional development is the most effective in comparison to other forms of teachers' professional development, such as training, lesson demonstrations or guided practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Second, school leaders should be capable administrators and managers, as they 'Not only […] inspire, motivate, support and communicate well with staff, they also identify, secure and mobilise human, financial and material resources (Montecel & Cortez, 2002, in Baker, 2006, p. 315). The development of a system of school principals' professional development seems essential for the Georgian context for designing and implementation of bilingual educational programmes on the pedagogical level (Tabatadze, 2010b).

Conclusion

The content analysis conducted in the framework of the study revealed significant challenges of the implementation of bilingual educational reform on the political, institutional, and pedagogical levels. Political problems of bilingual educational policy in Georgia have several crucial reasons. In Georgia, the initiative for bilingual education comes from the government, and it is mainly perceived as a violation of the educational rights of ethnic minorities by their

representatives. One of the problems is the focus solely on teaching the state language rather than reforming minority schools. The inconsistency of the bilingual education reform is another key obstacle to the effective implementation of bilingual educational programmes on the political level. Apart from political problems, there are several on the pedagogical and institutional levels, one of which is the lack of human resources.

Despite the fact that the importance of bilingual education was recognised in the context of teaching the state language, the main purposes of bilingual education should not be ignored: to develop a balanced bilingualism in each child without causing any academic problems, and to provide the opportunity for students to receive an education in their native languages. Therefore, it is crucial that the Ministry of Education define the goals of bilingual education in Georgia to be the development of bilingualism along with the overall academic success of each student.

To achieve the goals mentioned above, curriculum and textbook reform, along with pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development reforms, should be undertaken. The latter of these will ensure the recruitment and retention of a cadre of bilingual-qualified teachers for non-Georgian language schools. The preparation of instructional leaders for these bilingual educational reforms is of the utmost importance for the successful and effective implementation of the minority educational policy in Georgia.

One essential priority must be ensuring the active involvement of the parents and community in the life of the school. Professional development of the administrators and teachers in the area of parent and community involvement will prove to be crucial to realising this priority. At the same time, the non-Georgian language schools can benefit a great deal by implementing parent-education and awareness-raising programmes. Bilingual educational policy implementation should rest on the local commitment of teachers, students, parents, and communities as a whole. Political, institutional, and pedagogical support is needed to reap the benefits of bilingual education in the Georgian context.

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Biographical note

Shalva Tabatadze has a PhD in Education and has served as a chairman of the Centre for Civil Integration and Inter-Ethnic Relations (CCIIR) since 2005. Dr. Tabatadze is an Associate Professor at East European University. His research interests are educational policy and multilingual and intercultural education. He is the author of 4 textbooks, 7 monographs and more than 30 articles in the field of educational policy and multilingual and intercultural education and the editor of more than 10 textbooks on content and language integrated teaching.

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Child Rights in Primary Schools – The Situation and Expectations

Jelena Stamatović*[1] and Jelena Žunić Cicvarić[2]

School is the most suitable place for students to learn about child rights and where these rights are to be respected. In the research we have conducted, the objective was to examine the knowledge of primary school students about the rights of the child and to obtain insight into how these rights are respected. Using an interview scaling technique, we questioned 351 final year primary school students and 231 teachers. The students did not rate their knowledge of child rights highly: they mostly expect teachers to provide them with information on child rights; the students obtain the majority of such information in the civic education classes, which is an optional subject and is not attended by all students, as well as in homeroom sessions. Teachers believe that it is the responsibility of homeroom teachers to familiarise students with the rights of a child. The rights to freedom of expression of students and their participation in decision-making are the least respected, according to both students and teachers. Furthermore, all believe that some forms of discrimination exist in schools. We have found especially significant suggestions and recommendations given by students and teachers to overcome the existing problems and provide better access to the rights of the child in school.

Keywords: child rights, The Convention on the Rights of the Child, participation, discrimination, education system of Serbia, elementary education

1 *Corresponding Author. University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Education in Užice, Serbia; jelena.stamatovic22@gmail.com.
2 Užice Child Rights Centre, Serbia.

Otrokove pravice v osnovnih šolah – položaj in pričakovanja

Jelena Stamatović in Jelena Žunić Cicvarić

Šola je najprimernejši prostor, v katerem se učenci učijo o otrokovih pravicah in v katerem jih je treba spoštovati. Cilj izvedene raziskave je bil ugotoviti znanje učencev osnovne šole o otrokovih pravicah in pridobiti vpogled, kako so te pravice spoštovane. Z uporabo tehnike intervjuja z razvrščanjem smo izprašali 351 učencev, ki so bili v zadnjem letu osnovne šole, in 231 učiteljev. Učenci niso visoko vrednotili svojega znanja o človekovih pravicah: predvsem so pričakovali, da jim bodo učitelji zagotovili informacije o otrokovih pravicah; učenci so pridobili večino teh informacij pri pouku državljanskega izobraževanja, ki je izbirni predmet in ni namenjen vsem učencem, pa tudi pri razrednih urah. Učitelji verjamejo, da je odgovornost razrednih učiteljev, da seznanijo učence o pravicah otrok. Glede na odgovore učiteljev in učencev so najmanj spoštovane pravice učencev glede svobode izražanja in njihovega sodelovanja pri odločanju. Vsi verjamejo, da v šolah obstajajo nekatere oblike diskriminacije. Posebej pomembni se nam zdijo predlogi in priporočila učencev in učiteljev za prevlado obstoječih problemov in boljše zagotavljanje otrokovih pravic v šoli.

Ključne besede: otrokove pravice, Konvencija o otrokovih pravicah, participacija, diskriminacija, šolski sistem v Srbiji, osnovnošolsko izobraževanje

Introduction

As a social institution, school influences the environment by its actions and, in line with social expectations, it also allows individual development and the development of students' potential and their overall personalities. School is the basic context of growing up in modern society; it is the place where children are prepared for independent living in the community (Pešić, 1999). This approach involves the participation of students in school life and work. Vidović and his collaborators see the child's participation as a process directed to shared responsibility and mutual activities among students, as well as among students and adults (Vidović et al., 2000). In this context, school is the most suitable place for students to become familiar with the rights of the child, but also the place where their rights are to be respected. The question follows why it is especially important to observe the implementation of child rights in the education system? One reason is that all children go through the education system and spend a large part of their childhood there. Some children spend more time in school than with their own families. Since it is compulsory, all children go through the education system, (or most of them do so), therefore it affects the development and learning of almost all children in one country over a longer period. It is, therefore, essential that the education system and its institutions be based upon impeccable respect for the rights of the child.

Child rights in the education system

Analysing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, one can recognise the tendency of seeing a child as an active participant in the process of his/her development (Vranješević, 2006). Child development assumes encouraging, providing conditions for thriving but also protection from various forms of threats, as defined by the convention. In terms of development, it promotes the development of a child in accordance with his/her abilities and autonomy. Child development is emphasised through protection, fostering development possibilities and strengthening participatory roles in their own development (Landsdowne, 2005). The participation of children is an essential condition for development; it means taking into account their development possibilities and encouraging children to participate in decisions that affect them.

For decades, different perspectives on understanding children and childhood based on theories and research in biological and social sciences have been re-examined. However, the human rights perspective resting on ethical and legal principles can be an equally valid one (Woodhead, 2012, p. 52).

Most of the dominant development and psychological theories contain the idea of a child as an active participant in the process of his/her development, starting from Bruner who states that a child is a creator of meaning to many studies support that concept (Vranješević, 2013).

The concept of child rights is founded in humanistic pedagogy and psychology that represent the 'philosophical notion of education of a complex and complete personality', according to its founders Maslow, Rogers, and Steiner. They start off from the personality as the essential characteristic of a human being, from human dignity and the developmental needs of the individual. The basic concepts of humanistic education are found in the pursuit of pedagogy towards humanism, democracy, and the building of civil society. The core interests of humanistic pedagogy include the problems of personality and its development, activity, creativity, autonomy, self-actualisation, freedom of choice, responsibility and orientation towards higher goals and values, all of which are essential foundations that have been incorporated into the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the humanistic approach, one can recognise positive orientation in education, with an emphasis on positive human abilities rather than educational problems such as violence, behavioural disorders, developmental and learning difficulties, and the like (Bognar & Simel, 2013, p. 143). Furthermore, the perceptions of humanistic pedagogy are directed towards an individual, present, autonomy, experience, and personal values. Based on this essential feature, the individual seen as a priority, the very name of it the convention insists on the child as an individual, and thus the name of the convention is The Convention on the *Rights of the Child* (the rights of each) and not the Convention on the *Rights of the Children* (the rights of the group). The Convention is an international precedent because the focus is placed on the rights of every single child thus providing a non-paternalistic attitude towards that child (Cohen, 2001).

A core characteristic of humanistic education is participation, that is, the implementation of the child rights from the corpus of participatory rights: transferring of responsibility onto children, attributing the ability to judge to children, i.e., making decisions regarding the content of activities, learning (Bašić, 2009). Glasser considers the promotion of freedom of choice in learning to be particularly important so that it could help in aiding students in finding those activities for which they are motivated (Glasser, 2005). In education, teachers should be 'focused on positive abilities of a child and thus help him/her to create a positive image of him/herself' (Bognar & Simel, 2013, p. 143).

The education system, through its core business of the education of children, has a significant impact on their development and thus is in the direct function of exercising *the right to education* and *the right to adequate quality of*

education. Because almost all children are involved in this system, spend a large part of their childhood there and generate intense relationships with their peers and teachers, the education system naturally raises the demand for respect of every right of the child (Chür, 2015). This requirement raises the responsibility to organise the education system so that all the rights of the child are respected in all circumstances. In addition to the preceding, the education system has an essential role in relation to child rights and obligations of the States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In relation to the nature and resources of the education system, in the context of educational activities, an opportunity is given, and an obligation is imposed to inform children about their rights and to influence raising awareness about the importance of respecting the rights of the child in all aspect of society. Finally, one of the basic assumptions of full realisation and respect of child rights is that children, in addition to learning about their rights, have the opportunity to practice them, i.e., to 'live' them. Educational institutions are ideal places for the practical implementation of child rights. Having intense relationships with their peers and adults, children in educational institutions have the opportunity to develop practical skills by which they contribute to the observance of child rights and prepare for the role of active citizens in a democratic society. This particularly applies to the development of tolerant attitudes towards diversity, peaceful conflict resolution, the practice of the rights that belong to the corpus of civil and political rights, especially the right to participation. However, this potential can be used only if the organisation is such that all stakeholders are familiar with the child rights and implement them in practice.

The Republic of Serbia has signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and thereby undertook to: harmonise national legislation with the convention; improve the position of the child in all aspects of life (hence the improvement of their position in the education system); inform children about their rights; report periodically to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the achievement of rights under the aforementioned items.

The issue of child rights in the education system in the Republic of Serbia is roughly defined by legal and normative documents. The Law on the Foundations of Education regulates the general guidelines on child rights under the Convention. Normative documents define specific implementation issues. Here, we will mention the legislation on standards of quality of work of educational institutions, which defines specific standards and indicators relating to the rights of the child; the legislation of competency standards for the teaching profession; which the roles of a teacher that contribute implementation of child rights; and the legislation on standards of competence of the educational

institution directors, which also recognises definitions directed to respect for the rights of the child.

Approaches to the research of child rights

The question of child rights in education is an issue that is very current but not much studied. Approaches to the research of these issues can be classified as those relating to research dealing with the realisation of child rights in education and research and access to education for the rights of the child in school. When it comes to research on the realisation of child rights in education, there has not been many studies on this topic since the adoption of the convention on the rights of the child. The most significant studies of certain rights in the education system: the assessment of achievement of participatory rights in school (Jerome et. al., 2015; Kravarušić, 2014; Pešić & Tomanović, 1999; Vranješević, 2013) and to protection from violence and neglect (Popadić, 2009).

Research and approaches to education for the rights of the child in school (and intercultural education, education for peace) were the subject of the research of Pešikan and Marinković studying education about/for/through the rights of the child in the teaching of science and society in the lower grades of primary school (Marinković, 2004; Pešikan, 2003). The Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad places significant emphasis on the study of intercultural relations, the development of intercultural skills and competencies in children, models of professional development for teachers for intercultural education, etc. Substantial research in this area was conducted at the Department for Pedagogy of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad within the project 'Models of professional teachers - Development for intercultural education' and 'The European dimension of changes in the education system in Serbia'. This research was focused on the analysis of existing forms of education for human rights and intercultural education in the content of the school subject of civic education and other aspects of the implementation of this subject (Gajić, 2009). There were also some studies indicating interconnection of the contents of certain school subjects and the rights of the child. Some studies analysed literature for children in terms of gender equality and political correctness (Stefanović & Glamočak, 2008). The research conducted by Batarelo and associates indicates that '... the students' knowledge of the concepts of democratic citizenship was contributed most by the Croatian language, and then History' (2010, p. 11). The study states that the human rights contents are present in literary texts/readers in the lower grades and that the students are encouraged to think about them through actions of the characters. Todres and Higinbotham explore children's

literature examining what children learn about their rights, the rights of others, the role of the rights in a democratic society in a broader sense. He studies the ways children perceive the rights through their favourite books and texts and how they adopt the themes present in children's literature: discrimination, exploitation, loneliness, fear, abandonment, child participation, etc. (Todres & Higinbotham, 2013).

Method

The study of the capacity of schools for the implementation of child rights in the education system is a project of the Uzice Centre for Child Rights in the Republic of Serbia, the goal of which is to establish a sustainable capacity for education for child rights. The first stage of the project was focused on examination knowledge and implementation of child rights in schools and applied an empirical non-experimental method. Part of this research is presented in this paper.

In studying the problem of schools' capacity for educating children to recognise and achieve their rights, we used an empirical non-experimental method. Specifically, the objectives of our research were to determine how children evaluate the quality of their knowledge and skills related to child rights acquired at schools to examine the extent to which child rights are respected at school and to determine if the right to participation and non-discrimination is achieved and how.

The research sample consisted of 351 students of senior grades of primary school; 51% were students of the 7th grade and 49% students of the 8th grade. The structure of the sample by gender is 170 boys (48.43%) and 181 girls (51.57%). Furthermore, 231 teachers in elementary schools were examined: 32.50% of teachers in the junior grades and 67.50% of teachers in the older grades

The instrumentation applied was specifically designed for this research. The questionnaire for students consisted of 21 questions the objective of which was to determine ways in which students were introduced to child rights, as well as the degree of realisation of child rights in school. The instrument is a combination of questionnaire with questions and offered answers (13 questions), an five open questions and a scale of Likert type (the degree of agreement in scale: 1-I completely disagree, 2- generally disagree, 3- indecisive, 4- generally agree, 5- I agree fully) and questions related to the impact assessment (2 questions with the offered estimates 1 - there is no, 2 - there is very little there, 3 is on average, 4 - very much exists, 5- fully exists).

The questionnaire for teachers consisted of 10 questions relating to the methods of educating students about child rights and the respect of the same

rights in school. In the questionnaire, there are questions with offered answers (3 questions) and open questions (7 questions).

Data processing was done with SPSS 20. In addition to descriptive statistics, measures that show the relationship between variables ($\chi 2$ test and t-test) were used.

Results and discussion

Starting from the belief that a child should participate in his/her own development, the role of school is to encourage and guide children's development, respecting their developmental abilities and needs (Landsdown, 2005; Vranješević, 2006;). Evaluating the basic knowledge necessary to understand and implement child rights, students rated statements about that knowledge from 1 (I strongly disagree) to 5 (I strongly agree) as follows: they believe that they received the most knowledge about their culture (M = 3.93), followed by knowledge that prepares them for life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, and equality with all people (M = 3.88), knowledge of tolerance toward individuals who belong to other cultures, ethnicities and religions (M = 3.73), knowledge and skills on their rights and the rights of others (M = 3.72), knowledge of other cultures and languages of other ethnicities (M = 3.71), knowledge on how to defend their rights and the rights of others (M = 3.61), whereas the lowest rate was assigned to the knowledge, skills and responsibility for environmental protection (M = 3.55). Based on these results, we can observe that students did not rate the knowledge of their rights and the rights of others, nor the knowledge on how to defend their rights and the rights of others, very highly in comparison to other kinds of knowledge. Knowledge related to one's culture and other cultures was rated highly. Some authors believe that school should reflect the current cultural diversity of the society and thus help students to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will allow them to function cross-culturally (Zuković & Milutinović, 2008, p. 530). If we compare these evaluations in relation to students' gender, the results show that there is a statistically significant difference of 0.05 only in the case of the statement that relates to the development of a tolerant relationship with people who belong to different cultures, ethnicities and religions. Boys and girls assessed the knowledge required to understand and implement child rights approximately the same, except a difference in the statement school helped me develop a tolerant relationship with individuals who belong to other cultures, ethnicities and religions, where girls rated the role of school more highly than boys did.

Table 1
Student evaluation of knowledge and skills required to understand and implement child rights

Statements about student knowledge	Gender	N	M	SD	
I acquired sufficient knowledge, skills and responsibility related to environmental protection in school	M	169	3.56	1.14	t = .148
	F	178	3.54	1.01	df = 345 sig = 0.883
I acquired sufficient knowledge and skills related to my rights and the rights of others in school	M	168	3.65	1.04	t = –1.218
	F	178	3.78	.96	df = 344 sig = .224
I learned to defend my rights and the rights of others in school	M	168	3.62	1.11	t = .121
	F	177	3.61	1.16	df = 343 sig = .904
I acquired sufficient knowledge of my culture in school	M	163	3.98	1.01	t = 0.886
	F	175	3.88	109	df = 336 sig = 0.376
I acquired sufficient knowledge of the language and culture of other ethnic groups in school	M	163	3.77	1.10	t = 0.989
	F	172	3.65	1.04	df = 333 sig = .323
School helped me develop a tolerant relationship with individuals who belong to different cultures, ethnicities and religions	M	167	3.60	1.23	t = –2.038
	F	176	3.86	1.11	df = 333 sig = .042
School prepares me for life in a tolerant society	M	167	3.81	1.22	t = –.219
	F	177	3.84	1.10	df = 342 sig = 0.827

Nearly a half of the students who participated in the research believe that they have sufficient knowledge of child rights (42.20%), 28.70% think that they have average knowledge of them, and 18.70% think that they know only the basics of child rights; 6.00% of students claim that they do not know anything about this, whereas 4.30% believe themselves to be 'experts' in child rights. Girls think they have more knowledge of child rights than boys do. Statistical indicators confirm this: specifically, values $\chi 2 = 12.948$, df = 4, p = .012, and Cramér's V index is .19, which show a small association between variables. The greatest difference is observed for the statement that they know only the basics of child rights, in the boys' favour, and in the statement that they know a lot about child rights in the girls' favour

The following results show how students see the responsibility of adults in informing them about child rights and who is, in their opinion, the most responsible for informing them about their rights; 36.61% of students believe that teachers hold the greatest responsibility in this respect, 27.86% believe it is the

school counsellor and the psychologist, followed by parents (23.36%), homeroom teacher (16.81%), school principal (7.69%), school as a whole (5.70%) and civic education teachers (5.65%). Students commonly expect school employees to provide information and knowledge on the rights of the child, although one in four students also expects information from his/her parents. Teachers answered the same question as follows: 45.69% think that the homeroom teacher holds the greatest responsibility in informing students about child rights, the same percentage of teachers believe that the responsibility lies with the counseling and psychological service, 28.45% think that all teachers should inform children about their rights, 22.41% believe that it is the role of parents, 7.33% of teachers name school administration and 1.72% name the media. Teachers also primarily see school or more precisely, its employees as the agents who should inform students about their rights, but most teachers don't recognise the necessity and responsibility of all teachers to inform and help students acquire knowledge of their rights, and almost a half of teachers see this as the sole responsibility of homeroom teachers.

The responsibility of school in the modern society is to create conditions in which students will adopt knowledge and skills necessary to accept universal values, overcome stereotypes, and develop intercultural relationships (Banks et al., 2001; David, 2002). This approach underscores the importance of school and the education system as one of the key and most efficient factors in familiarising children with their rights, sharing information about child rights, and raising awareness of the importance of child rights and their implementation in the society as a whole, which is one of the measures for the implementation of child rights defined under Article 4 of the convention.

We observed the way in which students are educated about their rights in relation to the observations and experiences of students and in relation to teachers' opinions. Students stated their opinions about the way in which they obtained information about child rights. Most obtained information in school (78.30%), and slightly more than half said that they obtained this kind of information from parents (53.00%). A number of students named the media (27.50%) and other sources outside the school (information obtained through books and brochures or receive information from friends). This indicates that students are interested in learning more about this topic, which is why they seek information from other sources apart from school and parents. Assuming that school is responsible for educating students about their rights, we wanted to know which organisational forms of school activities offer substantial knowledge to students and develop their skills and capacities for the understanding and application of knowledge in this area. Students stated that most content

about child rights is presented in civic education classes, followed by homeroom sessions, less in regular classes and extracurricular activities, while child rights are the least talked about in specialised activities, such as forums, school campaigns, etc. (Table 2). Bearing in mind that civic education is an elective course, students who do not choose this course will not have access to this kind of information. However, homeroom sessions and regular classes include the entire student body, so they can still learn about child rights in these classes.

Table 2
Organisational forms of school activities in which content related to child rights is presented

Organisational forms of school activities	Yes	No
Regular classes that cover all courses from the curriculum	67 19.10%	284 80.90%
Elective course – civic education	184 52.40%	167 47.60%
Homeroom sessions	160 45.60%	191 54.40%
Extracurricular activities (school clubs, student parliament, etc.)	67 19.10%	284 80.90%
Forums, lectures, school campaigns, peer education	41 11.70%	310 88.90%

The responsibility of school and teachers for the education of children about their rights requires teachers to be familiar with this area and to know how to implement it in the school programme. Teachers evaluated the requirements and system solutions that would ensure a quality approach to the issue of child rights, rating their agreement or disagreement with the offered statements on a five-degree scale. The results can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3
Differences in teachers' attitudes about the requirements for realisation of school activities related to child rights in relation to the workplace (teachers in the junior grades and teachers in the senior grades.)

Statements	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD	
Respecting child rights in school is very important	229	2.00	5.00	4.67	.59	F = .694 df = 218 p = .675
Teachers should be more familiar with child rights	226	1.00	5.00	3.84	1.14	F = .420 df = 215 p = .488
Learning about child rights should be a part of the regular curriculum in initial teachers' training	230	1.00	5.00	4.03	1.02	F = 0.152 df = 81.034 p = .880
Learning about child rights should be in the regular primary school curriculum	231	1.00	5.00	3.89	1.03	F = -1.369 df = 84.116 p = .175

Teachers mostly agree that respecting child rights in school is very important, but there is disagreement about whether teachers should better familiarise themselves with child rights or not, although they do believe that teachers should be taught about child rights during initial teachers' education. It is not surprising that teachers highly rated the need to develop competencies related to child rights and their implementation, given that the *Rulebook on Competency Standards for Teachers* obliges them to do so. The third place belongs to the statement that learning about child rights should be a part of the regular school curriculum. Comparing these attitudes based on the statistical indicators (T-test and F-test), we can conclude that there is no statistically significant difference between the attitudes of teachers who teach in junior and senior grades of primary school.

One of the research questions from which we started this research is the extent to which child rights are respected in school and the way in which the rights to participation and non-discrimination are realised. We observed these categories from the student's perspective and analysed teachers' suggestions for improving this area.

Students assessed the degree to which their rights are protected in school (Table 4).

Table 4
Student evaluation on the protection of child rights in school

Child rights	N	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Life and physical integrity	343	1.00	5.00	3.70	1.22
Non-discrimination	279	1.00	5.00	3.42	1.29
Healthcare	346	1.00	5.00	3.89	1.17
Care of the adults	347	1.00	5.00	3.76	1.23
Quality education	344	1.00	5.00	4.01	1.12
Freedom of expression	280	1.00	5.00	3.45	1.29
Respect for their opinion	346	1.00	5.00	**3.28**	1.20
Being informed about important things	347	1.00	5.00	3.74	1.11
Freedom of association	338	1.00	5.00	3.70	1.15
Leisure time, recreation and playing	345	1.00	5.00	3.74	1.23
Culture and art	345	1.00	5.00	3.78	1.16
Freedom of religion	348	1.00	5.00	4.02	1.14
National culture and language	345	1.00	5.00	4.01	1.56
Privacy and protection of property	347	1.00	5.00	3.65	1.28
Protection from violence	345	1.00	5.00	3.57	1.41
Protection from drugs	346	1.00	5.00	3.82	1.40
Protection from trafficking of children	348	1.00	5.00	**4.04**	1.37

Based on these results, we can see that protection against the trafficking of children in school received the highest ratings by students, whereas the respect for their opinion received the lowest. The first five rights by ratings are: protection from the trafficking of children, freedom of religion, national culture and language, quality education and healthcare. The five rights that received the lowest ratings are: respect for students' opinions, right to non-discrimination, freedom of expression, protection from violence, and the right to privacy. Respect for the child's opinion and the right to non-discrimination are two of four principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that oblige countries that signed the convention, including school as an institution, to respect, support, protect and educate children about their rights, so the question is raised about whether schools realise this role, given that children do not believe that their rights are sufficiently respected. Freedom of expression, another of the rights that students believe not to be sufficiently respected, is an integral element of the participation rights, and the lack of protection against violence often occurs as the consequence of discrimination. Things that students listed as least achieved in regard to child rights indicate the seriousness of the problem

and impose an obligation for those who deal in the organisation and realisation of educational activities in school to put more effort in planning activities that will help create conditions conducive to the recognition and respect for child rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is focused on encouraging development in accordance with one's abilities, but also participation in one's own development, which implies the freedom of expression and the respect for students' opinions. Students did not rate their right to protection from violence very highly, given the existence of the government programme *School Without Violence*, which has been implemented in a number of schools, as well as the *Special Protocol for the Protection of Children and Students against Violence, Abuse and Neglect in Educational Institutions* designed for all employees in education and parents for the purpose of preventing and solving the problem of violence. Analysing the problem of violence, Popadić thinks that school is an ideal place for programmes for reducing violence among school children to be easily implemented (2009, p. 236).

When it comes to participation in making decisions regarding the life and activities of school, about a half of students who participated in the research (49.30%) believe that participation is present, 24.20% of students are not aware that they can participate in decision-making, whereas the same percentage of students (24.20%) thinks that students are not allowed to participate in the decision-making process. Based on these results, we can conclude that not all students are allowed to participate in making decisions that affect them.

Students estimate that they are most involved in making decisions outside regular classes, in remedial and additional classes (M = 3.49), extracurricular activities (M = 3.43) and school clubs (M = 3.39), followed by decisions within regular classes concerning the organisation (M = 2.27), decisions about the organisation of space (M = 2.71), and decisions concerning content (M = 2.54). Finally, they think that they are least involved in making decisions regarding school management, especially the segment related to school rules (M = 2.06). School rules, particularly those that exclusively apply to students, should be the result of a joint effort of students and teachers, which implies student participation. Analysing students' opinions on whether the adopted rules apply to all students, without exceptions, we obtained the following results: 76.10% of students believe that they do, 12.80% of students think that the rules do not apply to all students equally, whereas 10.00% do not know.

A fundamental question that should be analysed regarding child rights is discrimination. School as an educational institution should encourage the mental and cognitive development of students through its activity. Therefore,

teachers should enable and teach students to respect certain values, universal values, such as the prohibition of discrimination. Table 5 shows how students see the respect for non-discrimination in school.

Table 5
Discrimination in school and its causes

Causes of discrimination in school	Yes	Sometimes	No	I don't know	Total
Age	42 12.00%	91 25.90%	170 51.00%	33 9.40%	345
Gender	34 9.70%	52 16.80%	241 68.70%	19 5.40%	346
Physical abilities	116 33.00%	109 31.10%	92 26.20%	31 8.80%	348
Race	84 23.90%	63 17.90%	179 51.00%	22 6.30%	348
Ethnicity	88 25.10%	77 21.90%	145 41.30%	34 9.70%	344
Religion	66 18.80%	59 16.80%	174 49.60%	47 13.40%	346
Political beliefs	22 6.30%	24 6.80%	220 62.70%	82 23.40%	348
Financial condition	62 17.70%	94 26.80%	157 44.70%	34 9.70%	347
Physical appearance	108 30.80%	91 25.90%	119 33.90%	27 7.70%	345
Social background	42 12.00%	61 17.40%	169 48.10%	70 19.90%	342
Parents' status	50 14.20%	77 21.90%	183 52.10%	38 10.80%	348

Based on these results, we can see that in each category that indicates a cause, i.e., personal trait, there is a certain number of students who believe that this trait is the cause for discrimination. Students think that physical abilities, physical appearance, and ethnicity are the major causes of discrimination, whereas children this the least discrimination occurs based on their political beliefs, gender, and social background.

Examining teachers' opinions on which child rights are least respected in school, the results show that teachers most frequently stated the right to protection from discrimination, then the right to freedom of expression and the right to participate in decision-making. Students and teachers alike believe that there are varying degrees of discrimination in school in different categories; therefore, the child right to protection from discrimination is not sufficiently

respected. This opinion is shared by both teachers and students. In addition, teachers and students state the freedom of expression and participation in decision-making, i.e., 'respecting students' opinions as their participation rights, as the least respected child rights in school.

Teachers believe that the most respected child rights in school are the right to education, the right to freedom of expression (unlike students, who think it is one of the least respected rights), then protection from discrimination (which was also stated as one the least respected rights by students), the right to leisure, recreation and playing and protection of children from violence, also listed among insufficiently respected rights by students. Here, we can see a difference in perceptions and identifications of child rights, as well as in perceived ways to violate these rights and mechanisms of protection.

Bearing in mind students' needs related to knowledge about child rights and their implementation in everyday school life and activities, it is necessary to learn what it is that students suggest as solutions for improved access to knowledge about their rights and its implementation. Analysing their essay answers, we attempted to classify their proposals into several categories: direct and indirect introduction to children's rights (education, activities and topics in class, conversations with teachers about children's rights). Teachers also gave their proposals about child rights and how to deal with them, and their answers are also classified into several categories: through regular curriculum, through various forms of extracurricular activities, through specialised teacher training in this area, by introducing parents to the rights and duties of their children, by organising peer education and by enabling students to participate more in decision-making on critical issues of their school life.

The survey conducted by Vranješević (2013) lists the areas about which children should be informed in school concerning their participation. These include the house rules of the school, all about the rights and protection of the rights, things related to school life, life in the classroom, extracurricular activities, evaluation and criteria for evaluation.

Conclusions and Implications

In relation to its primary purpose and activity, i.e., education of children, the education system has a great responsibility in creating the conditions conducive to the realisation of child rights defined under the convention. School and its teachers can become significant promoters of child rights; in other words, they can continuously and directly support child rights and guide their students toward the realisation of their rights.

There are four principles in the convention without which we cannot ensure implementation of other rights: *life, survival and development* (Article 6); *the best interests of the child* (Article 3); *participation* (Article 12) – the child has the right to freely express his/her opinion and the right to have his opinion taken into account in matters and procedures that affect him; *non-discrimination* (Article 2) – all rights apply to all children without discrimination (Vučković-Šahović, 2011). The results of the conducted research show the degree and ways of achieving these principles from the standpoint of teachers and students. Students did not rate their knowledge of child rights and on how to protect their rights very highly, although the majority of them consider school to be the most responsible source for providing information about the rights of the child. Article 5 of the Convention defines the obligation of adults to provide children with appropriate guidance and counselling on how to achieve their rights, including knowledge and information about child rights. Teachers are expected to provide children with information and knowledge on child rights, but one in four students expects to receive this kind of information from their parents as well. This opinion is shared by teachers, although many of them do not recognise that every teacher is responsible for helping students acquire the knowledge of their rights. Instead, they believe that the greatest responsibility lies with the homeroom teacher. In relation to this, the answer that students obtain the most information in civic education classes, followed by homeroom sessions, regular classes and extracurricular activities, and the least information in specialised activities, such as forums, school campaigns, etc. is not surprising. A systematic approach to curriculum development in the field of child rights would require the development of an active approach in all school activities that would activate all resources for obtaining information, adopting knowledge of child rights, and creating the conditions in which children would be able to freely 'exert' their rights. This requires specific teachers' competencies and their openness for continuous improvement. However, the results of this research show that teachers believe they do not need any additional knowledge in this field, but also that they expect to learn about child rights during initial teachers' education.

Participation in decision-making has a stimulating effect on the development of the child, because he/she is more willing to accept responsibility for things in which he/she participates. Students state that the rights related to participation (respect for their opinions, freedom of expression and the right to privacy) are the least respected rights in school. Teachers have a similar opinion, because they think that the right to freedom of expression and opinion and the right to participation are least respected. In addition, teachers and

students recognise certain forms of discrimination in school. The question of recognising and experiencing discrimination requires one to be familiar with child rights, methods of protection against it, and the conditions and circumstances that lead to their violation. Discrimination includes any form of prejudice, exclusion, restriction or preference based on a personal trait, the purpose of which is to violate or negate human rights and fundamental freedoms. The goal of modern education is focused on the equal treatment of every student and developmental encouragement in accordance with their capabilities and potential. Therefore, the role of the school is to act preventively and provide the conditions conducive to non-discrimination and respect for the child right to non-discrimination.

Based on the results of this research, we recognise space for overcoming identified deficiencies from the standpoint of teachers and students and in relation to all four aforementioned principles of the convention, and recommendations and methods for a better approach to child rights suggested by teachers and students are particularly relevant here. Specifically, potential solutions are focused on the knowledge of child rights acquired in different ways, allowing children to participate in the life and activities of school, enhancing the curriculum with content from this field, as well as a constructive approach to existing curriculum content that can help in acquiring knowledge of child rights, but also a continuous improvement of teachers in this field and peer education in the knowledge, implementation and realisation of child rights in the school environment and the child's life.

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Biographical note

Jelena Stamatović, PhD, is assistent professor at the University of Kragujevac, Faculty of Education Užice, Serbia. Her research interest is in pedagogical area such as: quality in education, school developement, profesional developement of teacher and metodological of pedagogical research. She is an autor of several monografics and scientific papers.

Jelena Žunić Cicvarić, Master of Didactic and Methodically Sciences. She is employed in the Child Rights Centre Užice, Serbia at the position of programme director. Her professional work is related to the subject of the *rights of the child in education* (promotion and monitoring of the rights of the child in educational system), thus numerous projects and research in which she was involved have been focused on the subject of the child rights.

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The Professional Competences of Physical Education Teachers from North-Eastern Italy

Miloš Tul[1], Bojan Leskošek[2] and Marjeta Kovač*[3]

This cross-sectional study was designed to evaluate the self-perceived professional competences of Italian physical education (PE) teachers. For this purpose, a self-administered questionnaire has been designed to examine a broad scope of general and subject-specific competences. The participants, 484 Italian PE teachers from the north-eastern part of Italy, evaluated their professional competences on a four-level Likert scale. Factor analysis is used for the examination of the internal structure of the competence field. The results show that the self-perception of their competence profile was quite complex, consisting of 13 factors, which together explain 51.1% of the total variance. Didactic approaches, which represent the first factor and explain 31.3% of the total variance, seem to be the most informative for their estimations of how effectively they can teach their specific subject. The teachers feel insufficiently competent in some general areas, such as the use of information and communications technology, communication in foreign language, scientific research work, initiative, and entrepreneurial spirit. They do not have sufficient abilities to bring to PE the recent sports activities in which teenagers currently participate in their free time. The outcomes of the present study may aid in the future updating of PE teacher education study programmes and the designing of a creative system of lifelong training programmes.

Keywords: physical education, teachers, professional areas, perceived competences

1 State scientific high school of France Prešeren, Italy.
2 Department of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Sport, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.
3 *Corresponding Author. Department of Pedagogic and Didactic, Faculty of Sport, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; Marjeta.Kovac@fsp.uni-lj.si.

Poklicne kompetence učiteljev športne vzgoje iz severovzhodne Italije

Miloš Tul, Bojan Leskošek in Marjeta Kovač

Namen študije je bil ugotoviti, kako italijanski učitelji športne vzgoje zaznavajo svojo strokovno usposobljenost. Uporabljen vprašalnik je vključeval sklopa splošnih in predmetnospecifičnih kompetenc. Anketiranci, 484 italijanskih učiteljev športne vzgoje iz severovzhodne Italije, so ocenili svojo strokovno usposobljenost na štiristopenjski lestvici. Za preučitev notranje strukture učiteljevega kompetenčnega prostora je bila uporabljena faktorska analiza. Ugotavljamo, da je kompetenčni profil učitelja športne vzgoje zelo kompleksen, saj ga sestavlja 13 faktorjev, ki pojasnjujejo 51,1 % skupne variance. Kot najpomembnejše so se izkazale predmetnospecifične kompetence, ki predstavljajo prvi faktor, poimenovan didaktični pristopi. Ta pojasnjuje 31,3 % skupne variance in tako najbolj opredeljuje učinkovitost poučevanja športne vzgoje. Na nekaterih splošnih področjih, kot so: uporaba informacijske in komunikacijske tehnologije, sporazumevanje v tujem jeziku, znanstvenoraziskovalno delo, dajanje pobud in podjetniški duh, se učitelji zaznavajo kot premalo kompetentne. Prav tako niso dovolj usposobljeni za vključevanje sodobnih vrst športa, s katerimi se ukvarjajo današnji najstniki v svojem prostem času, v pouk športne vzgoje. Izsledki študije lahko pomagajo pri posodabljanju študijskih programov bodočih učiteljev športne vzgoje in nudijo iztočnice za oblikovanje programov stalnega strokovnega spopolnjevanja.

Ključne besede: športna vzgoja, učitelji, poklic, zaznava kompetenc

Introduction

Teachers and their competences, in particular, are attributed a crucial role in fulfilling quality education; therefore, teacher training and lifelong learning programmes should be included among the priority political tasks of European countries (OECD, 2009; Peklaj, 2015).

A competence is described as a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes, and desires that leads to effective, embodied human action in a particular domain (Deakin Crick, 2008). Within the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project, through policies aimed to create an integrated higher education area in Europe, the 30 most relevant general competences have been described and divided into three wider categories: instrumental or practical competences, interpersonal competences, and systemic competences (Gonzalez & Wagenaar, 2003).

In the field of education, competences can be divided into general (universal or subject-independent) and specific ones (Eurydice, 2002); both types should be transferable and available for use in various situations, not solely in the context in which they were acquired. General competences are related to communication, teamwork, the ability to acquire and transfer knowledge, and lifelong learning, while specific competences are related to individual teaching subjects (Eurydice, 2003).

Recently, five new areas of teachers' competences have been identified: teaching with the use of modern educational technology, integration of children with special needs, working with culturally mixed groups of children, management of schools with various administrative tasks, and conflict management (Eurydice, 2003). When modernising study programmes, which was carried out in parallel with the Bologna reform in the majority of European countries, the Directorate for Education and Culture of the European Commission (2005) defined common European principles for teachers' competences as guidelines, which should be adhered to by the creators of educational policies on national and regional levels: the profession of a teacher should be based on a high degree of education, it should be included in a lifelong learning framework, it should be mobile, and it should be based on partnership. In studying and defining the competences of teachers of individual subjects, Laporte (1997) emphasised the importance of a common (i.e., European) approach to physical education (PE), which included uniform concepts and PE teacher education (PETE) programmes. Between 2002 and 2007, the sport-related AEHESIS (Aligning a European Higher Education Structure in Sport Science), a thematic network project, focussed on the systematisation and professionalisation of vocations

in the field of sport, particularly the profession of the PE teacher and his/her competences (Hardman, Klein, Patriksson, Rychtecky, & Da Costa, 2008). The AEHESIS project proposed and framed the core sets of principles for PETE programmes and their benchmark standards, which should embrace learning outcomes and occupational competences, i.e., what a teacher should know and be able to do (Hardman et al., 2008). Nevertheless, when talking about educational affairs in Europe in general, the responsibility for education is still fully regulated on the national levels.

The competences of Italian PE teachers have been studied by Vitali and Spoltore (2010). Their study had some significant limitations: the sample was small (n = 37), and included students from sports and motoric sciences, PE teachers (five years after graduation) and other workers from the sport labour market. Furthermore, it should be noted that there are no special study programmes exclusively for PE teachers in Italy (Mussino, Cini, & Talucci, 2005). A step towards a realistic assessment of the effectiveness of the different PETE programmes in Italy is to assess the PE teachers' self-evaluations of their teaching competences. By determining how they perceive their current competences, we can certainly locate some problems in practice that could be resolved by improving the PETE programmes and providing appropriate PE teacher lifelong learning programmes. Thus, the study used a purpose-designed questionnaire to examine their self-perception of general and subject-specific competences.

Methods

Sample

The sample consisted of 484 PE teachers (209 men, 43.2%; 275 women, 56.8%) from the north-eastern part of Italy; 196 (40.5%) participants were employed at lower secondary schools, 244 (50.4%) participants at upper secondary schools, and the remaining participants were employed elsewhere (primary schools, project work). Almost two thirds of participants had been teaching more than 20 years (n = 338, 69.8%); the remaining participants are almost equally distributed in the following groups: from 11 to 20 years of working experience (n = 68, 14%) and up to 10 years of working experience (n = 78, 16.1%). Most of the participants (n = 402, 83.1%) had finished a three-year university PETE programme at a higher school for PE (it. *Istituto Superiore di Educazione Fisica*).

Instrument

According to previous studies (Gallardo, 2006; Hardman et al., 2008; Kovač, Sloan, & Starc, 2008; Laporte, 1999), a self-administered questionnaire was constructed for the study. It consisted of three parts: 1) demographic (gender, length of work experience, age, teaching level), 2) general competences (36 items), and 3) specific competences (40 items).

General competences included the abilities to communicate, to work on a team, to lead teams, to plan and adapt the teaching process, to understand general pedagogic and didactic principles, to use information and communications technology (ICT), to communicate in a foreign language, to mentor; to follow safety principles, and to behave ethically and responsibly.

Specific competences included specific aspects of PE, such as understanding the social, biological, and physiological aspects of physical activity (PA) and sport; understanding the theory of training; possessing pedagogic skills and didactic abilities related to teaching PE in the narrow (demonstration of motor skills and methodical steps) and broad senses of the word (cross-curriculum issues, ICT use, evaluation of the teaching process).

The self-perception of their current level of competences was reported on a four-level Likert scale with '1' indicating the lowest perception of competence and '4' the highest.

Data Collection Method

The questionnaire was sent to all lower (n = 807) and upper (n = 310) secondary schools in the regions of Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto by regular mail. PE teachers were informed about the objectives of the study as well as the voluntary and anonymous nature of their participation. A total of 495 questionnaires was returned; eleven of them were missing more than three pieces of data and were thus excluded from the study. Questionnaires with 1 to 3 pieces of data missing (n = 87, 17.6%) had the missing data imputed with the use of an E-M algorithm. In the end, 484 questionnaires were included in the analysis.

According to data from the Regional School Office of Trieste, in 2011 approximately 1,879 PE teachers were working in secondary schools of both levels in Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto. The sample represented approximately 28% of the entire population of PE teachers in both regions.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed with the PASW Statistics 18.0 computer programme. First, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (KMO) was used to evaluate the adequacy of the sample of variables. Second, the Bartlett test of sphericity was used. To reduce the complexity of connections between questionnaire items, maximum likelihood (ML) factor analysis with oblique rotation (Direct oblimin) was used. Kaiser criterion ($\lambda > 1$), scree plot, and the interpretability of factors were considered when deciding on the number of factors. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency was used to calculate the reliability of the questionnaire.

Results

The entire questionnaire has a high degree of reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .97), while the values of individual segments of the questionnaire vary between .77 and .90. The results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (KMO = .96) and the Bartlett test ($p < .005$) confirmed the eligibility of factor analysis. The procedure extracted 13 factors, which together explain 51.1% of the total variance (Table 1).

Table 1

Factor names, Average Values, and Standard Deviation of Individual Items, Factor Loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, and Proportion of the Total Variance Explained by Individual Factor

Factor / Item	l	$\bar{x}$	s	α	% v
1. Didactic approaches					
Qualification for encouraging creativity in finding solutions to motor tasks	.59	2.96	.70	.89	31.34
Qualification for encouraging student's learning in an instructive and creative way	.58	3.11	.66		
Qualification for encouraging students to be sport active in free time	.55	3.21	.68		
Qualification for encouraging personal progress of a student	.45	3.17	.62		
Qualification for formation and conveying of feedback information	.39	3.15	.68		
Qualification for special pedagogic approaches	.35	2.67	.77		
Qualification for different ways of assessment and grading knowledge in PE	.32	3.04	.68		

Factor / Item	l	$\bar{x}$	s	α	% v
2. Teaching methods					
Qualification for demonstrating skills that are not a part of curriculum	-1.06	2.56	.80	.80	3.24
Qualification for demonstrating skills that are a part of the curriculum	-.61	2.99	.70		
Understanding methodical ways in teaching skills that are not a part of the curriculum	-.58	2.60	.78		
3. Biological aspects of sport					
Understanding anatomical-functional aspects of sport	-.89	3.27	.62	.87	2.93
Understanding physiological aspects of sport	-.87	3.24	.63		
Understanding biomechanical aspects of sport	-.62	2.90	.72		
Understanding health aspects of PA and sport	-.40	3.46	.56		
Understanding physical and motor development of children and youth	-.39	3.17	.63		
Understanding theory of practising sport	-.33	3.04	.75		
4. Communication in foreign language					
Working in international area	.87	1.82	.81	.78	2.33
Communication in foreign language	.81	2.03	.81		
5. Social science aspects of sport					
Understanding cultural aspects of sport	.74	3.21	.68	.82	2.02
Understanding social importance of sport	.71	3.45	.61		
Understanding philosophical aspects of sport	.52	2.74	.83		
Understanding historical aspects of sport	.48	2.75	.77		
Understanding social circumstances in PE lessons	.34	3.18	.65		
6. Legislation and general educational aspects					
Understanding legislation in the area of education	-.61	2.39	.71	.77	1.92
Understanding school system as a complete entity	-.59	2.80	.73		
Understanding curricula of different subjects	-.56	2.48	.77		
Qualification for setting goals and learning targets	-.33	3.15	.65		
7. Organisation and entrepreneurial spirit					
Ability to take initiative, entrepreneurial spirit	-.71	2.82	.86	.81	1.45
Ability for formation and leading various projects	-.61	2.99	.73		
Ability to connect with external institutions	-.59	2.92	.82		
Organisational skills and knowledge for the implementation of school and extracurricular programmes	-.57	3.10	.75		
8. Planning					
Qualification for setting goals according to curriculum	-.69	3.16	.70	.90	1.45
Understanding general didactics of PE process	-.67	3.15	.65		
Qualification for diagnosing and composing status analysis	-.59	3.26	.63		
Qualification for planning a process according to status analysis and curriculum	-.58	3.05	.66		
Understanding PE curricula	-.54	3.38	.66		
Understanding methodical ways in teaching motor skills from the curriculum	-.51	3.26	.65		
Ability to use different teaching methods and forms of teaching PE	-.31	3.30	.60		

Factor / Item	l	$\bar{x}$	s	α	% v
9. General pedagogic knowledge					
Ability for flexible use of knowledge in practical situations	0.47	3.24	0.63	.80	1.33
Ability for recognition, setting and solving problems	0.42	3.13	0.59		
Ability to make right decisions according to the circumstances in a lesson	0.39	3.25	0.60		
Ability to lead the team	0.38	3.29	0.59		
Ability for adaptation and work in new situations	0.37	3.19	0.65		
Ability for teamwork	0.36	3.07	0.62		
10. Ethical aspects					
Ability for socially responsible behaviour	.67	3.31	.68	.79	1.17
Appreciation and respect for multiculturalism	.63	3.47	.65		
Ethical and professionally correct attitude	.63	3.38	.63		
Considering safety principles in pedagogic process	.56	3.18	.65		
Importance of equal opportunities	.46	3.21	.69		
Ability for criticism and self-criticism	.41	3.20	.62		
11. Research work and general educational aspects					
Qualification to research at an appropriate level	.46	2.30	.78	.78	1.17
Understanding characteristics of research work	.43	2.54	.71		
Understanding various didactic principles	.36	2.93	.66		
Ability for abstract thinking, analysis and synthesis	.34	2.93	.71		
Use of ICT	.31	2.58	.73		
12. Psycho-pedagogic context of educational process					
Understanding psychological aspects of sport	-.46	3.13	.69	.77	.79
Understanding how to use different pedagogic strategies	-.46	2.98	.66		
Understanding different pedagogic approaches and social contexts when teaching PE	-.35	2.87	.68		
13. Financial flow and media in sport					
Understanding financial flow in sport	.44	2.37	.80	.77	.68
Understanding media influence on sport	.35	2.82	.77		

Note. x = average value, s = standard deviation, l = factor loadings, α = Cronbach's Alpha, % v = proportion of the total variance (before rotation).

Discussion

The main finding of the study is that 13 extracted factors (Table 1) indicate a quite complex competence profile of Italian PE teachers. The complexity of estimations of their competences has undoubtedly been influenced by some historical events, which have defined both the contents and the etymological categorisation of PE in Italy (Carraro, Bertollo, Lanza, & Zocca, 2003; Vitali & Spoltore, 2010) as well as a late response to the Bologna reforms. For instance, only in 1998

did Italy found *faculties of sports and motor sciences*, which replaced a three-year course of study at former *higher schools for PE* (Istituto Superiore di Educazione fisica) (Mussino et al., 2005). This study also showed that PE teachers could critically evaluate their own perceived level of and, at times, lack of competences.

Specific pedagogic and didactic knowledge is one of the most valuable competences for teachers (Eurydice, 2003), including PE teachers (Campos Mesa, Ries, & Del Castillo, 2011; Kovač et al., 2008; Romero Cerezo, 2009; Romero Granados & Campos Mesa, 2010). Italian PE teachers also highly valued their own pedagogic and didactic knowledge, while the first factor in the present research, *Didactic approaches*, explained 31.3% of the total variance. It is formed by specific competences, particularly of the instrumental type, related to special pedagogic and didactic approaches in PE lessons, such as creativity in teaching (l = .59; $\overline{x}$ = 2.96) and encouraging the ability of students to solve motor tasks (l = .58; $\overline{x}$ = 3.11). Creativity as an essential competence of future graduates has been mentioned by both the students of the first three years of Spanish sports faculties (Romero Cerezo, Zagalaz Sànchez, Romero Rodriguez, & Martinez Lòpez, 2011) and Spanish university teachers (Sàenz-Lòpez Bunuel et al., 2009). Vitali and Spoltore (2010) determined that the ability to solve tasks in new and creative ways was vital for Italian teachers. The first factor is also saturated by competences for motivating students to spend their free time more actively (l = .55; $\overline{x}$ = 3.21), to encourage their personal progress (l = .45; $\overline{x}$ = 3.17) and to offer help when learning new motor skills. Nowadays, children and youth spend their free time mainly in a sedentary way (Starc & Strel, 2012). It is known that PA acts as a prevention strategy for health-related problems and establishing PA as a habitual behaviour in children can result in active adult lifestyle (Pate, Baranowski, Dowda, & Trost, 1996). Italian PE teachers perceive their ability to motivate students for PA quite highly. This is extremely important because the data about the lifestyles of Italian children are alarming: 22% of 8- and 9-year-old children are physically active during their free time less than one hour per week, 38% of them watch television or play videogames more than three hours per day, and only 25% of them walk or cycle to school (Gargiulo et al., 2015).

The second factor, *Teaching methods*, includes a group of subject-specific competences, which are generally instrumental and are important in the narrow sense of teaching PE, mostly in demonstration skills as the most important teaching method in the PE process. Italian PE teachers perceive high competence in the good demonstration of the skills that are a part of the curriculum ($\overline{x}$ = 2.99). In contrast, the understanding of the methodical ways in teaching sports contents that are not a part of the curriculum is placed third from the bottom on a list of self-perceived subject-specific competences ($\overline{x}$ = 2.60). This

finding is disturbing, as new sports that are interesting for young people are constantly appearing (e.g., rollerblading, new forms of modern dance and aerobics, etc.). PE teachers should include these contents in regular PE sessions, as only thus can they follow the interest of young people, which requires adequate demonstration and understanding of methodical ways of including such contents into the educational process. One of the key problems of PE today is the excessive inclusion of traditional content, which is not particularly related to sports that young people practice in their free time (Hardman, 2008). The sample of subjects includes 69.8% of PE teachers with more than 20 years of work experience, and it is understandable that teachers are hesitant regarding innovations and learning new skills due to numerous injuries among older PE teachers (Lemoyne, Laurencelle, Lirette, & Trudeau, 2007).

The third factor, *Biological aspects of sport,* includes a group of subject-specific instrumental competences, as the items are closely related with the basic professional knowledge in the area of PE, such as anatomical-functional, physiological, biomechanical and health aspects of sport. Many authors consider these factors to be a theoretical background to PE teachers' work and a basis for an efficient PE process (Campos Mesa et al., 2011; Kovač et al., 2008; McKenzie & Lounsbery, 2013; Romero Granados & Campos Mesa, 2010; Vitali & Spoltore, 2010). Within the public health context, PE can play a significant role in reducing sedentary behaviour and contributing to public health (McKenzie & Lounsbery, 2013).

Italian PE teachers have placed their understanding of health aspects of PA and sport in the first place among subject-specific competences ($\overline{x}$ = 3.46). McKenzie and Lounsbery (2013) believe that the survival of PE programmes in schools will depend largely on how effective PE teachers are in operating within a public health context.

The fourth factor, *Communication skills in foreign languages*, includes general competences of a mostly instrumental type. The perception of the actual level of communication in foreign languages ($\overline{x}$ = 2.03) and working internationally ($\overline{x}$ = 1.82) are at last and second last places, respectively, on the list of competences, indicating that Italian PE teachers do not feel sufficiently competent in this field. Gianferrari (2009) stated that the ability of Italian primary and secondary school teachers to communicate in a foreign language is poor, regardless of the subject they teach. Similarly, the use of foreign language has been marked below average among Slovenian PE teachers, who also did not wish to improve this type of knowledge (Kovač et al., 2008). Lesser importance and knowledge of written and oral expression in at least one foreign language was also found by Pazo Haro and Tejada Mora (2012) as well as by Sàenz-Lòpez

Bunuel et al. (2009) in the studies on a sample of Spanish university teachers and postgraduate students, which is unusual as English is a basic communication language in research. Knowledge (and the use) of foreign language in pedagogic practice is a complex problem, related to the age and the length of employment; younger generations tend to have considerably fewer problems in the use of foreign language (Kovač et al., 2008; Vitali & Spoltore, 2010).

The fifth factor, *Social science aspects of sport*, exclusively includes subject-specific competences of an instrumental type. Italian teachers perceive themselves to be sufficiently competent in the area of cultural aspects ($\overline{x} = 3.21$) and the understanding of the social importance of sport ($\overline{x} = 3.45$). This has also been confirmed by Vitali and Spoltore (2010), who found that belief in the high social significance of sports experts is high among Italian PE teachers.

The sixth factor, *Legislation and general educational aspects*, includes systemic competences that are related to the knowledge of school legislation as a whole and curricula of individual subjects. Teachers perceived lower competences in these areas, presumably because they cannot directly influence these factors.

The seventh factor includes competences related to the organisational abilities of PE teachers. Findings from numerous studies (ANECA, 2004; Kovač et al., 2008; Romero Cerezo, 2009; Romero Cerezo et al., 2011; Romero Granados & Campos Mesa, 2010) indicate the importance of possessing competences related to the ability to plan, organise, manage, and lead school and out-of-school sport activities. Italian PE teachers perceive lower competence in this area, as the item related to initiative and entrepreneurial spirit is the tenth worst marked competence ($\overline{x} = 2.82$), despite the fact that almost one half of PE teachers are regularly included in the school projects or participate in sports activities, also outside of school. Lesser abilities related to the organisation and management of Italian teachers have also been reported by Vannini and Mantovani (2007), whereas Slovenian PE teachers emphasise the need for additional knowledge in this area (Kovač et al., 2008). Entrepreneurial spirit and initiative have been explicitly supported by the EU as the priority tasks of future education by encouraging partnerships between the private sector and various levels of education with the aim of acquiring competences required in the job market (European Commission, 2015; Eurydice, 2003).

The eighth factor, *Planning,* is defined with subject-specific competences of an instrumental type representing basic professional knowledge in the PE field (ANECA, 2004; Campos Mesa et al., 2011; Romero Cerezo, 2009; Romero Cerezo et al., 2011; Romero Granados & Campos Mesa, 2010).

In all items, Italian PE teachers evaluated their range of competences with scores between 3.05 and 3.38. Particularly accentuated was understanding

the PE curriculum (third highest self-perceived competence).

The ninth factor, *General pedagogic knowledge and the flexibility of teacher's work*, is represented with general competences of a systemic type. Italian PE teachers consider themselves to be highly competent in their ability to lead a team ($\overline{x}$ = 3.29), ability to make right decisions according to the circumstances in a lesson ($\overline{x}$ = 3.25), and the flexible use of knowledge in practical situations ($\overline{x}$ = 3.24). The highest expressed items in this group indicate a certain level of adaptability of Italian PE teachers. Nowadays, teamwork is one of the most important general competences for graduates from different professional profiles (ANECA, 2004; Pazo Haro & Tajada Mora, 2012; Vitali & Spoltore, 2010). This ability has also been attributed high importance by PE teachers (Kovač et al., 2008; Romero Cerezo et al., 2011), who simultaneously desire additional knowledge (Kovač et al., 2008) in this area, which includes the competence for successful team-leading. As this has been placed in the context of general competences, it could be concluded that this ability is particularly highly developed among Italian PE teachers.

The tenth factor, *Ethical aspects,* consists of the group of general competences of a mostly systemic type, which are related to ethics, multiculturality, criticism and self-criticism, and responsible behaviour in a relationship between pupils and teachers as well as on a general societal level. The item about safety in lessons can be understood as an expression of responsible behaviour and thus ethical attitudes towards the pupils.

Ethnicity in Italy is highly relevant, as the population in some areas is significantly multicultural with the number of immigrants increasing each year. According to the latest data, 8.7% (N = 635.195) of children in Italy are of different ethnic origin than Italian (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2013). Migrant children are more likely to experience behavioural problems than their non-migrant peers are (Kouider, Koglin, & Petermann, 2014) due to social exclusion; moreover, their underprivileged position can also influence their physical development and health. In view of the guidelines for working in ethnically mixed environments and the encouragement of respect for interculturality (European Commission, 2015), PA and sport can play an important role in integrating migrant children into new social settings. Due to their rich experiences with migrant children Italian PE teachers feel sufficiently competent in this field: they placed their competences level on the first (multiculturality; $\overline{x}$ = 3.47), the second (ethical and professionally correct attitude; $\overline{x}$ = 3.38) and the third positions (socially responsible behaviour; $\overline{x}$ = 3.31) among the general competences.

The eleventh factor, *Research work and general educational aspects*,

included a group of general competences of instrumental and systemic types. In this area, Italian PE teachers do not show particular competence, as the understanding of the characteristics of research work (x = 2.54) and the qualification for such work ($\overline{x}$ = 2.30) were marked relatively low. Due to the historical role of so-called 'educazione fisica' (PE) (i.e., that it was focussed solely on practice), research activity understandably does not have a tradition among Italian teachers (Vitali & Spoltore, 2010). The use of ICT is one of the weakest points of European teachers, as they seldom include it in their lessons (Eurydice, 2011), presumably also due to the insufficient knowledge for its effective use. This item has been particularly observed in the present study, as the use of ICT was the seventh-lowest marked competence ($\overline{x}$ = 2.58). Similar findings were revealed in the study by Gianferrari (2009) on a sample of beginning teachers and in the study by Turri and Ceccato (2009) on a smaller sample of PE teachers. As the correlation between the ability of teachers for ICT use and their age has been confirmed in other studies (Gianferrari, 2009), the results can be explained by the age of teachers included in the present study. Additionally, the inadequate or out-of-date technology available to teachers could represent a significant reason (Farinelli, 2010; Gianferrari, 2010).

The last two factors explain less than 1% of the variance. The twelfth factor includes competences related to the psycho-pedagogic contexts of lessons (understanding psychological aspects of sport; understanding various pedagogic strategies of management and pedagogic approaches as well as the social contexts of lessons) and is in its contents correlated with the ninth factor about general pedagogic knowledge. The thirteenth factor is defined by items about the understanding of financial flow in sport ($\overline{x}$ = 2.37) and the influence of media on sport ($\overline{x}$ = 2.82); in both items, teachers perceive their low levels of competence.

Conclusion

Since teaching is much more than a task and involves values or assumptions concerning education, learning, and society, the concept of teacher competences may resonate differently in different national contexts (European Commission, 2013, p. 8). The present study is the first scientifically designed attempt to form a more precise definition of the perceived competences of the Italian PE teachers.

Italian PE teachers marked their competences highly in the understanding of biological-health rules of development in children and pedagogic-didactic aspects of teaching as well as good communication. Simultaneously, the

social aspects of sport, multiculturality, safety, and ethics, and the adaptability of their pedagogic ideas are in the forefront, whereas their estimations about communication in foreign language, scientific research work, philosophical and historical aspects of sport and the effects of financial flow on sport are rated with lower scores. Italian PE teachers are orientated towards the presentation of their motor skills and not in the use of ICT technology. Nevertheless, due to the longer professional careers of teachers, they are probably not aware that the use of ICT could efficiently replace their demonstrations and reduce the number of potential injuries, which increase with age (Lemoyne et al., 2007). Low evaluation of the ability to demonstrate and understand the teaching methods of the contents that are not part of the curriculum indicates that Italian PE teachers offer young people mostly traditional sports and not those in which teenagers participate in their free time.

When interpreting the results and defining the contents of individual factors, a certain degree of care is required, mainly because of the different levels of reliability of individual factors and also due to the different degrees of expression of individual items. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that only teachers from the north-eastern part of Italy were included in the study. Care is also required when comparing the findings of this study with similar foreign studies, as different research and methodological approaches should be considered as well as specific social contexts, which formed a basis for individual study.

The expectations for teachers and schools in Europe are changing (Peklaj, 2015): teachers are asked to teach in increasingly multicultural classrooms, to integrate students with special needs, to use ICT for teaching effectively, to engage in evaluation and accountability processes, and to involve parents in schools (OECD, 2009). In some of these areas, Italian PE teachers feel insufficiently competent. Furthermore, as noted in the European Commission's (2012) communique 'Rethinking Education', the reform of education and training systems is essential in achieving higher productivity and the supply of highly skilled teachers with creative thinking that the 21st-century marketplace requires. Therefore, they are in need, also in Italy, of (re)evaluation of the quality of teacher preparation programmes for becoming a high-quality teacher (Floden, Richmond, Drake, & Petchauer, 2017) and a creative system of permanent professional training. From the point of view of the Italian Ministry of Education, which support the improvement of teacher's competences for more qualitative approaches with financial resources (€500 for each teacher per year), a sophisticated system of lifelong professional training should be designed, which will equip teachers with tools to make lessons more efficient (Peklaj, 2015), to allow them to use modern approaches to teaching, to

adequately differentiate goals and thus bring PE with modern sports contents to various target groups of pupils in more interesting ways.

We have suggested that national professional association of PE teachers prepare web pages with guidelines and examples of good productive learning activities to show how teachers could improve their practice (Floden et al., 2017).

If these recommendations are taken into consideration, they will further enable Italian PE teachers to improve their own range of competences, especially those that have been highlighted as needing improvement.

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Biographical note

Miloš Tul, PhD, is employed as physical education teacher at the State Scientific High school of France Prešeren, Trieste, Italy. He was also teaching at the Faculty of Applied Kinesiology of the University of Primorska, Slovenia as an assistant in the Ball Games courses. His research interests include competences of physical education teachers and physical fitness of young football players.

Bojan Leskošek, PhD, is an assistant professor at Department of Natural Sciences, Faculty of Sport, University of Ljubljana where he teaches Statistics and Research Methodology. His scientific research focuses on the application of statistics and methodology in sport sciences, physical fitness and motor skills of children and youth, information and expert systems in sport and performance evaluation in sports.

Marjeta Kovač, PhD, is a full professor at Department of Pedagogic and Didactic, Faculty of Sport, University of Ljubljana where she teaches Didactics of physical education, Practical pedagogical training, Management of school and out-of-school-sport programmes etc. Her scientific research focuses on the field of environmental factors that affect physical activity, physical fitness and motor skills of children and youth, working conditions, health problems and competences of PE teachers and different didactic phenomena. She served as a reviewer in several international scientific journals.

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Tatjana Devjak and Sanja Berčnik, *Education of preschool children* (In Slovene: Vzgoja predšolskega otroka), University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education: Ljubljana, 2018; 288 pp.: ISBN 978-961-253-219-2

Reviewed by Jurka Lepičnik Vodopivec[1]

The monograph *Education of preschool children* (authors Tatjana Devjak and Sanja Berčnik) presents a broader insight into the study of preschool pedagogy. The central subject of the monograph is the preschool period of the child's development, which extends from the child's birth to entering primary school; it also defines the notion of education as a comprehensive concept that entails various aspects, from caring for the child to the individual design of the child as a personality, and the integration of a child into human society as a collective underpinning of society and various specific individuals.

In the first chapter, *Pedagogy as a science and the definition of basic concepts*, the authors rightly analyse the critical concept of education and various related theories in this context. They note that education today means 'a holistic activity of people, a creative process among people, a conscious activity of shaping an individual as an individual and a social subject' (Devjak & Berčnik, 2018, p. 10). The authors deal with the pedagogy as a science through a variety of foreign authors, including Althusser, Durkheim, Apple, and Slovenian ones , such as Medveš and Kroflič, outlining the different views and theoretical approaches to education with a focus on the education of that preschool child, which enables them to gain a critical understanding of education, especially the education of the child in the preschool period, which is supported by the notion that the modern concepts of education 'tend to gradually abolish the management of the individual, eliminate manipulation, to prepare the individual to be able to set his own educational goals and develop his own personality (self-education,

1 Faculty of Education, University of Primorska; jurka.lepicnik@pef.upr.si.

not self-censorship)' (ibid., p. 16). The next chapter contributes to the broader understanding of education, with a historical overview of theories, concepts and views on the education of a preschool child, ranging from ancient Greek philosophers to various modern theorists such as Komenski, Pestalozzi, Locke, Rousseau, Oberlin, Owen, Froebel, Dewey, Steiner, and Montessori, discussing the history of the development of preschool institutions and the contemporary curriculum and preschool education in Slovenia.

The chapter *Understanding children, childhood and children's rights* brings the conceptual bases for later discussion and analyses modern theoretical concepts of understanding preschool childhood, which are pedagogically, psychologically and sociologically conceived. It is also significant that the authors introduce the understanding of the child and education as it is understood today, through the concepts of universal human and child rights (and duties). In doing so, they emphasise the empowerment of the child, when he is enabled to decide for himself and the concept of participation, which enables personal growth, strengthening of responsibility and searching for one's own individuality and identity. In addition, they point out the problematic aspects of child's rights, about which Kodelja (1995, p. 53) writes that 'they are nothing more than a multitude of regulations that allow adults to decide on their children and shape them in their own image.' The chapter concludes with the advocacy of children, which 'contributes to the awareness, that the basis of organised preschool education is built upon children's rights and not just their needs and/or the needs of their parents, families' (Devjak & Berčnik, 2018, p. 94).

The critical educational activities of the child in the preschool period take place through the child's play. The monograph takes this fact into account with a detailed discussion of the conceptual issues posed by play and the treatment of different types of children's play, the importance of play for children's development, the role of play as a collective or social event; this framework also includes the types and the roles of toys, in particular, the definition of a good toy. The establishment of a conceptual understanding of play and toys is, of course, essential for the proper education of preschool teachers. The authors also take into account a variety of theories and theoretical approaches, while defining the main distinction between play and work, defining work as an activity and the play as 'a tool, developing the child's skills, connection with parents and the wider world, at the same time revealing the laws of the world around him'(ibid., p. 97). For preschool pedagogy and education of preschool teachers, it is also important to understand the environments in which the child grows up or where the child's education is taking place: both the family and the kindergarten.

In the continuation, the monograph conceptualises the family through the review of changes in European history and through the treatment of modern forms of family, its functions and tasks, changes in family life and the influence of the family on the child's personality and moral development. Since institutional education in kindergarten in relation to the family also plays a vital role in the child's preschool age, the text also discusses various models of cooperation between family and kindergarten (client, managerial, and partnership models), which are critically illuminated. The text also separates formal and informal forms of cooperation with parents, identifying the roles played by professionals or parents, which indirectly determine the model of cooperation. In the following, the monograph focuses on the kindergarten in the various functions and contexts of the kindergarten's cooperation with other institutions of society (museums, theatres, the library, health centres, etc.).

From the aspect of the conceptualisation of preschool teachers in contemporary times, it is crucial that the monograph also presents views on the education of preschool teachers through history and their professional development today. The professional development of preschool teachers is defined as the process of lifelong learning, which 'is the common formula in which all types of learning and education can be combined' (ibid., p. 185).

In the concluding chapters, the monograph returns to a more detailed analysis of the various current educational concepts and thematises them through the questions posed by the reform-pedagogical movement and various alternative educational concepts. It, therefore, deals entirely with conceptual questions, such as the priority of development before learning, the priority of natural education before the planned educational influence, the priority of the orientation of the education that originates from the child before the education that is based on cultural norms and values and, on this basis, also deals in detail with different directions of reform pedagogy (progressive pedagogy, pedagogy of pragmatism, and pedagogy of the working school).

The monograph *Education of preschool children* deals with a unified and clearly defined subject. Its argumentation is scientifically based, extensive, and theoretically relevant, and the text covers its subject in all key aspects and also consistently analyses it. The monograph includes key sources and the latest bibliography from the field, characterised by rich professional terminology. It is a transparent scientific contribution to preschool pedagogy, and it is aimed at professional educators, students of pedagogical guidelines, planners and educators in kindergartens, planners and providers of further education programs, other higher education teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, special educators and the entire professional public who are interested in this kind of problem. It

provides a deeper insight into the understanding of the education of pre-school children and will, as such, be useful as a reference work and as a book for the professional public. The present monograph, in light of the above, represents an essential contribution to the development of pedagogy and preschool pedagogy in Slovenia.

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