

# The Right to Education for Children with Disabilities from the Earliest Age

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## Abstract

*The right to education constitutes a fundamental human right and is the focus of numerous international agreements, conventions, as well as scientific and expert research. Grounded in a human rights perspective, this study aims to understand the involvement of children with disabilities in early education programs. The participants—parents of children with disabilities (N=10)—reported challenges faced while enrolling their children with disabilities in early education institutions, including insufficient support or even denied enrolment. Study participants also emphasized challenges extending beyond enrolment: children's stays in daycare had been limited, children were insufficiently included in extracurricular activities, and parents encountered organizational challenges in securing financing for special needs assistants. While satisfied with the personal competencies of teachers, participants were dissatisfied with the teachers' professional skills and were equally dissatisfied with the performance of the professional team. Some participants recounted discrimination against their children. In conclusion, these narratives reveal "vulnerabilities" of the early education system. Given the importance of educational inclusion for children with disabilities, this topic requires continued attention.*

**Key words:** children with disabilities; Croatia; early education; inclusion.

## Introduction

As established within Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to an education—a right that is also explicitly bestowed upon children with disabilities (Official Gazette, International Agreements, 12/1993, Article 23). While not explicit, these Articles, as well as many other legal and social doctrines,

imply a need to include children with disabilities within educational programming. Within the Croatian early education system, this policy of inclusion has only recently been adopted (State Pedagogical Standard for Preschool Education, Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010). Given the emerging nature of these rights, this study seeks to understand parents' perspectives on the inclusion of children with disabilities within the Croatian early education system.

### ***A Human Rights Model***

These rights for children have emerged in tandem with a recent shift away from a medical model, which focuses on addressing individual deficiencies, toward the social work model, which shifts the “blame” for the disability from the person with disabilities to the “unjust, cruel society” (Mihanović, 2011). The emphasis on the importance of social context has been well received by those traditionally regarded as “disabled” (Mihanović, 2011). This approach has been similarly acknowledged within the human rights model, which centers primarily on the dignity of a human being and only secondarily (if truly necessary) on the medical condition of the person. The human rights model guides the conceptualization of this study. The model is based on four principles: *dignity*, *autonomy*, *equality* and *solidarity* (Quinn & Degener, 2002; Žiljak, 2005). The human rights model does not solely aim at achieving legal equality, but also at engaging in activities directed toward development of the potential of children with disabilities and their empowerment.

### ***Importance of Inclusion of Children with Disabilities***

Educational inclusion, or the participation of children with disabilities in social activities, represents a strategy that aims at the advancement of an inclusive society (Cerić, 2008); that allows all children, regardless of sex, age, ability, ethnic background or disability, to participate in and to contribute to the society. Such vision of the society does not imply that all members of the society are equal; rather it suggests that everyone, regardless of differences, has equal right to participate and belong to the society, and to receive education that is appropriate to his or her abilities. This approach contributes to achieving “equality”, as well as to mitigating and eradicating all forms of segregation, separation, isolation and discrimination (Cerić, 2008). Moreover, inclusive education aspires to raise awareness on the importance of inclusion among all students and educational professionals with the aim of accepting differences as incentives, and not hindrances to learning (Vican & Karamatić-Brčić, 2013).

While there are many benefits to inclusive education, the expansion of inclusive education for both children and adults with disabilities is hindered by the negative attitudes of the public, the lack of political will, the lack of institutional inertia, as well as the lack of financial means that would support wider implementation of the pending reforms. In short, full public and operational support is missing to advance policies on inclusive education in practice (Milić Babić & Dowling, 2015).

Yet, if these supports can be garnered, the potential benefits are clear: Inclusive education may serve to disrupt the circle of poverty and exclusion, to allow children with disabilities to stay in their family and community circle, to raise the quality of education to a higher level, and to help combat discrimination. These potential benefits are based on the premise that social interactions with peers represent the foundation for a child's developmental socialization. Explicitly, it is the interaction that spurs the child's progress to its highest potential, and particularly his or her social and mental development. It is in the hope of realizing these many benefits that we seek to better understand trends of inclusive education within early education.

### ***Participation of Children with Disabilities in Early Education Programs in Croatia***

Participation in the early education system is not mandatory for children in the Republic of Croatia; yet, children may enroll at the age of six months and continue attending until the elementary school enrolment (this period of optional early education is often referred to as *kindergarten*). One year of preschool education attendance is mandatory for all children before their enrolment in elementary school, as prescribed by the Preschool Education Act (Official Gazette, No. 10/1997, 107/2007, 94/2013, Article 23a) in force since 2014. Only recently has the early education system abandoned a policy of segregation toward children with disabilities; similar to the entire system of education, it came to the point where change was inevitable (Skočić Mihić, 2011). A number of international agreements on antidiscrimination were ratified and the State Pedagogical Standard for Preschool Education was adopted (Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010). The aim of many of these agreements was to develop a successful system of education that integrated an appreciation for the abilities of all children, including children with disabilities. In such manner, one of the measures of the National Plan of Action for the Rights and Interests of Children from 2006 was achieved.

A child with disabilities represents a child who, due to physical, sensory, communication or intellectual impairments, requires additional support in learning and development in order to attain the highest possible developmental outcome and level of social integration (Social Welfare Act, Official Gazette, 152/2014, Article 4). Children with disabilities are enrolled in early education classes based on the opinions of: (a) the expert committee (established in accordance with the social welfare regulations); (b) the professional staff (education science professionals, psychologists, professionals in education and rehabilitation); (c) the senior nurse and the director of the early education institution; and (d) in accordance with suitable medical and other professional assessments, opinions or decisions issued by official bodies, institutions or expert witnesses (State Pedagogical Standard for Preschool Education, Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010). In cases where the number of children is insufficient to form a special needs class, children with disabilities enroll in mainstream education

classes if a number of stipulations are satisfied. For example, children who experience a mild disability must be able to master the basic elements of the curriculum just like their classmates, while children who experience moderate disability may be included only if the necessary accommodations are available (State Pedagogical Standard for Preschool Education, Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010).

The State Pedagogical Standard for Preschool Education (Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010) defines the accommodations required of early education institutions in effort to support the needs of children with disabilities. The Standard defines (a) the number of children who may be enrolled in a class along with a child with disabilities; (b) the number of teachers and professionals in education and rehabilitation assigned to the child; as well as (c) the opportunities in which care assistants may be employed. The Standard does not mention other forms for the promotion of educational inclusion. Yet, many early education institutions voluntarily implement inclusion strategies, such as seeking external professional support and cooperation with rehabilitation therapists, as well as the engagement of special needs assistants, who are becoming increasingly recognized as an indispensable form of support to children with disabilities.

### ***Right to Education***

The right to education is a fundamental human right and education is viewed as the driving force that empowers children and adults to shape their own future, escape from poverty, and fully participate in their community (Spajić-Vrkaš, Kukoč, & Bašić, 2001). The international community proscribes all forms of discrimination in education and advocates for the commitment to gradually guarantee educational opportunity for all.

The aim of early education is to offer the child an opportunity for holistic development, regardless of the child's sex, age, social or cultural background, national or religious affiliation, and physical or mental ability. Early education has a particular impact on the life of a child as it encourages socialization and peer interaction, emotional and cognitive development, as well as the appropriation of a sense of responsibility and recognition of the needs of others. In early education activities, children acquire new understandings of their environment through play and in mutual contact, joint education, and learning among children with or without disability. This, in turn, allows children to adopt core human values: acceptance and recognition of diversity, empathy, responsibility, solidarity, tolerance and cooperation (Valjan-Vukić, 2011).

### ***Aim and Research Questions***

The aim of this paper is to present the experiences of parents concerning the involvement of children with disabilities in early education programs. The research questions were as follows: 1) How do parents describe the experience of enrolling a child with disabilities in kindergarten?, and 2) How do parents describe challenges within the early education system?

## **Methodology**

### **Recruitment**

The research team partnered with nine non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provided services and supports to children with disabilities and their families so as to identify and recruit potential research participants—parents of children with disabilities. The NGOs sent parents the call for participation (provided by researchers) to their personal e-mail accounts. The central information site for persons with disability, In-Portal.hr, also published the call for participation. After recruiting participants, semi-structured interviews were scheduled and conducted in participants' homes.

### **Participants**

Research participants represented the parents of children with disabilities who were included in mainstream kindergarten classes in the cities of Zagreb and Varaždin. The participants agreed to take part in the research of their own free will.

All 10 participants were mothers of children with disabilities, ranging from 28 to 47 years of age, with an average age of 37 ( $M=37.8$ ). Eight participants were married, one participant lived in cohabitation, and one was a single parent. With regards to educational attainment, seven participants had completed a high school degree, while three participants had obtained higher education degrees. The average age of children with disabilities was 6 years ( $M=6.2$ ), ranging from 5.5 to 7 years. The research sample represented parents of children with the following disabilities: Down syndrome ( $n=3$ ), psychomotor retardation ( $n=2$ ), microdeletion ( $n=1$ ), impaired vision (amblyopia) ( $n=1$ ), autism spectrum disorder ( $n=1$ ), spastic cerebral palsy ( $n=1$ ) and speech and language impairment ( $n=1$ ). Five of the participants' children were female and five were male.

### **Instrument**

Each interview was guided by the same two sets of questions developed specifically for the purpose of this research. The first set of questions, which referred to the experience of enrolling the child in kindergarten, examined the parents' experiences of the initial school interview regarding the enrolment of their children, and the steps taken in effort to secure the enrolment. The second set of questions addressed the challenges encountered in kindergartens, and examined the degree of inclusion of the child with disabilities, relationships with other children, relationships with teachers, and the availability of school supports.

### **Ethical Aspects of the Research**

The participants were informed of the proposed research, including its topic, aim, and purpose. The participants were also informed of the option to decline from answering particular questions and to withdraw from the interview at any

point. Additionally, participants were informed that the data collected would be analyzed aggregately, making it impossible to link personal information to particular participants (i.e., ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of the data). Oral consent to participation and to recording of the interview was obtained from each participant prior to the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative content analysis was employed to process data obtained within semi-structured interviews. This research method involved subjective text interpretation through a process of systematic classification and coding. The goal of the analysis was to aggregate, understand, and interpret the empirical material through data editing, defining content units, the process of coding and selecting, as well as through defining relevant terms and categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

## **Results and Discussion**

The results are presented in thematic sections that correlate with the defined research questions regarding parents' experiences concerning children with disabilities in early education programs. The following two sections address these research questions, respectively: (1) How do parents describe the experience of enrolling a child with disabilities in kindergarten? and (2) How do they describe the challenges within the early education system?

### **Question 1: Parents' Experiences of Enrolling a Child with Disabilities in Kindergarten**

Upon analysis of the answers received from the participants to the first research question How do parents describe the experience of enrolling a child with disabilities in kindergarten?, the following themes emerged.

**Barriers to enrolment.** According to the accounts of the participants, denied enrolment of children with disabilities in kindergartens is reflected in the barriers presented at enrolment (*"Very hard, we ran into a brick wall..."* (S\_01); *"...well, in the end, my child didn't get enrolled in the kindergarten of our choice as they put up huge resistance."* (S\_02)), in the refusal of the kindergarten to enroll a child with disabilities (*"We also tried a couple of private kindergartens, but they wouldn't take us there either."* (S\_01); *"...and the fourth time, when I wanted to enroll him, they said he couldn't be enrolled."* (S\_05); *"No, at first I couldn't. They wouldn't take her at first."* (S\_10)), as well as in denying the right to privileged enrolment of children with disabilities in kindergarten (*"Not to mention that the Regulation says that the child with disabilities should have privilege at enrolment, and then they tell me... well, we don't have further capacities for enrolment as we took in all the children, we filled up all the places"* (S\_01); *"...so the privileged enrolment was first to go as there was a waiting list already."* (S\_06)). Article 20 of the Preschool Education Act (hereafter referred to as "the Act") (Official Gazette, No. 10/1997, 107/2007, 94/2013)

states that the right to privileged enrolment in kindergartens belongs to children from families with multiple children, children with disabilities, children whose parents were victims of or disabled through the Croatian Homeland War, children of employed parents, and children of single parents. Although the Act states that children with disabilities have the right to privileged enrolment in kindergarten, the results of this research indicate that children of the participants were denied their right to privileged enrolment, they experienced insensitivity, and in some cases were refused enrolment in kindergartens all together.

Participants also mentioned encountering unfounded arguments for schools' inability to enroll children, such as the shortage of professional staff necessary to enroll a child with disabilities in kindergarten ("*...that they don't have professional enough, that professional team for him*" (S\_02); "*Just don't tell me right away that you don't have the staff, that you don't have the people...*" (S\_10)). Similarly, parents were told by school professionals there was a shortage of space for their child with disabilities in kindergarten ("*...there's no room...*" (S\_01); "*...there are just too many children...*" (S\_02); "*...there's no room. We're packed. You're too late.*" (S\_06)).

According to Article 22, Paragraphs 3 and 4 of the State Pedagogical Standard for Preschool Education (Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010), based on the opinion of the professional staff at the kindergarten, only one child with mild disabilities may be included in the mainstream kindergarten class, provided that the total number of children is reduced by two. Alternatively, one child with severe or multiple disabilities may be included in the mainstream education class, if the number of children with disabilities is not sufficient to form a separate special needs class; in such a case, the total number of children in the mainstream education class should be reduced by four. Furthermore, the State Pedagogical Standard for Preschool Education (Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010) sets the number of professional staff members in relation to the number of kindergarten classes. The number of professional staff may be increased in accordance with the special needs of children, the dislocation of facilities, and the variety of programs implemented at the institution. The kindergarten may decide on the profile of the professional staff that is appropriate to meet the needs of the children. These explicit provisions within the State Pedagogical Standard for Preschool Education (Official Gazette, No. 63/2008, 90/2010) call into question the legitimacy of the reasons set forth by schools for excluding children with disabilities.

**Insufficient support with enrolment.** Parents also expressed a lack of support in enrolling children with disabilities in kindergartens—demonstrated, first, by one participant reaching out to the relevant Ministry for assistance in enrolling the child with disabilities in kindergarten ("*And, in the meanwhile, last year in September I went to the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth as they said I need to get an assistant.*" (S\_05)), and by two other participants contacting the responsible Municipal Department for assistance in enrolling the child with disabilities in kindergarten ("*of course, we gave it a try with the City.*" (S\_01); "*I mean we called, and so they said, send us an e-mail, we'll*

see. *You can go to the kindergarten at, I don't know, the other side of the town.*" (S\_02)).

Not only did participants indicate a lack of support from the schools during their attempts to enroll their child in kindergarten, they also spoke to the lack of support from other parents during this experience ("*...I couldn't find absolutely anyone, you know, to share with me their experience.*" (S\_01); "*The main reason I agreed to this interview is that... that you don't have anyone to tell this story.*" (S\_02)). Interaction with other parents has the potential to impart a sense that they are not alone and isolated with a certain problem, as well as the opportunity to learn new strategies for coping with a certain parenting challenge or life situation (Pećnik, 2013). One of the most valuable benefits of these friendship relationships among parents is reflected in the social networking that ensures support in difficult moments. Pećnik (2013) affirms that in the company of those "walking in the same shoes", people are more likely to overcome life challenges, as well as keep or regain a positive attitude in life.

**Emotional challenges of enrolment.** Participants described the experience of enrolment as emotionally overwhelming—reflected in the uncertainty and anxiety over whether the kindergarten would enroll their child ("*It was also a real hassle for us, would they accept her, or not...*" (S\_03); "*...we were really kept on ice for a while, and it was like, will they make it.*" (S\_03)). Some participants indicated feeling low-hearted (i.e., stressed) ("*...I can only say it was a really stressful period for me.*" (S\_01); "*Well, I felt really down all these years because I couldn't believe that a child with an impaired vision cannot be admitted anywhere, not to a single kindergarten in this town...*" (S\_02); "*Quite frankly I left her feeling like a sad puppy; I cried my eyes out at home.*" (S\_06)), while others spoke of losing hope ("*It was more like: Please, help!*" (S\_02); "*I felt like throwing in the towel and just giving it all up.*" (S\_10)). Another participant highlighted the need for patience during enrolment of the child in kindergarten ("*And so you wait like an idiot. And the other one just came in and got enrolled, and you wait for a year, and your child still can't get in. So, that means the other child is worth more than mine?*" (S\_07)).

Protecting the wellbeing and adequate development of the child entails protecting the wellbeing of parents (Pećnik, 2013). A survey on the support services for parents of the youngest children in the community, conducted by UNICEF, revealed that parents of 6-year-old children were more anxious about the behavior or development of their children than parents of children in younger age groups; these parents of 6-year-old children also had higher levels of parental stress, combined with the lowest sense of parental competency (Pećnik, 2013). As many as 1 in 3 of these parents expressed that they often experienced challenges in coping with the tasks of their parental role. The elevated level of parental stress indicates the imbalance between the demands of parenting and the capacity of the parent to adequately meet these demands, given his or her personal psychosocial capacity, as well as the resources available in the close surroundings (Pećnik, 2013). These findings demonstrate the need to extend existing services for parents (i.e., beyond the birth of the child, the first couple of years, and in particular in the child's third year); additional attention should be devoted to the development of services for parents of children in their preschool year.



## **Question 2: Parents' Perceptions of Challenges within the Early Education System**

With regard to the second research question "How do parents describe challenges within the early education system?", the following themes were identified.

**Limitations on the duration of stay in kindergarten.** The research participants discussed limitations placed on the duration of stay in kindergarten for children with disabilities. This challenge was highlighted through parents' accounts concerning the limited number of days per week their children were allowed to attend the kindergarten ("*...they would only enroll her to attend for up to three times per week...*" (S\_01)), the limited number of hours children spent in kindergarten ("*This year the lunch was at 12.30 pm, so she could stay in kindergarten until 1 pm. They would never allow the child to stay longer than this...*" (S\_03); "*...but he can stay for 5 hours, so that means from 8 am to 1 pm.*" (S\_04); "*...but only to stay for two hours, and only from 11.30 am to 2 pm, you know.*" (S\_10)), and also the limited or denied stay of their children in kindergarten during the nap time ("*...well, the Agency said she has to stay in kindergarten during the nap time as well...*" (S\_01); "*... and then they told us, oh no, she can't stay for the nap time, she needs an assistant, and that assistant is not there when she sleeps, he leaves to attend to someone else in the other class*" (S\_03)).

The Regulation affecting access to child care among parents of children with severe disabilities (Official Gazette, No. 18/2009) does not impose any explicit limits on the children's duration of stay in daycare; rather it stipulates that parents of children who stay in daycare for more than 8 hours are no longer entitled to a leave of absence or part-time work as might be warranted by the need to provide care to their child. Thus, according to the Regulation, kindergartens should not limit the duration of stay of children with disabilities; instead, they should pursue an agreement between the parents and the professional staff in the kindergarten, in accordance with the needs and the abilities of children. This type of agreement, however, is virtually impossible in the absence of a strong and cooperative relationship between the kindergarten and the parents. Although other countries in Southern Europe equally do not guarantee the legal right to early education upon termination of the parents' leave of absence, promotion of this right would facilitate earlier enrolment of children in education, both for children with and without disabilities. Consequently, children would benefit from improved cognitive development and skills, among other advantages, and parents would benefit from the opportunity to plan child care more effectively (European Commission, 2014).

**Under-inclusion of children with disabilities in activities.** Another challenge for participants was the insufficient inclusion and involvement of children with disabilities in kindergarten activities. Participants documented instances of children with disabilities being excluded from kindergarten activities ("*They have some projects in which [child] is not included...*" (S\_03); "*I mean, when we were supposed to go to the theater, they wouldn't let us go...*" (S\_05)). Other participants noted the lack of inclusive

activities in kindergartens (*"If one child is in the wheelchair, why shouldn't we all try sitting in the wheelchair and see how we would manage different obstacles, or something like that. There are no activities like that, and their weirdness is something that's just there, so at the beginning the kids go around with a bunch of question marks over their heads and then later they just let it go by."* (S\_01); *"He can't just sit still and listen and work with other children, he's not exactly... he disturbs. So when they need to go outside to take a break from all that program, to play for a bit, this is when he comes."* (S\_09)). A recent study examining the presence of inclusive activities in the pedagogical practice of teachers specifically analyzed early education programs in order to identify quality indicators in early education (Borovac, 2013). This study scrutinized 962 activities—61 (6.34%) of which involved inclusive activities (i.e., the activities that promoted the basic values of inclusion). Given the results, Borovac (2013) concluded that the presence of inclusive activities in everyday pedagogical practice of teachers can be interpreted as an indicator of high quality in early education. In other words, the perception of inclusive activities is remodeled from the perceived exclusive right of a certain child ("earned" through the presence of disability) to the everyday early education practice that supports adequate child development (Borovac, 2013, p. 45).

**Challenges of securing an assistant.** Participants described organizational difficulties in securing assistants in kindergartens. This theme was understood from the participants' accounts on the shortage of assistants (*"...they don't have an assistant."* (S\_01); *"The shortage of assistants, or the impossibility to get one."* (S\_08); *"Those kids really miss an assistant."* (S\_09)), the frequent turnover of assistants (*"...she constantly changed assistants..."* (S\_01); *"... she gets an assistant, for two or three months, then comes another one, for another two or three months as well, then the third one... this is not good."* (S\_06); *"... but it was someone else every year."* (S\_08)), and the inconsistent and unclear functions of assistants (*"...because they needed that assistant to do their administrative work on the side."* (S\_01); *"...the assistant is at the same time the teacher, the support, and I don't know, the cleaning lady, and the person who changes diapers and all."* (S\_01)).

In the last couple of years, a need has been recognized for additional assistance and support to the early and preschool education process (Blanuša Trošelj, 2012). Within the EU, there are different approaches to managing the need for assistants in the early education system. However, in the majority of cases, assistants take up an active role alongside the teacher in the immediate educational practice (Blanuša Trošelj, 2012). Depending on the country, assistants differ with regard to the (lack of) qualifications and the level of education. The matter of assistants in kindergartens is still not regulated by law and, in the perspective of the new Regulation, there is discussion as to whether the legislative framework would regulate the subject of assistants in early education institutions.

**Satisfaction with children's kindergarten experience.** Despite the many challenges noted, participants expressed their satisfaction with their children's kindergarten experience in the sense of the inclusion and acceptance of their children by other

children in the kindergarten (socialization) (“...Well, she basically had no problem fitting in.” (S\_03); “He is very nice. They accepted him and so...” (S\_05); “She really adjusted very well.” (S\_08); “...the kids accepted him too.” (S\_09)). Participants cited specific examples where their child was included in the play (“So they play these games, we wouldn’t even come up with at home.” (S\_02); “But through play he will accept that they do something with building blocks together, sand or something, I don’t know, to put the sand in a bucket together...” (S\_04); “...he started to join others in play and so.” (S\_05)). Parents also emphasized the importance of the friendships their child had developed (“I feel that the greatest benefit of kindergarten is that she really has friends now.” (S\_01); “So this is really, really important, we were invited to, I don’t know, like 7 – 8 birthday parties by now, which also proves that they like him.” (S\_04); “He has friends.” (S\_05)).

The integration of children with disabilities in the general education system has certainly increased the number of social interactions between children with and without disabilities. Although the majority of research to date reveals low acceptance rates of children with disabilities by their peer groups, the number of studies indicating the opposite trend is in fact on the rise. Fortlouis-Wood (2008) emphasizes the importance of friendship in promoting social development and emotional functioning at all stages of life. Kindergarten presents a unique setting for experiencing social interactions and learning verbal and nonverbal communication. It offers an opportunity to learn how to build relationships with others, to live in a group and in society; equally, it teaches children how to adjust to groups and to rules. In order to expand social benefits for both groups of children, it is advised to develop and implement effective interventions directed at improving the quality of social interactions of children with and without disabilities (Carter & Hughes, 2005).

**Dissatisfaction with the teachers’ professional competencies.** The parents of children with disabilities characterize the challenges they encountered as dissatisfaction with the professional competencies of teachers (“The past ones were a disaster. A disaster...” (S\_01); “...there are just some things about [child] that they don’t understand.” (S\_02); “It’s just that the teachers can’t dedicate equal attention to him and the other children. They pay more attention to the other children...” (S\_09). Comments emphasized the unprofessional pedagogical behavior of the teachers (“Then we later found out that they did some things there that were not very pedagogical.” (S\_01); “...they would leave the children to sleep alone, and they would go up on the roof to smoke. They would leave them unattended. Or they would encourage one child to hit another child because one pushed the other.” (S\_01)), or, in some cases, that the teachers were insufficiently trained to work with children with disabilities (“it was always a bit of a problem on the professional side because they were not trained to deal with the disabilities.” (S\_02); “...but they didn’t have enough expertise.” (S\_04)).

A recent study examining teacher training among a sample of 65 teachers of the Kindergarten Center Rijeka supported the necessity of meeting a number of different prerequisites for inclusive education in order to offer the best possible early

education to children with disabilities (Rudelić, Pinoza Kukurin, & Skočić Mihić, 2013). Teachers recognized the importance and the need for acquiring a wide range of professional competencies at an advanced level. Additionally, teachers acknowledged that professional training was largely, or completely insufficient to prepare them for effective work with children with disabilities in an inclusive environment (Rudelić et al., 2013). Honeyball and associates (2011) emphasize the need for continuous training of the professional staff, and teachers in particular, as they are expected to actively monitor the thoughts and the feelings of children, to observe children's activities, to recognize children's potential, and to identify methods to support children's development.

**Satisfaction with the teachers' personal competencies.** Despite many criticisms, parents stressed their satisfaction with personal competencies of the teachers, as reflected in their accounts of efforts made by the teachers ("*...so she tries to include all that in her practice, which is great.*" (S\_01); "*...she said herself she doesn't know many things, but that she's willing to learn.*" (S\_06); "*...they all try really hard.*" (S\_08)), of their willingness to communicate ("*...the communication is good and so everything works out well.*" (S\_06); "*talk to the teachers, if there is an issue with their approach... and then all problems can work out.*" (S\_09); "*I always got the information I asked for.*" (S\_10)), and of their readiness to cooperate ("*...all the activities she does with the speech therapist and the special education teacher, she communicates to the teacher and the teacher tries to do the same with her. Just as we agreed in the beginning... and then it works. So the teacher is ready to cooperate...*" (S\_06); "*...if I practice, draw these things with him as the speech therapist instructed, they also tend to do the same with him in the kindergarten.*" (S\_09)).

It is well established that children behave in conformity with their environment; to this point, children also possess the ability to flawlessly interpret nonverbal messages of which adults are often unaware (Slunjski, Šagud, & Brajša-Žganec, 2006). Therefore, the positive feedback from parents regarding the competencies of teachers suggests benefits for the children in this study. Beyond the professional work with children with disabilities, it is important to consider the importance of teachers' personal contacts that occur on various social levels; among family members, friends or random one-time acquaintances. The influence of these personal experiences on forming and changing teachers' attitudes around inclusion is insufficiently researched. Yet, tenets of contact theory (Allport, 1954) suggest that through contact, individuals develop comfort and competency in dealing with those who are different from themselves. Findings from the current study may generate questions as to how teachers develop competencies, whether through formal training or through informal experiences.

**Dissatisfaction with the performance of professional staff.** Parents also expressed their dissatisfaction with the performance of the professional team as suggested by their accounts concerning the lack of meaningful engagement of the professional staff with the children with disabilities ("*He wouldn't work with the child for an hour, pull him out of the class and work with him like the speech therapists to whom you would normally take the child. I mean, it's ridiculous... there's no real work done with the children.*"

(S\_02); *"I can't say that my [child] got any real support from their side."* (S\_08). Parents also expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of the professional staff through discussion of the perceived uselessness of the professional staff (*"And so in a bunch of cases they have acted more like administrative staff than a professional team. So that we're not really happy with them."* (S\_01); *"... you can't really get any help from the speech therapist at the kindergarten. The kindergarten speech therapist is only there to identify the problem and to send the kid to other specialists"* (S\_02)), as well as the incompetency of the professional team (*"Well then, I don't really have anything nice to say about our professional staff, as they are completely unprofessional... and I don't say this because I have some personal wild ideas, but because they truly are unprofessional."* (S\_01)).

Professional work with children with disabilities presents a particular challenge for teachers, and all members of the professional staff, in early education institutions. In line with the findings of this study on parents' perceptions regarding the support of professional staff (or lack thereof), research conducted by Kolarić Piplica (2014) similarly revealed that teachers perceived the support of the professional staff as insufficient or nonexistent. Under such circumstances, the implementation of a successful and inclusive program is virtually impossible. Professional engagement with parents represents an important and valuable resource of social support. The social environment, including the professionals who work with children with disabilities, should be designed to reduce the stress to which the family is exposed. Parents' successful adjustment to their child's disability depends upon several important factors, including an understanding of the environment as well as support from the environment, high-quality professional care, and activation of effective strategies for stress management (Balan, 2015).

**Discrimination of children with disabilities in kindergarten.** Research participants also encountered a lack of understanding (perceived as discrimination) of the children with disabilities. Participants communicated this lack of understanding (i.e., discrimination) through accounts involving the parents of other children (*"His mom came and asked the teachers to separate the children. She wouldn't have her son spend his time with [child], because this couldn't be good for him."* (S\_01); *"...one dad came, unfortunately quite drunk... and then he said to me and her, what does this kid do here, get out of here with that child. This child has no place being here, this child would only disturb our children."* (S\_10)). In addition to a lack of understanding from parents of other children, participants described a lack of understanding by other children in the class (*"Before that absolutely everyone looked at her like she was a weirdo."* (S\_01); *"There are some children who sometimes don't understand some of his behavior..."* (S\_02)). The accounts of participants clearly demonstrate that it is insufficient to simply place children with disabilities in mainstream education classes as a means of tackling the problem of segregation and discrimination.

In the absence of appropriate supports and a sense of belonging to the peer group, physical integration of children with disabilities only further exacerbates

discrimination. A study by Anđelković and associates (2012) examined attitudes among parents of children without disabilities toward the inclusion of children with impaired vision. Findings revealed generally positive attitudes among parents of children without disabilities. However, parents expressed some concerns regarding the wellbeing of their children in inclusive classes, as well as hesitation in responding to the questions which related to the competencies of professionals who worked with children in inclusive early education classes (Anđelković et al., 2012). Engaging peers with and without disabilities in play and joint activities, as well as encouraging continuous interaction, may produce a positive effect on their interaction in the long term (Terpstra & Tamura, 2008). Discrimination is generated by a lack of information, individuals' prejudices, and fears. Whether these root problems exist among the parents of children without disabilities or professional staff at kindergartens, it is imperative to raise societal awareness regarding different disabilities so as to mitigate prejudice and avoid discrimination.

### ***Research Limitations and Recommendations***

The research was conducted with an appropriate sample of 10 parents, which also constituted a research limitation, as the presented findings could not be generalized to represent the entire population of parents of children with disabilities. This limitation is typical for qualitative research (Polit & Beck, 2010). As the research involved only mothers, future research projects should be designed to also include fathers.

We recommend that future research efforts combine qualitative and quantitative research methods. Interviews and focus groups could be complemented or informed by quantitative surveys that would provide additional, varied data on the experiences of inclusion of children with disabilities in rural and urban parts of the country.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The main responsibility of education is to provide guidance for children to develop positive life values. These values could, and should, include promoting equality among people, respecting their parents, friends and teachers, and advancing their intellectual abilities throughout a lifetime. In contemporary society, children face many forms of social exclusion, including discrimination based on religious, ethnic and national differences, and, of relevance to this research, discrimination based on disability. For this reason, it is crucial to educate children at the earliest age to respect differences and to nurture feelings of security, understanding, friendship, and solidarity. The analysis of responses provided by the participants of this study revealed both positive and negative perceptions regarding their experiences of enrolling children with disabilities in kindergarten. Yet, given the critical value of early education, challenges faced by parents during enrolment are particularly concerning. Besides denied enrolment of children, the participants also recounted unfounded arguments made by the management of early education institutions against their children's enrolment.

After they had “won the great struggle” to enroll their child in an education institution, participants encountered many challenges during their children’s kindergarten experience. The duration of stay in kindergarten is limited for children with disabilities. Additionally, parents affirmed that their children were not sufficiently included in mainstream education activities and stressed the organizational and financial difficulties in securing the employment of assistants in kindergartens. While participants were satisfied with the personal competencies of kindergarten teachers, they were dissatisfied with the teachers’ professional competencies. Participants expressed equal dissatisfaction with the performance of the professional staff. Lastly, participants noted a lack of understanding (i.e., discrimination) of children with disabilities within the early education system, at large. It may be concluded that the early education system is highly “vulnerable” in terms of educational inclusion. This vulnerability of the system should receive more attention so that it may meet the needs of children with disabilities and protect their right to education from the earliest age.

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# Pravo na odgoj i obrazovanje djece s teškoćama od najranije dobi

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## Sažetak

*Pravo na obrazovanje temeljno je ljudsko pravo i u središtu je brojnih međunarodnih ugovora, konvencija, znanstvenih i stručnih istraživanja. Ovaj rad temelji se na modelu ljudskih prava i cilj mu je istražiti uključenost djece s teškoćama u programe ranog odgoja i obrazovanja. Sudionici istraživanja – roditelji djece s teškoćama u razvoju (N = 10) opisuju izazove s kojima se suočavaju prilikom upisa djeteta s teškoćama u predškolske ustanove, izražavaju nedostatak podrške kod upisa ili čak nemogućnost upisa svog djeteta u predškolsku ustanovu. Također, sudionici nailaze na izazove unutar samog vrtića. Djetetu se ograničava boravak u skupini, smatraju da postoji nedovoljna uključenost djeteta s teškoćama u aktivnosti, a naglašavaju organizacijske poteškoće vezane uz osiguranje rada asistenta. Sudionici su zadovoljni osobnim kompetencijama odgojiteljica, ali su nezadovoljni njihovim profesionalnim kompetencijama, baš kao što svoje nezadovoljstvo iskazuju i u vezi s radom stručnog tima. Neki su sudionici spomenuli diskriminaciju djece. Zaključno, ti iskazi otkrivaju „ranjivosti” ranog obrazovnog sustava. S obzirom na važnost uključivanja u obrazovanje za djecu s teškoćama u razvoju, ova tema zahtijeva stalnu pozornost.*

**Ključne riječi:** *djeca s teškoćama u razvoju; Hrvatska; inkluzija; rani odgoj i obrazovanje.*

## Uvod

U članku 23. Konvencije o pravima djeteta ističe se kako djeca imaju pravo na obrazovanje – pravo koje se također izričito odnosi na djecu s teškoćama u razvoju (NN – Međunarodni ugovori, 12/1993, članak 23). Iako nisu eksplicitni, ti članci, kao i mnoge druge pravne i društvene doktrine, ukazuju na potrebu uključivanja djece s teškoćama u razvoju u obrazovne programe. Unutar hrvatskog sustava ranog odgoja i obrazovanja inkluzivna politika tek je nedavno usvojena (Državni pedagoški standard predškolskog odgoja i naobrazbe, NN 63/2008, 90/2010). S obzirom na prirodu tih prava u ovom se istraživanju nastoji razumjeti perspektiva roditelja o uključivanju djece s teškoćama u razvoju u hrvatski sustav ranog odgoja i obrazovanja.

## **Model ljudskih prava**

Ova prava za djecu pojavila su se zajedno s nedavnim pomakom iz medicinskog modela, koji se usredotočuje na rješavanje pojedinih nedostataka, prema socijalnom modelu, koji prebacuje „krivnju” invaliditeta od osobe s oštećenjem na „nepravedno, okrutno društvo” (Mihanović, 2011). Mihanović (2011) govori o tome kako je danas socijalni model stekao značajnu popularnost, osobito među onima koji su tradicionalno označeni kao „nesposobni”. Upravo iz socijalnog modela dolazimo do modela ljudskih prava na kojem se temelji ovaj rad. Model je usmjeren na dostojanstvo ljudskog bića i tek nakon toga, ako je to uistinu potrebno, na medicinske značajke te osobe. Model spominje četiri vrijednosti, a to su *dostojanstvo, autonomija, jednakost i solidarnost* (Quinn i Degener, 2002; Žiljak, 2005). Kod modela ljudskih prava više nije riječ samo o doseganju pravne jednakosti, već i o djelovanju usmjerenom k razvijanju potencijala djece s teškoćama s ciljem njihova osnaživanja.

## **Važnost uključivanja djece s teškoćama u predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje**

Obrazovna inkluzija ili sudjelovanje djece s teškoćama u razvoju u društvenim aktivnostima predstavlja strategiju čiji je krajnji cilj unaprjeđenje inkluzivnog društva (Cerić, 2008); omogućuje svoj djeci, bez obzira na spol, dob, sposobnost, etničku pripadnost ili poteškoću da u njemu sudjeluju i daju svoj doprinos. Tako shvaćeno društvo ne znači da su u njemu svi članovi jednaki, nego da svi, bez obzira na navedene različitosti, imaju jednako pravo na mogućnost da sudjeluju i pripadaju društvu, odnosno da se obrazuju u skladu sa svojim sposobnostima. Takvo shvaćanje „jednakosti” doprinosi smanjivanju i iskorjenjivanju svih oblika segregacije, odvajanja, izolacije i diskriminacije (Cerić, 2008). Štoviše, inkluzivno obrazovanje usmjereno je na razvijanje svijesti kod učenika i cijelog odgojno-obrazovnog osoblja o važnosti inkluzije s ciljem prihvaćanja različitosti kao poticaja u učenju, a ne prepreke (Vican i Karamatić-Brčić, 2013).

Iako postoji mnogo prednosti inkluzivnog obrazovanja, napredak inkluzivnog obrazovanje za djecu i odrasle osobe s invaliditetom je spor zbog negativnih stavova javnosti, nedostatka političke volje, inertnosti institucija i nedostatka financijskih ulaganja kojima bi se osigurala bolja provedba reformi. Ukratko, nedostaje javna i operativna podrška za inkluzivnu obrazovnu politiku u praksi (Milić Babić i Dowling, 2015).

Ipak, ako se te podrške mogu ostvariti, jasne su potencijalne koristi: značaj inkluzivnog odgoja i obrazovanja djece s teškoćama je da ono može pomoći da se prekine krug siromaštva i isključenosti, može pomoći djeci s teškoćama da ostanu u krugu svoje obitelji i društvene zajednice, može podići kvalitetu obrazovanja na višu rzinu, može pomoći u borbi s diskriminacijom. Te potencijalne koristi temelje se na pretpostavci da su upravo socijalne interakcije s vršnjacima osnova za razvoj i socijalizaciju djeteta. Oni doprinose najvišim postignućima djeteta, te njegovu

socijalnom i mentalnom razvoju. Postoji nada da će se te brojne prednosti ostvariti, kako bismo bolje razumjeli trendove inkluzivnog obrazovanja u okviru ranog odgoja i obrazovanja.

### ***Uključenost djece s teškoćama u razvoju u programe ranog odgoja i obrazovanja u Hrvatskoj***

U Republici Hrvatskoj predškolski odgoj djece nije obavezan, može započeti u dobi od šest mjeseci i trajati do početka osnovnoškolskog obrazovanja (to razdoblje neobaveznog ranog odgoja i obrazovanja često se naziva dječji vrtić). Godina prije polaska u školu je obvezna godina predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja za svu djecu u Republici Hrvatskoj, i to je određeno Zakonom o predškolskom odgoju i obrazovanju (NN 10/1997, 107/2007, 94/2013, čl.23.a) koji je na snazi od 2014. godine. Predškolski odgoj je do unatrag nekoliko godina imao dominantno segregirajući karakter u odnosu na djecu s teškoćama, te se kao i ukupan sustav školovanja u Hrvatskoj nalazio pred procesom nužne promjene (Skočić Mihić, 2011). Ratificiran je niz protudiskriminirajućih međunarodnih dokumenata. Među njima je i donošenje Državnog pedagoškog standarda za predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje (NN 63/2008, 90/2010). Cilj tih sporazuma jest razvoj uspješnog sustava obrazovanja uz uvažavanje mogućnosti djece s teškoćama. Time je realizirana jedna od mjera Nacionalnog plana aktivnosti za prava i interese djece 2006. godine.

Dijete s teškoćama u razvoju jest dijete koje zbog tjelesnih, senzoričkih, komunikacijskih ili intelektualnih teškoća treba dodatnu potporu za učenje i razvoj kako bi ostvarilo najbolji mogući razvojni ishod i socijalnu uključenost (Zakon o socijalnoj skrbi, NN 152/2014, čl. 4). Djeca s teškoćama u razvoju uključuju se u skupine s redovitim programom na temelju mišljenja: (a) stručnog povjerenstva (osnovanog po propisima iz područja socijalne skrbi); (b) mišljenja stručnih suradnika (pedagoga, psihologa, stručnjaka edukacijsko-rehabilitacijskog profila); (c) više medicinske sestre i ravnatelja dječjeg vrtića; (d) kao i odgovarajućih medicinskih i drugih nalaza, mišljenja i rješenja nadležnih tijela, ustanova i vještaka (Državni pedagoški standard predškolskog odgoja i naobrazbe, NN 63/2008, 90/2010). Ako je nedovoljan broj djece za ustroj odgojno-obrazovne skupine s posebnim programom, tada se upisuju u redovne vrtićke skupine ako su osigurani potrebni specifični uvjeti. Na primjer, djeca s lakšim teškoćama koja mogu svladati osnove programa s ostalom djecom u skupini, te djeca s težim teškoćama samo ako su dostupni potrebni smještajni kapaciteti (Državni pedagoški standard predškolskog odgoja i naobrazbe, NN 63/2008, 90/2010).

Državnim pedagoškim standardom predškolskog odgoja i naobrazbe (NN 63/2008, 90/2010) definirani su uvjeti koje vrtići trebaju osigurati kao podršku djetetu s teškoćama u razvoju. Propisuje se (a) broj djece u skupini u kojoj boravi dijete s teškoćama u razvoju (redovnoj ili posebnoj skupini); (b) propisuje se i broj odgojitelja i stručnjaka edukacijsko-rehabilitacijskog profila za rad u skupini u koju je uključeno

dijete s teškoćama u razvoju; kao i (c) mogućnost zapošljavanja asistenta za pomoć djetetu s teškoćama u razvoju. Spomenutim standardom nisu definirani neki drugi oblici podrške uključivanju djece s teškoćama u razvoju. Ipak, mnoge institucije za rani odgoj i obrazovanje dobrovoljno provode inkluzijske strategije, kao što je vanjska stručna podrška i suradnja s djetetovim rehabilitatorima, te uključivanje asistenta koji postaje sve potrebniji oblik podrške djetetu.

### **Pravo na obrazovanje**

Pravo na obrazovanje jedno je od temeljnih ljudskih prava, pa obrazovanje predstavlja pokretačku snagu u osnaživanju djece i odraslih da sami oblikuju svoju budućnost, da izađu iz siromaštva i da potpuno sudjeluju u životu svoje zajednice (Spajić-Vrkaš, Kukoč, i Bašić, 2001). Međunarodna zajednica zabranjuje svaki oblik diskriminacije u obrazovanju i zastupa obvezu postupnog osiguranja obrazovanja za sve.

Cilj odgoja i obrazovanja u dječjem vrtiću jest da djetetu omogući sveukupni razvoj, bez obzira na spol, dob, socijalno ili kulturno porijeklo, nacionalnu ili vjersku pripadnost, tjelesno ili psihičko stanje. Predškolsko obrazovanje ima posebnu važnost u životu svakog djeteta, ono potiče socijalizaciju, interakciju s vršnjacima, emocionalni i kognitivni razvoj djeteta, razvijanje odgovornosti i osjećaja za potrebe drugih. U okviru predškolskih aktivnosti djeca usvajaju nova znanja o okolini i svijetu oko sebe putem igre, međusobnih kontakata, zajedničkog odgajanja i učenja djece s teškoćama i djece bez teškoća u razvoju. Tako djeca razvijaju temeljne ljudske vrijednosti: prihvaćanje, uvažavanje različitosti, empatiju, odgovornost, međusobno pomaganje, toleranciju i suradnju (Valjan-Vukić, 2011).

### **Cilj i istraživačka pitanja**

Cilj je ovog rada istražiti iskustva roditelja vezana uz uključenost djece s teškoćama u programe ranog odgoja i obrazovanja. Istraživačka su pitanja rada: 1) „Kako roditelji opisuju iskustvo upisa djeteta s teškoćama u razvoju u vrtić?”; i 2) „Kako roditelji opisuju izazove unutar sustava predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja?”

## **Metodologija**

### **Postupak**

Istraživački tim surađivao je s devet udruga koje pružaju usluge i podršku djeci s teškoćama u razvoju i njihovim obiteljima kako bi se identificiralo i stupilo u kontakt s potencijalnim sudionicima istraživanja – roditeljima djece s teškoćama u razvoju. Udruge su poslale poziv za sudjelovanje roditeljima (koje su im poslali istraživači) na njihove privatne *e-mail* adrese. In-Portal.hr, kao središnji medij za informiranje osoba s invaliditetom, također je objavio poziv na istraživanje. Nakon stupanja u kontakt sa sudionicima, zakazani su i provedeni polustrukturirani intervjui u domovima sudionika.

## **Sudionici**

Sudionici ovog istraživanja bili su roditelji djece s teškoćama s iskustvom inkluzivnog predškolskog obrazovanja, odnosno roditelji čija su djeca uključena u redovne skupine predškolskog odgoja na području Grada Zagreba i Varaždina. Radi se o sudionicima koji su dobrovoljno pristali na sudjelovanje u istraživanju.

Svih 10 sudionika majke su djece s teškoćama, te se raspon njihovih godina kretao između 28 i 47 godina, pa njihova prosječna dob iznosi 37 godina ( $M=37,8$ ). U braku je 8 sudionica, 1 je sudionica u izvanbračnoj zajednici i 1 samohrana majka. Što se tiče obrazovnog statusa, 7 sudionica ima srednju stručnu spremu, a preostale 3 sudionice imaju visoku stručnu spremu. Prosječna dob djece s teškoćama je 6 godina ( $M=6,2$ ), a dob kretala se od 5,5 do 7 godina. Djeca sudionica istraživanja imala su različite dijagnoze, pa su tako u uzorku istraživanja u djece bile zastupljene sljedeće teškoće: sindrom Down ( $n=3$ ), zaostajanje u psihomotornom razvoju ( $n=2$ ), mikrodelacija ( $n=1$ ), slabovidnost (ambliopija) ( $n=1$ ), poremećaj iz autističnog spektra ( $n=1$ ), spastična cerebralna paraliza ( $n=1$ ) i jezično-govorne teškoće ( $n=1$ ). Petero je djece ženskog i petero muškog spola.

## **Mjerni instrument**

Koristio se predložak pitanja izrađen za potrebe ovog istraživanja koji se sastojao od dvije grupe pitanja. Prva grupa pitanja predložka odnosila se na opis iskustva kod upisa djeteta u vrtić u okviru čega se ispitivalo iskustvo prvog razgovora, zatim koraci koji su poduzeti kod upisa. Druga grupa pitanja odnosila na izazove unutar vrtića, tako da se ispitivala uključenost djeteta s teškoćama, odnos s drugom djecom, odnos s odgojiteljicama, osigurana podrška u vrtiću.

Etički aspekti istraživanja

Sudionicima su dane najvažnije informacije u vezi s istraživanjem, kao što su tema, cilj i svrha istraživanja. Također, sudionicima je omogućeno da ne odgovaraju na neko pitanje ako ne žele, kao i da mogu odustati tijekom provedbe intervjua. Upoznati su s tim da će se dobiveni podaci analizirati grupno, tako da se osobni podaci neće moći povezati s konkretnim sudionikom (tj. osigurana je anonimnost i povjerljivost podataka). Prije provođenja istraživanja zatražen je usmeni pristanak svakog sudionika na istraživanje i na snimanje intervjua.

## **Obrada podataka**

Za obradu podataka dobivenih polustrukturiranim intervjuima koristila se kvalitativna analiza sadržaja. Riječ je o istraživačkoj metodi subjektivne interpretacije sadržaja teksta putem procesa sustavne klasifikacije kodiranja. Cilj je analize sažimanje, razumijevanje i tumačenje empirijske građe, a provodi se uređenjem empirijske građe, određivanjem jedinica kodiranja, postupka kodiranja i izbora, zatim definicijama relevantnih pojmova i kategorija (Hsieh i Shannon, 2005).

## Rezultati i rasprava

Rezultati su prikazani putem tematskih područja s obzirom na postavljena istraživačka pitanja koja se odnose na iskustva roditelja vezana uz uključenost djece s teškoćama u programe ranog odgoja i obrazovanja. Svako područje odgovara na jedno istraživačko pitanje, odnosno: (1) „Kako roditelji opisuju iskustvo upisa djeteta s teškoćama u razvoju u vrtić?“, te (2) „Kako opisuju izazove unutar sustava predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja?“

### **Prvo istraživačko pitanje: Iskustvo upisa djeteta s teškoćama u razvoju u vrtić iz perspektive roditelja**

Analizom odgovora dobivenih od sudionika vezanih uz prvo istraživačko pitanje „Kako roditelji opisuju iskustvo upisa djeteta s teškoćama u razvoju u vrtić?“, dobiveni su sljedeći odgovori roditelja.

**Prepreke upisu.** Nemogućnosti upisa djece s teškoćama u vrtić se prema izjavama sudionika očituju u otežanom pristupu vrtiću prilikom upisa („Izrazito teško, nailazili smo na potpuni zid...” (S\_01); „...pa moje dijete na kraju nje upisano u vrtić u koji smo mi htjeli, zato što su nam oni pružili dosta velik otpor.”(S\_02)), odbijanju vrtića za upis djeteta s teškoćama („Pokušali smo i u nekoliko privatnih vrtića, no ni tamo nas nisu htjeli uzeti.” (S\_01); „...a četvrti put, kada sam ga trebala upisati, rekli su da se on ne može upisati.” (S\_05); „Ne prvo nisam mogla. Nisu mi je prvo htjeli.” (S\_10)), nepoštivanju prednosti upisa djeteta s teškoćama u vrtić („A ne da u Pravilniku stoji da prilikom upisa dijete s teškoćama ima prednost, a onda da mi kažu... je, ali mi nemamo kapaciteta, jer smo upisali svu djecu, potrošili smo prostor” (S\_01); „...znači prvenstvo upisa je odmah otpalo, jer postoji lista čekanja.” (S\_06)). Prema članku 20. Zakona o predškolskom odgoju i obrazovanju (NN 10/1997, 107/2007, 94/2013) prednost pri upisu djece u dječje vrtiće imaju djeca iz obitelji s više djece, djeca s teškoćama u razvoju, djeca roditelja žrtava i invalida Domovinskog rata, djeca zaposlenih roditelja i djeca samohranih roditelja. Iako u spomenutom Zakonu stoji da djeca s teškoćama u razvoju imaju prednost upisa u vrtić, dobiveni rezultati pokazuju da su se sudionici istraživanja susreli s nepoštivanjem prednosti upisa, te su naišli na nerazumijevanje i na odbijanje upisa djeteta u vrtić.

Sudionici navode i pronalazak neutemeljenih razloga koji onemogućavaju upis djeteta, kao što su *nedostatak stručnog tima u vrtiću da bi se dijete s teškoćama upisalo u vrtić* („...da oni ipak nemaju dovoljno stručan, taj stručni tim za njega” (S\_02); „A nemojte odma reći da nemate kadar, da nemate ljudi...” (S\_10)). Isto tako navode i *nedostatak slobodnih mjesta za upis djeteta s teškoćama u vrtić* („...nema mjesta...” (S\_01); „...da je jednostavno previše djece...” (S\_02); „...nema mjesta. Gužva je. Zakasnili ste.” (S\_06)).

Prema članku 22. st. 3. i 4. Državnog pedagoškog standarda predškolskog odgoja i naobrazbe (NN 63/2008, 90/2010), u odgojno-obrazovnu skupinu može se uključiti, na temelju mišljenja stručnih suradnika dječjeg vrtića, samo jedno dijete s lakšim teškoćama i tada se broj djece u skupini smanjuje za dvoje djece, te se može uključiti

samo jedno dijete s većim ili kombiniranim teškoćama ako je nedostatan broj djece za ustroj odgojne skupine s posebnim programom i tada se broj djece smanjuje za četvero. Također, prema Državnom pedagoškom standardu predškolskog odgoja i naobrazbe (NN 63/2008, 90/2010) određen je broj stručnih suradnika s obzirom na broj odgojno-obrazovnih skupina. Broj stručnih suradnika može se povećati s obzirom na posebne potrebe djece, dislociranost objekata i različitost programa koji se provode u vrtiću. Profil stručnog suradnika odabire vrtić na osnovi potreba djece i programa koje provodi. Te eksplicitne odredbe u okviru Državnog pedagoškog standarda za predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje (NN 63/2008, 90/2010) dovode u pitanje zakonitost obrazloženja vrtića za isključivanje djece s teškoćama u razvoju.

**Nedostatak podrške pri upisu.** Roditelji su također izrazili nedostatak podrške pri upisu djeteta s teškoćama u razvoju u vrtić – to se očituje u potrebi jedne sudionice za kontaktiranjem nadležnog ministarstva za pomoć pri upisu djeteta s teškoćama u vrtić („E, a u međuvremenu sam otišla prošle godine u 9. mjesecu u Ministarstvo socijalne politike i mladih, dok su rekli da trebam imati asistenta.” (S\_05)), te u potrebi dvije sudionice za kontaktiranjem Gradskog ureda za pomoć pri upisu djeteta s teškoćama u vrtić („pokušali smo, naravno, s Gradom.” (S\_01); „Pa mislim zvali smo, ali to je bilo pošaljite mail, vidjet ćemo. Možete ići u vrtić, na ne znam, na drugom kraju grada.” (S\_02)).

Ne samo da sudionici ukazuju na nedostatak podrške od dječjeg vrtića tijekom njihova pokušaja upisa djeteta u vrtić već su govorili i o nedostatku podrške od drugih roditelja s kojima bi mogli podijeliti svoje iskustvo („...nisam mogla naći nigdje nikoga, ono, da podijeli sa mnom svoje iskustvo.” (S\_01); „Ja sam ponajprije pristala na ovaj razgovor baš zbog toga što...što ne znaš kome bi ispričao ovu priču.” (S\_02)). Komunikacija među roditeljima pruža osjećaj da nisu sami i jedini s određenim problemom, a također i priliku za učenje neke nove strategije kako se nositi s određenim roditeljskim problemom ili životnom situacijom (Pećnik, 2013). Jedna od najvažnijih funkcija takvih roditeljskih prijateljstava je društveno umreženje koje omogućuje podršku u teškim trenucima. Pećnik (2013) naglašava da je među „onima u istim cipelama” vjerojatno lakše svladati životne probleme, zadržati i vratiti pozitivan stav prema životu.

**Emocionalni izazovi upisa.** Iskustvo upisa roditelji opisuju kroz emocionalnu preplavljenost - koja se očituje kroz neizvjesnost i tjeskobu roditelja da li će vrtić upisati njihovo dijete („Ali smo isto onak imali zavrzlake, hoće li, neće li...” (S\_03); „... pa smo mi bili na ledu neko vrijeme, i bilo je dal će oni uspjeti.” (S\_03)). Neki roditelji ukazali su da se loše osjećaju (tj. pod stresom) („...to mogu reći da je to bio iznimno stresan period za mene.” (S\_01); „Pa dosta loše sam se osjećala sve ove godine, jer nisam mogla vjerovati da dijete koje je slabovidno ne može nigdje ići, apsolutno niti jedan vrtić u ovom gradu...” (S\_02); „Iskreno otišla sam ko obični puran od nje, i plakala sam se ko kišna godina doma.” (S\_06)), dok ostali govore o gubitku nade („Nego je to bilo: Molim vas, pomozite!” (S\_02); „Puno put i je bilo da dignem ruke i odustanem od svega.” (S\_10)). Također, tu je i sudionica koja je istaknula potrebu za strpljenjem pri upisu djeteta u



vrtić („I čekaš ko budala. Znači onaj koji je došao, se je upisao, a ti kaj čekaš godinu dana, dete ti nemre iti nutra. Znači jedno dete vredi više od mojega?“ (S\_07)).

Briga za djetetovu dobrobit i optimalan razvoj podrazumijeva i brigu o dobrobiti roditelja (Pećnik, 2013). Provedeno Unicefovo istraživanje usluga za podršku roditeljima djece najmlađe dobi u zajednici pokazalo je da su roditelji djece u dobi od 6 godina zabrinutiji za ponašanje ili razvoj svog djeteta nego roditelji djece iz mlađih dobnih skupina, imaju najvišu razinu roditeljskog stresa, a najniži osjećaj roditeljske kompetentnosti (Pećnik, 2013). Kod roditelja šestogodišnjaka je čak 1/3 onih koji su iskazali da se češće teško nose sa zadacima roditeljske uloge. Povišeni je stres pokazatelj neravnoteže između zahtjeva koje skrb o djetetu postavlja pred roditelja i roditeljeve mogućnosti da na njih primjereno odgovori s obzirom na vlastite psihosocijalne resurse, ali i resurse koji su mu na raspolaganju u njegovoj okolini (Pećnik, 2013). Ti rezultati govore o potrebi da se, uz postojeće usluge namijenjene roditeljima (nakon poroda i u prvim godinama života, a osobito u trećoj), naglasak stavi na razvoj usluga usmjerenih roditeljima u godini pred djetetov polazak u školu.

### **Drugo istraživačko pitanje: Izazovi unutar sustava predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja iz perspektive roditelja**

Na drugo istraživačko pitanje „Kako roditelji opisuju izazove unutar sustava predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja?“, dobiveni su slijedeći odgovori roditelja.

**Ograničenje trajanja boravka u vrtiću.** Sudionici istraživanja istaknuli su ograničenje trajanja boravka djeteta s teškoćama u vrtiću. Taj izazov očituje se u njihovim izjavama da vrtić ograničava broj dana u tjednu u vrtićkoj skupini („...oni je nisu htjeli upisati na više od 3 x tjedno...“ (S\_01)), vrtić ograničava broj sati boravka u vrtićkoj skupini („Ove godine je ručak u pola 1, pa je onda do 1 u vrtiću. Nikad nisu dali da dijete ostane dulje.“ (S\_03); „...ali on može biti 5 sati, znači to je od 8 – 13 sati.“ (S\_04); „...ali s tim da bude samo 2 sata i to od pol 12 do pol 2, razumiješ. Znači od pol 12 do pol 2 kad je ona bila već kaput gewesen“ (S\_10)), ograničenje vrtića da dijete s teškoćama u vrtiću spava („...znači Agencija je čak rekla da mora ostajati na spavanju...“ (S\_01); „...onda su nam rekli, jooj, ne može ona spavati, treba asistenta, a taj asistent nije kad ona spava, onda on ide u neku drugu grupu čuvati“ (S\_03)).

Prema Pravilniku o uvjetima i postupku za stjecanje prava zaposlenog roditelja ili samozaposlenog roditelja djeteta s težim smetnjama u razvoju na dopust ili na rad u skraćenom radnom vremenu radi njege djeteta (NN 18/2009) nigdje se izričito ne zabranjuje boravak djeteta u vrtiću do 8 sati, već je samo navedeno da roditelji čije dijete boravi duže od 8 sati gube pravo na dopust za njegu djeteta ili pravo na rad u skraćenom radnom vremenu. Dakle, prema Pravilniku sam vrtić ne bi smio ograničavati boravak djeteta s teškoćama, a vrijeme provedeno u vrtiću najbolje bi bilo da u dogovoru s roditeljima odredi stručni tim vrtića s obzirom na potrebe i mogućnosti djeteta. Međutim, to je neizvedivo ako vrtić i roditelji nemaju dobar, suradnički odnos. Iako ni južnoeuropske zemlje ne jamče zakonsko pravo na

predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje po prestanku roditeljskog dopusta, nužno bi bilo omogućiti to pravo kako bi se omogućilo ranije uključivanje djeteta u predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje, kako za djecu s teškoćama tako i za djecu bez teškoća. Na taj bi se način pozitivno utjecalo na djetetov kognitivni razvoj, vještine i slično, te bi se roditeljima omogućilo kvalitetnije planiranje skrbi za djecu (European Commission, 2014).

**Nedovoljno uključivanje djece s teškoćama u razvoju u aktivnosti.** Ono što za sudionike također predstavlja izazov nedovoljna je uključenost djece s teškoćama u aktivnosti. Navedeno sudionici potkrepljuju izjavama da su djeca s teškoćama u razvoju isključena iz aktivnosti vrtića („Imaju oni neke projekte u koje [djevojčica] nije uključena....” (S\_03); „Ali ovaj, da kada smo trebali ići u kazalište, nas nisu pustili...” (S\_05)). Ostali sudionici ukazali su na nedostatak inkluzivnih aktivnosti u dječjim vrtićima („Ako se neko dijete vozi u kolicima, pa hajmo se svi voziti u kolicima pa da vidimo kako bi bilo prijeći prepreke ili nešto tako. Toga nema, te je njihova čudnost, nešto što je tu i djeca imaju upitnike na početku i onda jednostavno prijeđu preko toga.” (S\_01); „Ne može on biti miran i slušati i raditi s djecom, jer on baš nije... on ometa. I kad oni trebaju izaći van da se malo odmire od toga programa, da se malo igraju, onda on dolazi.” (S\_09)).

U istraživanju inkluzivne aktivnosti kao indikatora kvalitete u programima ranog predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja kojemu je cilj bio dobiti uvid u zastupljenost inkluzivnih aktivnosti u programima pedagoške djelatnosti odgojitelja, analizirani su predškolski programi (Borovac, 2013). Istraživanjem je analizirano 962 aktivnosti – 61 (6,34%) je bilo inkluzivnih (odnosno podržavale su temeljne vrijednosti inkluzije). S obzirom na rezultate Borovac (2013) zaključuje kako se prisutnost inkluzivnih aktivnosti u svakodnevnoj pedagoškoj djelatnosti odgojitelja može tumačiti kao dimenzija visokokvalitetne rane edukacije. Odnosno, kako inkluzivne aktivnosti ne bi trebale biti ekskluzivno pravo pojedinoga djeteta („zasluženo” postojanjem teškoće), već svakodnevna razvojno primjerena praksa rane edukacije (Borovac, 2013, str. 45).

**Izazovi u vezi s osiguranjem asistenta.** Sudionici opisuju izazove u organizacijskim poteškoćama, a u vezi s osiguranjem rada asistenta u vrtiću, što se može iščitati iz njihovih izjava da postoji manjak asistenata („...nemaju asistenta.” (S\_01); „Manjak asistenta, odnosno nemogućnost da ga se dobije.” (S\_08); „Takvoj djeci puno fali asistent.” (S\_09)), učestalo mijenjanje asistenata („...stalno je mijenjala asistente...” (S\_01); „...dobije asistenta, dva mjeseca tri, pa dođe drugi, pa opet dva-tri mjeseca, pa dođe treći... to nije dobro.” (S\_06); „...al to je svake godine bil neko drugi na žalost.” (S\_08)), te da vrtić zapošljava asistenta u različite svrhe („...jer im je ta asistentica trebala da im odraduje njihove administrativne poslove sa strane.” (S\_01); „...asistent je i odgojitelj i potpora i ne znam i teta čistačica i presvlačitelj pelena i svega.” (S\_01)).

Posljednjih godina uvida se potreba za uključivanjem dodatne pomoći i podrške u odgoju i obrazovanju djece rane i predškolske dobi (Blanuša Trošelj, 2012). Unutar EU na različite je načine riješena potreba za asistentima unutar predškolskog odgoja

i obrazovanja. Međutim, u većini slučajeva radi se o ulozi asistenta koji uz odgojitelja sudjeluje u neposrednom procesu odgoja i obrazovanja (Blanuša Trošelj, 2012). Ovisno o zemlji uglavnom se razlikuju u (ne)kvalifikacijama i stupnju obrazovanja. Još uvijek pitanje asistenata u vrtićima nije regulirano zakonskim okvirom, čeka se novi Pravilnik, no postavlja se pitanje hoće li i njime biti regulirano pitanje asistenata u predškolskim ustanovama.

**Zadovoljstvo uključenosti djeteta s teškoćama u vrtić.** Unatoč mnogim zapaženim izazovima, svoje zadovoljstvo uključenosti djeteta u vrtić sudionici su istaknuli u prihvaćenosti i uključenosti djeteta s teškoćama od druge djece u vrtiću (socijalizacija) („...*Pa ona se u principu bez problema uklopila.*” (S\_03); „*Jako je dobar. Prihvatili su ga i tako.*” (S\_05); „*Stvarno se je super prilagodila.*” (S\_08); „...*i djeca su ga prihvatila.*” (S\_09)). Sudionici su naveli specifične primjere u kojima je njihovo dijete bilo uključeno u igru („*Pa onda igraju neke igre, što se mi doma ni ne sjetimo.*” (S\_02); „*Ali u neakvoj igri će prihvatiti da skupa slažu kockice, pijesak i to, ne znam, da skupa stavljaju u kanticu...*” (S\_04); „...*počeo se uključivati u igre i tako.*” (S\_05)). Roditelji su također naglasili važnost prijateljstva koja su se razvila kod njihova djeteta („*Mislim da je to najveći benefit vrtića, ona zaista ima prijatelje sada.*” (S\_01); „*Znači to je jako, jako bitno, već smo bili pozvani, ne znam na 7 – 8 rođendana, što je isto dokaz da ga vole.*” (S\_04); „*Ima prijatelje.*” (S\_05)).

Integracija djece s teškoćama u redovit sustav odgoja i obrazovanja svakako je povećala broj socijalnih interakcija između djece s teškoćama i djece bez teškoća u razvoju. Međutim, većina dosadašnjih istraživanja upućuje na nisku prihvaćenost djece s teškoćama u razvoju u vršnjačkom okruženju, no sve je više onih koja ukazuju upravo suprotno. Fortlouis-Wood (2008) naglašava važnost prijateljstva za društveni razvoj i emocionalno funkcioniranje u svim fazama života. Vrtić je nezamjenjiv kao okolina za učenje socijalnih interakcija, verbalne i neverbalne komunikacije. Tu se uči kako živjeti u skupini, u društvu, kako komunicirati i uspostavljati odnose s drugima te kako se prilagoditi grupi i pravilima. Treba razvijati i provoditi djelotvorne intervencije usmjerene prema povećanju kvalitete socijalnih interakcija djece s teškoćama u razvoju i djece bez teškoća u razvoju, kako bi obje skupine djece imale socijalnu korist (Carter i Hughes, 2005).

**Nezadovoljstvo profesionalnim kompetencijama odgojiteljica.** Roditelji djece s teškoćama izazove s kojima se susreću opisuju nezadovoljstvom profesionalnim kompetencijama odgojiteljica („*Prethodne su bile katastrofa. Katastrofa...*” (S\_01); „...*ali oni jednostavno neke stvari kod [djeteta] ne razumiju.*” (S\_02); „*Samo se tete ne mogu toliko posvetiti njemu kao i drugoj djecu. Više se posvete drugoj djeci...*” (S\_09)). Ističu nepedagoške postupke u radu odgojiteljica („*Onda smo kasnije saznali da one tu rade neke stvari koje su jako nepedagoški.*” (S\_01); „...*one ostave djecu samu da spavaju, a one odu na krov pušiti. Ostave bez nadzora. Ili potiče drugo dijete da tuče drugo, jer te je on gurnuo.*” (S\_01)), ili u nekim slučajevima da odgojiteljice nisu educirane za rad s

djetetom s teškoćama („...profesionalno je to uvijek malo problem jer nisu one educirane za te teškoće.” (S\_02); „...ali nisu stručnjaci.” (S\_04)).

Istraživanje provedeno na 65 odgojitelja Dječjeg vrtića Rijeka potvrđuje da je za inkluzivni odgoj potrebno ispuniti niz različitih preduvjeta kako bi se djetetu s teškoćama omogućilo najbolji mogući rani predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje (Rudelić, Pinoza Kukurin, i Skočić Mihić, 2013). Odgojitelji prepoznaju važnost i potrebu za osiguranje širokog raspona stručnih znanja na visokoj razini. Osim toga, odgojitelji su priznali da je za djelotvoran rad s djecom s teškoćama u inkluzivnim okruženjima u većoj mjeri do u potpunosti potrebno obrazovanje (Rudelić i sur., 2013). Honeyball i suradnici (2011) ističu da je nužno konstantno usavršavanje stručnih djelatnika, a posebno odgojitelja, jer se od njih očekuje da aktivno oslušuju dječje misli i osjećaje, da promatraju aktivnosti, uočavaju njihove mogućnosti, te da nastoje pronaći odgovarajuće postupke koji će pripomoći njihovu razvitku.

**Zadovoljstvo osobnim kompetencijama odgojiteljica.** Unatoč mnogim kritikama, roditelji su naglasili svoje zadovoljstvo osobnim kompetencijama odgojiteljica, što se očituje u njihovim izjavama da se odgojiteljice trude („...pa se trudi uključiti sve to u rad što je super.” (S\_01); „...ona je sama rekla da ne zna neke stvari, ali da je spremna naučiti.” (S\_06); „...ali se jako trude.” (S\_08)), da su spremne na komunikaciju („...komunikacija je dobra i onda to ide.” (S\_06); „popričati s tetama, ako je negdje problem kod njegova ponašanja... i tu nema nikakvih problema.” (S\_09); „Dobila sam ja uvijek informaciju koju sam tražila.” (S\_10)), te da su spremne na suradnju („...tako da sve što ona radi kod logopeda i defektologa, ona sve prenosi teti i teta na taj način pokušava raditi s njom. Kak smo se na početku dogovorili... i to funkcionira. Znači, teta je otvorena za suradnju...” (S\_06); „...ako ja vježbam, crtam to s njime kako logoped kaže, tak onda i oni znaju u vrtiću isto s njime.” (S\_09)).

Poznato je da se dijete ponaša u skladu s ozračjem u kojem živi i izvrsno razumije neverbalne poruke kojih odrasli često nisu ni svjesni (Slunjski, Šagud, i Brajša-Žganec, 2006). Stoga pozitivna povratna informacija roditelja o kompetencijama odgojitelja sugerira prednost za djecu u ovoj studiji. Uz profesionalno iskustva u radu s djecom s teškoćama, u obzir je potrebno uzeti i privatno iskustvo, koje se događa u kontekstu različitih socijalnih razina, od člana obitelji, prijatelja, pa do slučajnog jednokratnog susreta. Utjecaj privatnog iskustva na formiranje i mijenjanje stavova odgojitelja prema inkluziji nije dovoljno istražena. Ipak, načela teorije kontakata upućuju na to da putem kontakta pojedinci razvijaju ugodu i smanjuju predrasude prema onima koji su različiti od njih (Allport, 1954). Rezultati istraživanja nameću pitanja o tome kako odgojitelji razvijaju kompetencije, bilo putem formalne edukacije ili putem neformalnog iskustva.

**Nezadovoljstvo radom stručnog tima.** Sudionici istraživanja iskazuju nezadovoljstvo radom stručnog tima, što se ističe kroz njihove izjave da nedostaje konkretan rad stručnog tima s djecom s teškoćama u razvoju („Neće on sad raditi s djetetom sat vremena, izvući ga iz grupe i raditi kao logoped kod kojega ga ti vodiš. Mislim, to su

*gluposti....ali nema tu konkretnog rada.” (S\_02); „ Ne mogu reći da je moja [djevojčica] s njihove strane dobila bilo kakvu stručnu podršku.” (S\_08)). Roditelji su također izrazili nezadovoljstvo radom stručnog tima u raspravi o percipiranoj beskorisnosti stručnog tima („I tak smo masu situacija našli gdje su pokazali da su više administrativni djelatnici, nego što su zapravo stručni tim. Tak da s njima nismo zadovoljni.” (S\_01); „...ne možete od logopeda u vrtiću ništa dobiti. Logoped u vrtiću je da uoči neki problem i da pošalje dalje.” (S\_02)), i u nekompetentnosti stručnog tima („Pa dobro, ja stvarno nemam ništa lijepo reći o našem stručnom timu, jer su oni totalno nestručni...i to ne kažem sada iz neke svoje fiks ideje, nego su zaista nestručni.” (S\_01)).*

Profesionalan rad s djecom s teškoćama u razvoju poseban je izazov za odgojitelje i čitav stručni tim unutar predškolske ustanove. Baš kao što su u ovom istraživanju roditelji prepoznali nedovoljnu podršku stručnog tima, tako i odgojitelji u istraživanju Kolarić Piplica (2014) navodi kako je podrška stručnog tima često nedostatna ili izostaje. U takvim je uvjetima uspješnu inkluziju gotovo nemoguće provesti. Uloga stručnjaka u radu s roditeljima predstavlja važan i vrijedan resurs socijalne podrške. Socijalna okolina, uključujući stručnjake u radu s djecom s teškoćama, trebala bi smanjiti stres obitelji. Zaštitni faktori u prilagodbi roditelja na teškoću djeteta su razumijevanje i podrška okoline, kvaliteta profesionalne brige i korištenje djelotvornijih strategija suočavanja sa stresom (Balan, 2015).

**Diskriminacija djece s teškoćama u razvoju u vrtiću.** Ono s čime se sudionici istraživanja susreću jest i nerazumijevanje (percipiraju kao diskriminaciju) djece s teškoćama. Sudionici su taj podatak priopćili u izjavama da se susreću s nerazumijevanjem (tj. diskriminacijom) drugih roditelja („Njegova mama je došla i zamolila odgojiteljice da ih razdvajaju. Da bi ona htjela da se njezin sin više ne druži s [djetetom], jer da to nije nikako dobro za njega.” (S\_01); „...došiel je jedan tata, na žalost u alkoholnom stanju... i on je njoj meni rekel što to dijete dela tu, marš van s tim djetetom. To dijete nema kaj tu delati, to dijete bude smetalo našoj djeci.” (S\_10)). Uz nedostatak razumijevanja roditelja druge djece, sudionici su opisali i nedostatak razumijevanja od druge djece u skupini („Prije toga su je apsolutno svi gledali ko čudaka.” (S\_01); „A ima djece koja ponekad ne razumiju neka njegova ponašanja...” (S\_02)). Prema izjavama sudionika istraživanja vidljivo je da nije dovoljno samo smjestiti djecu s teškoćama u razvoju u redovne skupine kako bi se riješio problem segregacije i diskriminacije.

Bez odgovarajuće podrške i osjećaja pripadnosti vršnjačkoj skupini, fizička integracija djece s teškoćama u razvoju samo dodatno pogoršava diskriminaciju. Istraživanje Anđelkovića i suradnika (2012) ispituje stavove roditelja djece bez teškoća u razvoju prema inkluziji djece s oštećenjem vida predškolskog uzrasta. Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su da roditelji djece bez teškoća uglavnom imaju pozitivne stavove, ali i da iskazuju elemente zabrinutosti za položaj svoje djece u inkluzivnim grupama i nesigurnosti prilikom davanja odgovora koji uključuju poznavanje kompetencija stručnjaka koji rade s djecom u predškolskim inkluzivnim grupama (Anđelković i sur., 2012). Usmjeravanje vršnjaka bez teškoća prema sudjelovanju

u igri i zajedničkim aktivnostima s djecom s teškoćama u razvoju, tijekom kojih će razumjeti ponašanje vršnjaka s teškoćama i davanjem pozitivnog potkrepljenja za nastavak interakcije, može rezultirati pozitivnim utjecajem na njihovu interakciju na duže vrijeme (Terpstra i Tamura, 2008). Do diskriminacije dolazi zbog neznanja, predrasuda i strahova. Bez obzira na to postoje li ti problemi s roditeljima djece bez teškoća ili stručnog tima u vrtićima, nužno je podići društvenu svijest o različitim teškoćama kako bi se smanjile predrasude i izbjegla diskriminacija.

### **Ograničenja i preporuke istraživanja**

Istraživanje je provedeno s odgovarajućim uzorkom od 10 roditelja, što je također predstavljalo ograničenje istraživanja, budući da se prezentirani rezultati ne mogu generalizirati na cijelu populaciju roditelja djece s teškoćama u razvoju. To ograničenje je tipično za kvalitativno istraživanje (Polit i Beck, 2010). S obzirom na to da su u istraživanju sudjelovale samo majke, kod budućih istraživanja trebalo bi u istraživanje uključiti i očeve.

Za buduća istraživanja preporuka je kombinacija kvalitativne i kvantitativne metode istraživanja. Intervjui i fokus grupe mogli bi se nadopunjavati ili informirati kvantitativnim istraživanjima koji bi pružali dodatne, raznovrsne podatke o iskustvima uključivanja djece s teškoćama u razvoju u ruralnim i urbanim dijelovima zemlje.

### **Zaključak i implikacije**

Glavna zadaća odgoja i obrazovanja usmjeravanje je djece na prave vrijednosti života. Te se vrijednosti mogu i trebaju odnositi na promicanje jednakost među svim ljudima, poštivanje roditelja, prijatelja, učitelja, kao i da svoje intelektualne sposobnosti nadopunjuju cijeloga života. U suvremenom svijetu djeca se susreću s nizom socijalnih isključivanja zbog vjerskih, etničkih, nacionalnih razlika, i od važnosti za ovo istraživanje, s diskriminacijom na temelju teškoća u razvoju. Upravo je zbog toga vrlo važno da djeca već u predškolskoj dobi nauče poštovati različitosti, usvajati osjećaj sigurnosti, osjećaj razumijevanja, prijateljstva i solidarnosti. Analiza odgovora dobivenih od sudionika ovog istraživanja pokazala je pozitivne i negativne percepcije u vezi s njihovim iskustvima upisa djece s teškoćama u razvoju u vrtić. Ipak, s obzirom na kritičnu vrijednost ranog obrazovanja, posebno su važni izazovi s kojima se suočavaju roditelji tijekom upisa. Osim odbijanja upisa djece, sudionici su također iznijeli neosnovane argumente od uprave ustanova ranog odgoja i obrazovanja protiv upisa djece.

Nakon što su uz veliku „borbu” napokon uspjeli upisati svoje dijete s razvojnim teškoćama u redovan vrtić, sudionici ovog istraživanja nailaze na mnoge izazove unutar samog vrtića. Trajanje boravka u vrtiću ograničeno je za djecu s teškoćama u razvoju. Osim toga, roditelji su potvrdili da njihova djeca nisu bila dovoljno uključena u glavne obrazovne aktivnosti, te naglašavaju organizacijske i financijske poteškoće vezane uz osiguranje rada asistenta u dječjim vrtićima. Sudionici su bili

zadovoljni osobnim kompetencijama odgojiteljica, ali nezadovoljstvo su iskazali kod profesionalnih kompetencija odgojiteljica. Sudionici su izrazili jednako tako i nezadovoljstvo radom stručnog tima vrtića. Na kraju, sudionici su u cjelini uočili nedostatak razumijevanja (tj. diskriminaciju) djece s teškoćama u razvoju u ranom obrazovnom sustavu. Može se zaključiti da je sustav predškolskog odgoja vrlo „ranjiv” u smislu uključivanja u obrazovanje, stoga mu treba posvetiti veću pozornost kako bi mogao zadovoljiti potrebe djece s teškoćama u razvoju i zaštititi njihovo pravo na obrazovanje od najranije dobi.