

Child and Institutions: Institutional Childhood

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Abstract

Early- and preschool-aged children spend their childhood in educational institutions. However, their growing up takes place during a time spent outside institutions. Considering the fact that childhood institutionalization is nowadays a frequently discussed topic, the interest in spending quality time which is not only realized in the family community, but also, more and more, in early education facilities and other out-of-home programmes aimed at children and their improvement, is becoming increasingly important. That exact segment of life has proved to be an important predictor of the quality development of each individual. By participating in various activities, the child is able to develop a personal system of values, critical thinking, tolerance, and human and ethical values. This paper presents the results of a survey conducted in kindergartens in the City of Zagreb, Sisak, Petrinja, Velika Gorica, and Velika Mlaka. Using an appropriately constructed Questionnaire on Parents' Opinions on Childhood Institutionalization, 250 parents assessed the importance of including children in different activities provided by early education institutions and other out-of-home programmes.

Key words: *child; childhood; early education facilities; leisure activities; parents; play.*

Introduction

Contemporary scholarly literature interprets childhood as a set of social, cultural, and economic structures that can be used to understand its emergence (Vasta, Haith, & Miller, 2005).

At the same time, this concept functions as a bridge between the macro (society) and micro level (individual development). Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999) interpret childhood as a social category, while the institutionalization of childhood is seen as a framework for understanding the early years of children's education and development. In addition, the social category of childhood implies the interpretation of childhood from the perspective of the parents and other adults in the child's social environment

who are important to him/her and participate in his/her life. It also implies various intuitive theories and ways in which they are interpreted and understand the child and childhood. This understanding of the influence of the social, cultural, and educational context on understanding children and the attitude towards them is a complex and subtle pedagogical issue. The contextualization of childhood reveals the values on which pedagogical theory and educational practice – i.e. the social dimension, the cultural dimension, and the dimension of the value of the childhood – are based, and is reflected in their institutionalization (Šagud, 2015). Some authors interpret childhood in the context of family privacy, which provides a shelter to children from any dangers that may arise in the contemporary process of growing up (Qvortrup, 2005). In accordance with the concept of the contemporary culture of living and constant aspirations towards protecting the youngest members of society and their upbringing, the protective attitude of the family towards the child is a fundamental characteristic of the modern age and a staple of modern childhood (Corsaro, 2005; Prout, 2005). In this way, the family assumes responsibility for education, health, and the protection of the children in the family. Because of this, the child gradually leaves his/her place in society and strengthens his/her position in the family, where his/her rights and freedoms increase. However, overall social change in the world, especially globalization, places children in different institutions, away from their parents, from an early age. Moreover, today more than ever, younger children are oriented towards growing up in the context of different institutions that have dual goals, such as providing care in the absence of parents, but also play a significant role in providing education. Early and preschool education in early education institutions is focused on respecting the personality of each individual child, his/her individual development, opportunities, and desires. According to Bruner (2000), every child can be taught in any area, but at different levels of abstraction and complexity. Because, as it is well known, a child is able to independently plan, organize his/her own activities, and develop his/her intellectual, social, emotional, creative, and other potentials already at an early age (Jurčević-Lozančić, 2005; Slunjski, 2008). This is exactly why it is necessary to look at the child in his/her entirety, together with his/her interaction with the environment as a process of development and learning. Moyles (2007) also points out that children are competent researchers since birth and that their learning is a holistic process. Ensuring and monitoring the quality of early and preschool education is at the heart of both strategies of education policies, and researchers and practitioners. Kindergartens provide quality education and recognize the quality of the life children and adults share. The more successful they are in promoting children's freedom and autonomy, the more high-quality they are considered to be (Jurčević Lozančić, 2016; Ljubetić, 2014; Miljak, 2009; Slunjski, 2015). Quality education is based on the contemporary understanding of a child as a whole being, the subject of his/her own education, an active, curious, and competent being with his/her own culture, needs, and rights. Meeting children's different needs (physical, emotional, cognitive, social, communicative, etc.) needs to be understood as dynamic, rather than permanent and irreplaceable process, and, as

Wenar (2003) points out, these needs have to be used as guidelines for strategy and programme development. In accordance with contemporary scientific knowledge, it is extremely important to emphasize the importance of play as a learning model and the comprehensive development of early- and preschool-aged children. It is also important to avoid the “schoolification” of the educational process in early education institutions (for more information, see Hrvatski Sabor, 2014). The Croatian Education, Science, and Technology Strategy (Hrvatski Sabor, 2014) promotes contemporary institutional early education aimed at developing a humanized environment that encourages a child to play, socialize, and learn, strengthens the child and makes him/her resistant. Play and recreation are of vital importance for a child’s well-being and health (Jensen, 2005). There are multiple examples in life (supported by scientific evidence) that confirm that physical movement stimulates and activates many mental abilities of a child (Šerbetar, Jurčević-Lozančić, & Kurić, 2012).

Methodology

The institutionalization of childhood has been recognized as a phenomenon of modern society. In order to determine the actual dimensions of this problem, the inclusion of children in extra-curricular programmes in the City of Zagreb as well as medium-sized (Sisak and Velika Gorica) and smaller towns (Petrinja and Velika Mlaka) was examined depending on their gender. At the same time, an empirical, non-experimental study on parental views on the purpose, needs, and possibilities of including children in extra-curricular programmes implemented in early education institutions and other out-of-home programmes was conducted.

The aim of this research was to identify parents’ views on the importance of including children in extra-curricular programmes in early and preschool education institutions, and institutions providing organized activities for children, depending on parents’ gender, degree of education, and place of permanent residence.

The main hypothesis states the following:

H₀ – There is no statistically significant difference between parents’ assessment of the importance of involving children in extra-curricular programmes, based on their gender, level of education, or place of residence.

Alternative hypotheses include the following:

H₁ – It is assumed that there is a correlation between parents’ level of education and their opinions on the inclusion of early- and preschool-aged children in extra-curricular activities;

H₂ – It is assumed that there is a gender difference between parents’ opinions on the importance of including early- and preschool-aged children in extra-curricular activities;

H₃ – It is assumed that there is a correlation between permanent residence and parents’ opinions on the importance of including early- and preschool-aged children in extra-curricular activities.

In this research, we focused on children who spend part of their childhood in different institutional environments. The *Questionnaire on Parents' Opinions on Childhood Institutionalization* was used to examine the actual involvement of children in different activities in and outside of kindergarten, as well as parents' opinion on the need to include children in various extra-curricular programmes. The results of this research can contribute to a better and more complete understanding of early- and preschool-aged children's leisure time. Furthermore, the research findings may indicate a better or fuller understanding of the different forms of child involvement and parents' opinions regarding the organization of children's time. In addition, they can be used in developing educational policies and programmes provided by institutions of early and preschool education, and institutions providing organized activities for early- and preschool-aged children.

Research on parents' opinions was conducted in the spring of 2017 on a convenience sample of parents of preschool children included in early education institutions. The research covers kindergartens in the areas of Sisak, Petrinja, Velika Gorica, and Velika Mlaka, and a total of four kindergartens in the City of Zagreb. These institutions include 750 ($N = 750$) children of preschool age. The research was conducted with the prior consent of the heads of the institutions. The instrument, the *Questionnaire on Parents' Opinions on Childhood Institutionalization* (UP-MRID), was distributed among parents of preschool children.

A total of 250 parents of early- and preschool-aged children fully completed the questionnaires, and this, according to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2009), constitutes a representative sample.

Table 1

Level of parents' education according to their place of permanent residence

		Qualification					Total f / %
		UQ ¹	CSE ²	CE ³	UE ⁴	PGE ⁵	
Residence	Smaller cities *	0	39	25	33	6	103 / 41.2%
	City of Zagreb	3	53	30	51	10	147 / 57.8%
Total		3	92	55	84	16	250

*Sisak, Petrinja, Velika Gorica, Velika Mlaka

Gender analysis showed that there were 27.6% ($f=69$) of fathers and 72.4% ($f=181$) of mothers included. The average age of the subjects was 38 ($M = 37.86$, $SD = 5.10$). The level of subjects' education (Table 1) ranges from unqualified (UQ; 1%, $f = 3$) to postgraduate education (PGE; 6%, $f = 16$).

¹ Unqualified

² Completed secondary education

³ College education

⁴ University education

⁵ Post-graduate education

As previously stated, the following instrument was developed for the purpose of this research: the *Questionnaire on Parents' Opinions on Childhood Institutionalization/UP-MRID*. The purpose and aim of this research was clarified to the participants, and socio-demographic data (age, gender, level of education) were collected. The questionnaire examines parents' opinions on the importance of including children in extra-curricular activities within the educational institutions the children attend, and other institutions whose services they use. A Likert type scale was used to evaluate parents' opinions. The subjects expressed the degree of agreement with a given statement, ranging from 1 to 5 (1 meaning they do not agree with the statement at all, and 5 that they fully agree with the given statement). The collected data was processed by using the following measures of descriptive statistics: measures of central tendency (M, SD) and dispersion (f).

The t-test was used to investigate the differences between the parents based on their gender and permanent residence. One-way variance analysis was used to investigate the difference between the parents' assessment in relation to their level of education. All data were processed with the help of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 23).

Results and Discussion

Parents included in the sample have an average of two children, and 60% of parent participants (N=151) have only one child. Of the total number of children (N=354), 176 (49%) are boys and 178 (58%) girls.

On a daily basis, children spend up to 10h (f=32; 9%) in educational institutions. The highest number of children spend up to 8h (f=144; 42%) there. A slightly smaller number of children (f=111, 31%) spend 9h in educational institutions, while the rest (f=67; 18%) spend 4h to 7h there.

There are 198 children who participate in extra-curricular programmes: 56% (f=11) participate in extra-curricular programmes within the kindergarten, while 44% (f=87) participate in extra-curricular programmes organized in other institutions (outside the kindergarten) (Table 2). The level of inclusion for each child ranges from one to four concurrent activities. As seen in Table 2, older children (pre-schoolers) are more involved in activities, while younger children (the second and third child in the family) are less involved in programmes. The most common activity children are involved in is sports, which is more frequent among boys (f = 89; 59%). Based on the results of their research, Elling and Knoppers (2005) suggest more predictors that influence the selection of leisure activities, such as social environment, parents' education, and the child's personality.

Furthermore, based on the results of their respective research projects Ilišin, Marinović Bobinac, and Radin (2001), and Šiljković, Rajić, and Bertić (2007) also discuss the fact that boys are more frequently involved in sports activities. The differences in affinities for the selection of activities are apparent from childhood,

and it can be assumed that there is a traditional approach and gender inequality in the choice of and participation in individual activities.

Furthermore, when it comes to foreign language learning activities, the results of this study show similar involvement in terms of gender (boys: $f=29$, 48%; girls: $f=32$, 52%). The results of this research fit into a general social attitude that considers this activity to be socially acceptable for both genders. Based on the results of their research, Ilišin et al. (2001) point out that children of highly educated and employed parents residing in larger cities are more likely to take part in foreign language learning activities.

The results of our research show that girls are more commonly involved in creative ($f=12$; 98%) and drama programmes ($f=15$; 97%) than boys.

Table 2

Inclusion of children in extra-curricular activities in/outside the kindergarten

	Gender	Total	Inclusion	Type of programme / total in / out of kindergarten					
				In kindergarten/ out of kindergarten	Sports	Foreign language	Creative	Singing	Acting and drama
1st child in the family	Girls	123	82	49	22	9	1	11	14
	Boys	127	69	69	22	0	2	2	4
2nd child in the family	Girls	52	26	16	10	3	1	4	3
	Boys	43	17	19	6	3	0	2	3
3rd child in the family	Girls	3	3	1	0	2	1	0	0
	Boys	6	1	1	1	0	0	2	1

Childhood is a particularly intensive period for the development of children's socialization, which is why it is extremely important to provide children with opportunities to establish social contacts in their immediate surroundings and new situations. The inclusion of children in extra-curricular activities outside of kindergartens provides them with opportunities to practice social contacts and become more skilful in the process of socialization, which is confirmed by parents' assessment (fathers: $M=4.23$, $SD=1.00$; mothers: $M=4.15$, $SD=1.06$). Bungić and Barić (2009) emphasize the important role of the institutional environment which directs the individual towards the process of socialization. In this process, motivation is an important factor. As seen in Table 3, parents estimate that the inclusion of children in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten is important if it reflects the child's interest (fathers: $M=4.45$, $SD=.91$; mothers: $M=4.38$, $SD=.80$).

Furthermore, the question of optimal duration of digital media use at an early and preschool age (fathers: $M=3.07$, $SD=1.12$; mothers: $M=3.09$, $SD=1.21$), is raised in a significant portion of research dedicated to this issue. American researchers Roberts, Foehr, Rideont, and Brodie (1999) studied how much children use different media, starting from the thesis that the media are potentially important social agents. According to the research conducted by Gunter and McAleer (1997), children begin watching television at the age of two to three. Their research shows that children watch

TV out of boredom or habit, to escape from reality, for entertainment, or because they are driven by a desire to learn something. Clifford, Gunter, and McAleer (1995) discuss the new role of television as a surrogate mother, which is characteristic of younger parents. Following studies dealing with the issue of children and the media, it is important to note the key role of parents. There is almost no author who has dealt with the influence of media on children without emphasizing the crucial role of parental intervention.

Furthermore, considering the claim related to extra-curricular activities offered within kindergarten programmes, parents believe that the existing offer does not meet their needs (fathers: $M=2.86$, $SD=1.09$; mothers: $M=2.86$, $SD=1.22$), which we suppose motivates parents to include their children in some other shorter programmes outside kindergarten. It is obviously necessary to think about the need to introduce extra-curricular and other short programmes within the primary programme so as to meet the existing needs and interests of both children and parents. It is interesting to note that parents estimate that their children are not overburdened with extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten (fathers: $M=2.36$, $SD=1.15$; mothers: $M=2.12$, $SD=1.12$), which confirms parents' views on the need and importance of a more intensive inclusion of children into extra-curricular activities in different institutions. However, the institutionalization of childhood is manifested as increased social control, which results in children spending less and less time in free play (Bašić, 2011). Mihalić (2013) points out that the overwhelming daily schedule of early- and preschool-aged children, which includes many different activities, can lead to stress and overload. Furthermore, a study of the difference between parents' opinions on including their children in special programmes based on the parents' gender was carried out using a t-test (Table 3). Using the t-test for independent samples, no statistically significant difference in estimations was found when it comes to the aforementioned assertions. At the marginal level of significance ($p=.05$), a difference in parents' assessment, based on their gender, was identified for the assertion *Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to learn how to manage their time*. The fathers thought this assertion to be more significant than the mothers. The aforementioned results encourage deeper consideration of the reasons why fathers think about the importance of including children in extra-curricular activities. Fathers approach children in a different way; for example, when it comes to their relationships with boys, fathers are more inclined to encourage physical and intellectual abilities, while with girls, they are more focused on the development of femininity (Čudina-Obradović & Obradović, 2000; Lamb & Tamis-Lemonada, 2004; Parke, 1996). The aforementioned authors emphasize that spending time with their children and being involved in their care gives fathers a series of opportunities to express their feelings and raise their children.

The assumption that there is a difference in parents' opinions on including early- and preschool-aged children in extra-curricular activities based on the parents' gender can be discarded because no significant deviations were found in the sample.

Table 3

The difference between parents' opinion on the importance of including children in extra-curricular activities, based on parents' gender

	Gender	M	SD	t	p
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to structure their leisure time	Male	3.75	1.25	0.73	.46
	Female	3.63	1.17		
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to learn how to manage their time	Male	3.78	1.21	1.90	.05
	Female	3.45	1.25		
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to develop self-control	Male	3.78	1.21	1.20	.22
	Female	3.58	1.17		
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to develop their individual potentials	Male	4.12	1.09	0.31	.75
	Female	4.16	.96		
Children should be able to choose whether or not they wish to participate in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten	Male	3.91	1.18	0.17	.85
	Female	3.94	.97		
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten if they show special interests	Male	4.45	.91	0.57	.56
	Female	4.38	.80		
Children spend an optimal amount of time using digital media (TVs, tablets, smart phones)	Male	3.07	1.12	0.09	.92
	Female	3.09	1.21		
Inclusion in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten encourages the socialization of children	Male	4.23	1.00	0.53	.59
	Female	4.15	1.06		
Children are already overwhelmed by activities and should not be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten	Male	2.36	1.15	1.54	.12
	Female	2.12	1.12		
Extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten are not necessary because they turn parents into "transporters" from one activity to another	Male	2.52	1.27	0.78	.43
	Female	2.38	1.28		
The kindergarten provides a variety of activities so no extra-curricular activities are required for the optimal development of children	Male	2.87	1.09	0.05	.95
	Female	2.86	1.22		
Children persist in attending extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten if they fit their abilities	Male	3.81	.94	1.05	.29
	Female	3.94	.87		
	Gender	M	SD	t	p

Family time is more significant for child development than various extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten	Male	3.71	.97	0.80	.42
	Female	3.82	1.06		
The joint activities of children and parents in nature are more important for child development than extra-curricular, organized sports activities	Male	3.74	.98	1.10	.27
	Female	3.90	1.04		
Extra-curricular activities for children outside the kindergarten are not justifiable because they reduce their family time	Male	2.71	1.16	1.27	.20
	Female	2.50	1.23		
Children should be given time for self-organizing activities in the family environment	Male	4.01	.81	0.30	.75
	Female	3.98	.89		
Children should be allowed to feel "bored"	Male	3.55	1.19	0.77	.43
	Female	3.68	1.15		

A one-way variance analysis was used to investigate the existence of statistically significant differences in parents' opinions on including children in extra-curricular programmes, based on their level of education (Table 4). At the level of significance $p \leq .01$, a statistically significant difference between groups was found concerning the assertion *Children should be able to choose whether or not they wish to participate in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten* ($F=3.69$). At the level of significance $p \leq .05$, a statistically significant difference between the groups was found concerning the assertions *Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten if they show special interests* ($F=2.70$), *Children should be given time for self-organizing activities in the family environment* ($F=2.86$), and *Children should be allowed to feel "bored"* ($F=2.63$).

It is obvious that parents' awareness of the importance of implementing the educational process from an early age increases with their level of education (Table 4). The research conducted by Pećnik, Radočaj, and Tokić (2011) shows that the level of education of both the father and the mother plays a significant role in the educational and professional success of their children. The research conducted by Williams, Williams, Lopez, and Tayko (2000) among Filipino mothers obtained similar results, confirming that mothers with higher levels of education also have higher expectations of their children's cognitive and psychosocial development. The research specifically emphasizes the importance of the mother's education, since she (more than the father) is involved in the child's daily activities. The results show that families with small children are often burdened by parents' increased focus on child care as well as a more pronounced conflict between the work and family role, which is compensated by children's increased involvement in extra-curricular activities (Asmussen, Corlyon, Hauari, & La Placa, 2007).

By means of post-hoc analysis, which was carried out using the Bonferroni test, it was confirmed that parents' level of education does indeed have an impact on their

opinions regarding the inclusion of children in extra-curricular activities (Table 5). The level of parents' education can be crucial in decision-making and opinion-development concerning the previously mentioned problem (LeVine, Miller, & West, 1988).

The hypothesis concerning the correlation between parents' level of education and their opinions on including children in extra-curricular activities has been partially accepted. The results of this research show that parents with higher levels of education have positive opinions on the importance of including children in extra-curricular activities.

Table 4

The difference between parents' assessment of the importance of including children in extra-curricular activities, based on their level of education

	f	P
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to structure their leisure time	.97	.42
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to learn how to manage their time	.99	.41
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to develop self-control	1.62	.16
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to develop their individual potentials	2.17	.07
Children should be able to choose whether or not they wish to participate in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten	3.69	.01
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten if they show special interests	2.70	.03
Children spend an optimal amount of time using digital media (TVs, tablets, smart phones)	1.72	.14
Inclusion in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten encourages the socialization of children	1.32	.26
Children are already overwhelmed by activities and should not be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten	1.13	.33
Extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten are not necessary because they turn parents into "transporters" from one activity to another	1.04	.38
The kindergarten provides a variety of activities so no extra-curricular activities are required for the optimal development of children	.91	.45
Children persist in attending extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten if they fit their abilities	.63	.63
Family time is more significant for child development than various extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten	2.27	.06
The joint activities of children and parents in nature are more important for child development than extra-curricular, organized sports activities	.29	.88
Extra-curricular activities for children outside the kindergarten are not justifiable because they reduce their family time	1.50	.20
Children should be given time for self-organizing activities in the family environment	2.86	.02
Children should be allowed to feel "bored"	2.63	.03

Table 5

Post-hoc analysis in relation to independent variables of parents' level of education

Dependent variable	(I) level of education	(J) level of education	Difference (I-J)	P
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to develop self-control	UQ	CSE	-1.51	.09
		CE	-1.38	.19
		UE	-1.50	.10
		PGE	-1.77*	.04
	CSE	CE	.13	1.00
		UE	.01	1.00
		PGE	-.253	1.00
	CE	UE	-.11	1.00
		PGE	-.38	1.00
		PGE	-.27	1.00
Children should be able to choose whether or not they wish to participate in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten	UQ	CSE	-1.80*	.02
		CE	-1.44	.16
		UE	-1.47	.14
		PGE	-1.85*	.04
	CSE	CE	.35	.38
		UE	.33	.31
		PGE	-.04	1.00
	CE	UE	-.02	1.00
		PGE	-.40	1.00
		PGE	-.37	1.00
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten if they show special interests	UQ	CSE	-1.50*	.02
		CE	-1.38	.05
		UE	-1.33	.06
		PGE	-1.50*	.04
	CSE	CE	.11	1.00
		UE	.16	1.00
		PGE	.00	1.00
	CE	UE	.04	1.00
		PGE	-.11	1.00
		PGE	-.16	1.00
Children should be given time for self-organizing activities in the family environment	UQ	CSE	-.49	1.00
		CE	-.70	1.00
		UE	-.72	1.00
		PGE	-1.16	.31
	CSE	CE	-.21	1.00
		UE	-.23	.72
		PGE	-.67*	.04
	CE	UE	-.02	1.00
		PGE	-.46	.58
		PGE	-.44	.61

Note: Unqualified (UQ); Completed secondary education (CSE); College education (CE); University education (UE); Post-graduate education (PGE)

Furthermore, we tried to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in parents' opinions based on their place of residence (Table 6). At the level of significance $p \leq .05$, a statistically significant difference between the groups was found in relation to the optimal amount of time that children spend using digital media. There is a noticeable difference in parents' opinions between smaller towns and Zagreb ($t=2.32$; $p=.02$). Parents of children from smaller towns think that their children spend an optimal amount of time using digital media, whereas parents from Zagreb think that the amount of time spent using digital media is not adequate. Concerning the assertion related to children's persistence in attending extra-curricular activities, depending on their possibilities, at the level of significance $p \leq .05$, a statistically significant difference among opinions of parents from smaller towns and Zagreb ($t=2.25$; $p=.02$) was found. Parents of children from Zagreb think that it is necessary to pay attention to children's individual interests and abilities during their participation in individual activities. At the level of significance $p \leq .05$, a statistically significant difference was found between the groups concerning the assertion that children should be allowed to be bored ($T=2.37$; $p=.01$). Parents of children from smaller towns think that children should be exposed to activities, so they would not feel bored. Based on the results of their research, Janković, Ljubotina, and Blažeka (2009) point out that, according to parents' opinions, the number of activities children take up in their leisure time increases depending on the size of the town they live in.

According to the results of this study, it is possible to confirm the hypothesis about the correlation between the place of residence and parents' opinion on the importance of including early- and preschool-age children in extra-curricular activities.

Table 6

The difference between parents' opinions on the importance of including children in extra-curricular activities, considering their place of permanent residence

	Residence	M	SD	t	p
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to structure their leisure time	Smaller cities	3.81	1.12	1.57	.11
	City of Zagreb	3.56	1.23		
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to learn how to manage their time	Smaller cities	3.63	1.24	0.92	.35
	City of Zagreb	3.48	1.25		
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to develop self-control	Smaller cities	3.80	1.09	1.79	.07
	City of Zagreb	3.52	1.23		
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten to develop their individual potentials	Smaller cities	4.23	.84	1.12	.26
	City of Zagreb	4.09	1.09		
Children should be able to choose whether or not they wish to participate in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten	Smaller cities	3.97	1.04	0.49	.62
	City of Zagreb	3.90	1.03		

	Residence	M	SD	t	p																																																																																																
Children should be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten if they show special interests	Smaller cities	4.49	.68	1.35	.17																																																																																																
	City of Zagreb	4.34	.92			Children spend an optimal amount of time using digital media (TVs, tablets, smartphones)	Smaller cities	3.29	1.16	2.32	.02	City of Zagreb	2.94	1.18	Inclusion in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten encourages the socialization of children	Smaller cities	4.27	.89	1.21	.22	City of Zagreb	4.11	1.13	Children are already overwhelmed by activities and should not be included in extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten	Smaller cities	2.10	1.13	1.01	.31	City of Zagreb	2.24	1.13	Extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten are not necessary because they turn parents into "transporters" from one activity to another	Smaller cities	2.48	1.25	0.57	.56	City of Zagreb	2.38	1.28	The kindergarten provides a variety of activities so no extra-curricular activities are required for the optimal development of children	Smaller cities	2.82	1.22	0.53	.59	City of Zagreb	2.90	1.16	Children persist in attending extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten if they fit their abilities	Smaller cities	3.76	.91	2.25	.02	City of Zagreb	4.01	.86	Family time is more significant for child development than various extra-curricular activities outside the kindergarten	Smaller cities	3.78	1.02	0.19	.84	City of Zagreb	3.80	1.05	The joint activities of children and parents in nature are more important for child development than extra-curricular, organized sports activities	Smaller cities	3.77	.97	1.09	.27	City of Zagreb	3.91	1.06	Extra-curricular activities for children outside the kindergarten are not justifiable because they reduce their family time	Smaller cities	2.46	1.06	1.18	.23	City of Zagreb	2.63	1.29	Children should be given time for self-organizing activities in the family environment	Smaller cities	3.87	.93	1.74	.08	City of Zagreb	4.07	.81	Children should be allowed to feel "bored"	Smaller cities	3.44	1.22	2.37	.01
Children spend an optimal amount of time using digital media (TVs, tablets, smartphones)	Smaller cities	3.29	1.16	2.32	.02																																																																																																
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Conclusion

In the context of contemporary social and economic changes, the attitude towards the child and childhood has also changed, which has resulted in a changed approach and understanding of the education of early- and preschool-aged children. Research on childhood and child development within different institutions (kindergartens, schools, sports group clubs, and other institutions) shows that development is not something that exists within a child, but something that happens through his/her active participation in the life of his/her community, its culture, customs, and traditions (Slunjski, 2015). The results of this research point to a traditional division of activities based on gender. A greater participation of boys in sports activities is noticeable, whereas girls are more involved in cognitive activities. Identical gender engagement is visible in the process of foreign language learning, which is in line with the general way of thinking, as learning foreign languages at an early and preschool age can provide greater academic success in the future. Furthermore, as the results of this research show, parents with higher levels of education include their children in extra-curricular activities more often. Although it is beneficial for children to participate in activities, the time when a child is spontaneous, alone, or playing with other children or parents, is extremely important because spontaneous and free play provides the synergy for his/her future progress. Undermining the importance of a child's play has a negative effect on healthy development, forcing the child to grow up faster. If we force the child to grow up faster, s/he will lose his/her spontaneity and naturalness, and discard his/her natural need for play. Nowadays, with so many different activities available, parents have a special responsibility to provide appropriate support for their children in their choice of activities, and it is justified to talk about the quality of leisure time or leisure time culture, which needs to be stimulated and developed from the earliest age.

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Dijete i institucije: institucijsko djetinjstvo

Sažetak

Dijete rane i predškolske dobi svoje djetinjstvo provodi u ustanovama za odgoj i obrazovanje, međutim, njegovo se odrastanje odvija i u vremenu koje nije obuhvaćeno boravkom u nekoj od institucija. S obziromna to da se danas učestalo govori o institucionalizaciji djetinjstva, interes za provođenje kvalitetnog vremena koje se uz obiteljsku zajednicu sve više ostvaruje i u ustanovama ranog odgoja i u drugim izvanobiteljskim programima usmjerenim na dijete i njegovu dobrobit dobiva na važnosti. Upravo taj segment života pokazao se kao bitan prediktor u kvalitetnom razvoju svakog pojedinca. Participiranjem u različitim aktivnostima djetetu je omogućeno razvijanje osobnog sustava vrijednosti, kritičnog mišljenja, razvoja tolerancije i humanih etičkih vrijednosti. U ovom radu provedeno je istraživanje u dječjim vrtićima Grada Zagreba i dječjim vrtićima s područja Siska, Petrinje, Velike Gorice i Velike Mlake. 250 roditelja je u prigodno konstruiranom Upitniku o mišljenju roditelja o institucionaliziranosti djetinjstva, procjenjivalo važnost uključenosti djece u različite aktivnosti koje se ostvaruju u ustanovama ranog odgoja i drugim izvanobiteljskim programima.

Ključne riječi: igra; roditelji; slobodne aktivnosti; ustanove ranog odgoja i obrazovanja.