

The Role of Early Childhood Education in Developing Social Competence of Roma Children

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Abstract

This research is based on the assumption that the social competences acquired in early childhood serve as a prerequisite for a successful social interaction during primary education. This type of competence can be a challenge for children who come from marginalized groups that are very often isolated within the society.

The aim of the research was to determine whether a longer stay in the institution of early childhood and preschool education contributes to a higher development of social competences of Roma children. The research was conducted with primary school teachers evaluating the social competences of sixty Roma children in the second grade. Subsamples consisted of thirty children who had been included in the early childhood and preschool education system for two years, and thirty children who had been included in the system for one year. The results indicate that the participants do not exhibit those behaviours that point to social competence frequently enough. The research results do not indicate a statistically significant correlation between the children's social competence and their length of stay in an institution of early childhood and preschool education. A disadvantage of this research is that it is based on a subjective assessment.

Key words: *children; deprived environment; institutions of early childhood and preschool education; marginalized groups; social functioning.*

Introduction

Contemporary society assumes an individual in possession of certain knowledge and skills. The development of these skills takes place while growing up in different social environments. For most individuals, family is the most important community.

Institutions of early childhood and preschool education represent a specific means of education and socialization, which, due to the nature of family relationships, is impossible within the family. Thus, one can assume that, along with the family, kindergarten is a significant social environment for the optimal development of children. Early childhood and preschool education institutions have the task of connecting the family environment to which an individual belongs and his or her social environment. This role is especially important when it comes to children from socially deprived areas. Institutions should take responsibility for providing and supplementing those levels of educational process that the family is unable to provide. One of these areas is the development of social competences that are undeveloped in the family due to its social deprivation, but which contribute to the well-being of children. Templeton (2011) determines children's well-being on the assumption that children are healthy, that they have the ability to learn, and that they have developed social and emotional functioning in the social environment. Studies (Deming, 2015; Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015; Odom, McConnell, & Brown, 2008) which have dealt with functioning within the social environment have shown that social competence is a predictor of self-actualization and success.

Social competence can be defined as the ability to accept social standards as one's own. As Katz and McClellan (2005) emphasize, it is the children's ability to use incentives (both from the environment and their own) to successfully participate in the community and society to which they belong. Furthermore, Goleman (2008) argues that social competence is a part of emotional intelligence that involves managing one's own emotions, establishing and maintaining good relationships with other people, and being able to persuade and guide others, and to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner. Mužić (2009) views social competence as a social skill, adapted behaviour, and social acceptance, all of which are interrelated and intertwined. Han and Kampe (2006) point out that social competence is the ability to express emotions, understand one's own and others' needs and feelings, solve problems, cooperate, negotiate, understand social situations, and align one's own behaviour with socially acceptable behaviours. Schwartz (1999) argues that social competence refers to a range of abilities that influence the establishment, development, and maintenance of relationships in the environment in which the child is developing and growing. Consequently, social competence includes a positive attitude toward oneself and others. Social competence is a developmental construct that implies the child's upbringing in a social environment in which the children are confronted with increasingly complex developmental tasks, and in response to which they develop more and more complex forms of social behaviour (Jurčević Lozančić, 2016).

The child's first environment in which he or she learns basic forms of behaviour and which gives him or her the starting point in social development is the family. A positive family environment provides the child with basic physical, social, and psychological

conditions for adaptation throughout life. Experiences that the child will encounter in social situations within the family will serve as a pattern of behaviour and expectations in other social environments, thereby mapping family interaction (Katz & McClellan, 2005). The structure of the family and the styles of parental education within the family largely affect the child's social development. Research results by Baumrind (1973, as cited in Katz & McClellan, 2005) on parenting styles suggest that the general competence of children, particularly the social one, is enhanced by an authoritative parenting style. Intensive care and supervision as well as good communication and warmth are the basic features of this kind of parenting style. The said research has shown that socially competent children often come from such families. Research by Brophy-Herb, Lee, Nievar, and Stollak (2007) has shown that children who come from families exposed to different stressors have a less developed social competence. It is therefore justifiable to consider whether children from socially deprived families are able to develop social competence.

Bronfenbrenner's research (1979) emphasizes the importance of the child's environment and its influence on the child's development. In his theory of ecological systems, Bronfenbrenner puts the child into the centre of the system, while the layers of the child's environment spread around him, and affect his or her development in a more or less significant manner. Such interaction, significant for the child's development, encompasses the interactions of structures within one layer and the interactions between structures in different layers. By growing up, the child enters a wider social environment in which he or she exercises the adopted patterns of social behaviour in the family.

Preschool is the child's wider social environment that enables him or her to socialize. In preschool, the child learns how to behave in a peer group, learns to respect the rules, norms and values of behaviour, to satisfy and express their needs in an acceptable manner, respect others, wait for their turn, and agree and negotiate with others. Social behaviours developed by the child during this period of growing up will become the foundation for all their future relationships. It is therefore extremely important that the child is in an environment where he or she feels successful and capable, and that the environment stimulates the child. Research by Brophy-Herb, Lee, Nievar, and Stollak (2007) likewise points to the role played by institutions of early childhood and preschool education in promoting social competence, especially in children who come from a deprived family environment.

In this context, the kindergarten teacher plays a very important role in promoting children's social development. The kindergarten teacher is a person who can provide emotional support to the child, who recognizes and meets their needs. The kindergarten teacher directly or indirectly participates in establishing and maintaining relationships with others, encourages children's learning through various activities, and creates a stimulating learning environment. The quality of the relationship that the child establishes with the kindergarten teacher will also reflect on the quality

of relationships that the child will establish with their peers and other adults in the preschool institution. In addition to shaping the social environment, the kindergarten teacher plays a role in shaping space and materials that enable children to explore, develop, and learn. Contemporary research (Katz & McClellan, 2005; Petrović-Sočo, 2009; Slunjski, 2008) shows that the quality of space in which children stay is related to child development and learning. The space in which children are staying within a kindergarten group on a daily basis should enable freedom of movement, interaction, independence, and freedom of relationships (Jurčević Lozančić, 2016). Among the most important factors in shaping the environment, Katz and McClellan (2005) emphasize space, schedule, and the child's autonomy during play. The stimulating physical environment enables the child to actively participate and affirm their intellectual, social, emotional, and creative potentials (Jurčević Lozančić, 2016). The author also concludes that understanding and respecting the child's existing knowledge and development skills, creating and enriching the stimulating environment, and providing support to the child, represents the essence of the kindergarten teacher's approach. In addition, the ability of a kindergarten teacher to include parents, as the child's primary teachers, in the functioning of such an environment contributes to the child's social development.

The inclusion of parents in the life and work of a preschool institution implies active parental participation in the creation of conditions that will enable their child's quality development. In this regard, parents should be given an opportunity to make decisions concerning their child, they should be informed and encouraged to seek the best opportunities for their child's growth and development (Milanović, Stričević, Maleš, & Sekulić-Majurec, 2014). In such institutions, the parent is given a central place and becomes a partner in decision making and implementation, which ultimately contributes to the child's social development. Contemporary humanist approach in preschool institutions is based on the democratic pluralistic and partnership principles, as well as principles of respect and tolerance. This approach of educational institutions and the implementation of such principles in the daily work of preschool institutions will certainly contribute to the development of the child's social skills required for a successful participation in the society (Jurčević Lozančić, 2016). The development of children's social competences contributes to the mutual understanding and support that will establish a relationship in which parents will become more satisfied and confident in their parenting activities, and in which kindergarten teachers will be more open to new ideas about the child's needs and interests.

Early Childhood Education of Roma Children

The living conditions faced by the majority of Roma population in the Republic of Croatia are difficult due to high unemployment rate, inadequate coverage of the education system, inadequate housing, and the (un)regulated Roma settlements. Roma children of preschool age fall into the risk group most often due to poverty

(World Bank, 2016). This makes them one of the most vulnerable groups of preschool children in the Republic of Croatia. The reason for this is that they live in extremely unfavourable conditions, most often without access to basic communal services, such as electricity and water. The children in such families may be additionally vulnerable and live in dehumanizing conditions, without minimal personal space (Evans, 2004). Current research consistently points to the fact that children in low-income families are more likely to grow in a less educationally stimulating environment that promotes the development of cognitive and perceptive abilities of the child (Gershoff, Aber, Raver, & Lennon, 2007; Družić Ljubotina & Kletečki Radović, 2011; Pećnik, 2013). Children living in poor families and communities are deprived of most of the things that are necessary for child development, which is negatively reflected on their motivation for learning and education. Interesting data are related to educational toys, the purpose of which is precisely the development of the child's perceptual, motor, and cognitive skills. Namely, UNICEF's research has shown that almost two thirds of Roma children cannot afford such toys, and that more than two thirds of preschool Roma children do not have their own bed, toys, picture books, tricycles etc. (Šućur, Kletečki Radović, Družić Ljubotina, & Babić, 2015). Growing up in such a deprived environment can result in a hindered development of pre-reading skills and a general unsuccessfulness in the educational system (Brajković, 2016). Another important factor in children's upbringing and education is the level of parental education. Parents belonging to the Roma national minority do not have the appropriate abilities nor skills for the cognitive stimulation of their children. This means that they do not use activities that stimulate pre-reading and pre-mathematical skills (reading a picture book, interpreting the terms appropriate to their age) (Šućur et al., 2015).

Kindergarten teachers are significant factors of general education (Gruden & Gruden, 2006). Immediate work with Roma children of preschool age is a good opportunity for monitoring the children's learning process that enables us to discover the developmental resources of children in these processes (Kubelka, Pelt, & Vrbanec, 2013). The kindergarten as a living space and the place of play and learning of children and adults must be open and meet the needs of children, parents, as well as the cultural and social community in which it operates (Ivon, 2010). Therefore, the Early Childhood and Preschool Curriculum must be directed towards a shared learning, exploration of the existing conditions, and improvement of the educational practice and all of its participants. Among the Roma population, the most favourable models are the child-centred adaptive ones that reinforce integration in the multicultural context of early childhood and preschool education. The desirable effects of such a preschool curriculum model include acquiring knowledge, skills, abilities, promoting social integration (reducing inequality of the Roma and the majority population), and a successful long-term integration into the wider community. Ultimately, a successful and permanent integration into society allows Roma people to have a more equal social position and a more favourable social role.

Methodology

Based on the research (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004) indicating a positive correlation between the children's stay in kindergarten and their development, it is possible to assume that the length of stay in the kindergarten can reduce the differences between children coming from socially deprived families when compared to those who grow up in a more favourable family environment. Since the majority of research (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015; Santos, Vaughn, Peceguina, Daniel, & Shin, 2014) emphasize the social competence as a prerequisite for success in later life, the emphasis of this research was precisely on this type of competence. Given the particularity of the environment in which Roma children are raised, it was justified to determine whether there are differences in the social competence of Roma children depending on the length of involvement in the system of early childhood and preschool education.

Starting from the research question, the following hypotheses were formed:

- 1) There is a difference in the social competence of Roma children depending on the length of their involvement in the system of early childhood and preschool education.
- 2) It is assumed that there is a difference in the social competence of Roma children depending on the children's age.
- 3) It is assumed that there is a difference in the social competence of Roma children depending on the children's gender.

The research included sixty Roma children attending the second grade of primary school, 50% of whom (N=30) had been included in the early childhood and preschool education system for two years, and the other 50% (N=30) for one year. The sample encompasses the entire population of second graders of Orehovica Primary School, where the research was conducted. The average age of respondents was 8 years and 6 months (SD=0.65), the youngest participant being 8 years old and the oldest one 10. This age differs from the age of the dominant population of children of second graders in the Republic of Croatia since the usual age of children starting the second grade is between 7 years and 5 months and 8 years and 4 months of age. The reason for such a distribution might be the very postponement of starting school due to delays in different aspects of development.

The research was conducted according to the ethical guidelines for conducting research involving children of the University of Zagreb and the Faculty of Teacher Education. It is possible that the presence of researchers would influence the children's functioning; therefore, the teachers evaluated the social competence of children with the help of a questionnaire. To ensure, to a certain extent, the objectivity of the persons who evaluated the children's social competence, the evaluation was conducted in the second grade, assuming that teachers had time to meet the respondents. Three teachers who taught classes to Roma children conducted the evaluation. The purpose of the research and the evaluation procedure were explained in detail to the teachers.

Research results were analysed using the statistical package SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Within the framework of processing the results with the help of descriptive statistical measures, the result of the evaluation of the social competence scale was analysed. The t-test was used to determine the significance of evaluation by subsamples (length of stay in the system of early childhood and preschool education, and gender). The relationship between the evaluation and the children's age was researched with the help of a one-way variance analysis. The age of children was set in 3 categories: 8, 9, and 10 years.

Instrument

For research purposes, a questionnaire for measuring the social competence was used, adapted to the Learning Objectives Catalogue from Bern Canton. The questionnaire was used in similar research in the Republic of Croatia, which allows for a triangulation of results (Galinec & Višnjić Jevtić, 2016; Glavina & Višnjić Jevtić, 2010; Sindik, Šunjić, Čosić, & Budisavljević, 2013).

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part contained questions related to independent variables (age, gender, and the length of stay in the system of early childhood and preschool education). The second part of the questionnaire consisted of an evaluation scale of the social competence of children in their early years and preschool children. The evaluation scale consisted of twenty statements describing behaviours and attitudes related to social competence. Teachers evaluated the frequency of behaviour of children in relation to the statements by means of a five-degree scale. Possible frequency evaluations are defined as never, rarely (less than 30% of time), sometimes (50% of the time), often (more than 70% of time), and always.

By using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, a high reliability of the instrument ($\alpha=.93$) was established. This reliability corresponds to the reliability of the instrument ($\alpha=.953$) in the research by Sindik, Šunjić, Čosić, and Budisavljević (2013).

Results and Discussion

Descriptive evaluation indicators (Table 1) show that the respondents do not exhibit prosocial behaviour frequently enough, which would lead to a developed social competence. Such evaluation may indicate the teachers' unwillingness to evaluate the absence or presence of certain behaviours, thereby opting for the average value (*sometimes*). It is also possible that teachers do not have the opportunity to see the respondents during unregulated interactions with other children, as unregulated interactions mainly take place outside the class, i.e. before/after classes when the teacher is not present. The lowest evaluation was given to the statement referring to communication with individuals speaking in another language ($M=2.58$; $SD=1.08$). Since this is a class consisting mainly of Roma population, it is possible that the respondents do not have the opportunity to communicate more often with children who speak another language. Teachers estimate that the relative majority of children

($f=26$) often or always feel as part of a group, which can be explained by means of belonging to a particular class community.

Table 1

Descriptive evaluation indicators in relation to statements describing prosocial behaviour

Statements	M	SD
Views oneself as a part of the group	3.33	0.84
Adheres to simple rules of conversation	3.28	0.83
Adheres to rules of common life	3.25	1.02
Recognizes one's own feelings	3.22	1.03
Recognizes others' feelings	3.15	0.94
Listens to the speaker	3.13	0.93
If necessary, renounces one's own requirements	3.10	0.95
Is attentive to living beings	3.08	1.01
Acknowledges others' personal space	3.08	0.91
Acknowledges others' opinion	3.07	0.99
Accepts differences	3.07	0.92
Accepts compromise	3.05	0.96
Renounces violence	2.97	1.22
Helps in joint decision making	2.97	1.09
Knows values of common life	2.97	1.08
Is open in approaching others	2.93	0.95
Is interested in various life situations	2.85	1.10
Mediates conflict situations	2.82	1.13
Can be assertive	2.68	1.23
Communicates with children speaking in another language	2.58	1.08

No statistically significant difference between the length of stay in the system of early childhood and preschool education and the score on the scale of social competence ($t=-0.88$; $df=58$; $p=.38$) was determined. A statistically significant difference was found in relation to individual statements. The research has shown that there is a statistically significant difference ($p\leq.05$) concerning the evaluation of statements *Adheres to simple rules of conversation* ($t=-2.56$; $df=58$) and *Recognizes one's feelings* ($t=-2.07$; $df=58$) in favour of the respondents who spent two years in institutions of early childhood and preschool education. At the same time, a statistically significant difference ($p\leq.05$) was found in the evaluation referring to the statement *Communicates with children speaking in another language* ($t=-2.07$; $df=58$), whereby a lower evaluation is present in children who stayed in institutions of early childhood and preschool education for two years. Given that those individuals come from the community that is most commonly in contact with members of the same community, it is possible that the children have no opportunity to communicate with children who speak the language of the majority population. Equally, at the age of nine, the majority of children form peer groups in which the choice rests on common interests, thus creating a gap between the Roma national minority and the majority population. Although it is assumed that staying in early childhood and preschool institutions contributes to better success of children at a later age, it seems that in the examples of children

coming from a deprived environment, the impact of the family and the community in which the child grows is as important/more important. Research by Višnjić Jevtić and Glavina (2015) shows that children, after returning to kindergarten following a two-month summer break, exhibit weaker language and social results compared to those before the summer. This may indicate the need for maintaining continuity in children coming from socially deprived environments. Han (2013) points out that the role of kindergarten teachers is crucial in the development of social competences of children with less developed social skills, which confirms the need for continuity of education and the *permanence* of an adult who can take on the role of a role model from whom children learn social skills.

Despite the assumptions that girls have a more developed social competence than boys, no statistically significant differences in the evaluation of social competence by the respondents' gender were found. Earlier research (Glavina & Višnjić Jevtić, 2010; Walker, 2005) also shows that there is no statistically significant difference in the social competence between boys and girls. Statistically significant differences were found in relation to individual statements (Table 2) describing prosocial behaviour. Teachers have estimated that boys recognize their feelings better ($t=2.14$; $df=58$; $p\leq.05$) and are better mediators in conflict situations ($t=2.15$; $df=58$; $p\leq.05$). Likewise, they estimated that boys are more assertive than girls ($t=3.58$; $df=58$; $p\leq.01$). All these behaviours can be interpreted as fending for themselves, which can be associated with the characteristics of culture in which this behaviour is expected of boys. Smith (1997) points out the gender-based division into expected and desirable behaviours, and states that in Roma culture it is expected from boys, as opposed to girls, to take care of themselves as early as from preschool age. The results of this research exhibit a higher frequency of behaviours related to caring for others ($t=-2.62$; $df=58$; $p\leq.05$), nonviolent resolution of conflict situations ($t=-4.34$; $df=58$; $p\leq.01$), accepting compromise ($t=-2.74$; $df=58$; $p\leq.01$), listening to others ($t=-2.83$; $df=58$; $p\leq.01$), and renouncing one's own requirements ($t=-2.67$; $df=58$; $p\leq.01$) in girls. These are in agreement with Smith's research (1997) that has shown that girls are expected to act as carers from the earliest age.

Despite the assumptions based on Jones, Greenberg, and Crowley's research (2015) that older children would exhibit socially desirable behaviours more frequently, the one-way analysis of variance ($F=1.08$; $p=.364$) has not determined a statistically significant difference in the evaluation depending on the age of respondents set in 3 categories.

In researching the relation between age, gender, and the length of stay in institutions of early childhood and preschool education and social competence, no statistically significant correlation between the variables was found. Statistically significant correlations were observed between the statements describing prosocial behaviour, and the independent variables (Table 3). At the significance level of $p\leq.05$, a correlation was established ($r=.26$) between the age and the recognition of others' feelings. A

Table 2

Differences in evaluation of statements by the respondents' gender

	t	df	p
Recognizes one's own feelings	2.32	58	.02*
Is attentive to living beings	-2.62	58	.01*
Is open in approaching others	1.71	58	.09
Is interested in various life situations	0.46	58	.65
Mediates conflict situations	2.15	58	.04*
Accepts differences	-1.49	58	.14
Renounces violence	-4.34	58	.00**
Accepts compromise	-2.74	58	.01**
Acknowledges others' opinion	-2.83	58	.01**
Helps in joint decision making	1.72	58	.09
If necessary, renounces one's own requirements	-2.67	58	.01**
Adheres to simple rules of conversation	-0.11	58	.91
Recognizes others' feelings	-0.26	58	.80
Communicates with children speaking in another language	1.40	58	.17
Listens to the speaker	-0.11	58	.91
Knows values of common life	0.27	58	.79
Views oneself as a part of the group	0.31	58	.76
Acknowledges others' personal space	-1.07	58	.29
Can be assertive	3.58	58	.00**
Adheres to rules of common life	-1.35	58	.18

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

statistically significant ($p \leq .05$) correlation was determined between the length of stay in the institution of early childhood and preschool education and recognizing one's own feelings ($r = .32$), as well as adherence to simple rules of conversation ($r = .26$). For nearly half of the statements describing socially desirable behaviour, a statistically significant correlation has been determined between the statements and the children's gender.

Despite the research (Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014) that dealt with the importance of involving Roma children in early childhood and preschool education institutions, there is a lack of systematic research into the development of Roma children in an inclusive environment. The disadvantage of this research is that teachers evaluated the frequency of behaviours that can determine social competence. It can be assumed that the evaluations departed from the objective state depending on the teacher's evaluation of the concept of frequency, which can be particularly problematic concerning the term *sometimes*. It is also possible that teachers were more inclined to give a more positive evaluation to behaviours that are desirable in class. Social interactions are most common in peer groups; therefore, it is possible that the teachers did not have a complete insight into the behaviour they evaluated.

Table 3

Correlation between Evaluation of Statements Describing Prosocial Behaviour and Independent Variables

Statements		Gender	Age	Length of stay
Recognizes one's own feelings	r	-.29*	.05	.32*
	p	.02	.69	.01
Is attentive to living beings	r	.33*	.01	.14
	p	.01	.95	.29
Is open in approaching others	r	-.22	-.08	.15
	p	.09	.55	.25
Is interested in various life situations	r	-.06	.11	-.18
	p	.65	.39	.17
Mediates conflict situations	r	-.27*	.23	.10
	p	.04	.08	.46
Accepts differences	r	.19	-.03	.25
	p	.14	.81	.06
Renounces violence	r	.50**	-.13	-.02
	p	.00	.34	.86
Accepts compromise	r	.34**	-.02	.22
	p	.01	.90	.09
Respects others' opinion	r	.35**	-.00	.16
	p	.01	.98	.22
Helps in joint decision making	r	-.22	.07	.07
	p	.09	.58	.61
If necessary, renounces one's own requirements	r	.33**	.16	.20
	p	.01	.23	.13
Adheres to simple rules of conversation	r	.01	.16	.26*
	p	.91	.23	.04
Recognizes others' feelings	r	.03	.26*	-.04
	p	.80	.05	.76
Communicates with children speaking in another language	r	-.18	.08	-.25
	p	.17	.54	.06
Listens to the speaker	r	.02	.11	-.02
	p	.91	.43	.88
Knows values of common life	r	-.04	.15	-.12
	p	.79	.25	.35
Views oneself as a part of the group	r	-.04	.14	-.01
	p	.76	.30	.92
Acknowledges others' personal space	r	.14	-.02	.12
	p	.29	.89	.37
Can be assertive	r	-.35**	.13	.05
	p	.01	.32	.71
Adheres to rules of common life	r	.17	.15	.22
	p	.18	.24	.10

*p≤.05, ** p≤.01

Conclusion

The conducted research was based on the assumption that a longer stay in early childhood and preschool institutions has a positive correlation with the social competence of children, irrespective of their socioeconomic environment. The results of the research have shown that there was no statistically significant difference between the period spent in the system of early childhood and preschool education and the children's social competence. In the same manner, no statistically significant correlation between the age and gender of children and their social competence was determined. Based on these results, the starting hypotheses are abandoned.

This research involved the population of children in a single community; therefore, it is impossible to generalize the research findings. The research referred to only one aspect of social functioning – the one in the peer community in relation to the total amount of time spent in the system of early childhood and preschool education. As far as children from marginalized social groups are concerned, it would be legitimate to repeat the research, keeping in mind the familial and social predictors.

The family, regardless of socioeconomic status or family functioning, is the primary community in which the child develops. Educational institutions should assume responsibility for strengthening the pedagogical competences of parents coming from marginalized groups with the aim of achieving educational continuity. The joint activities of institutions and families could help reduce the differences between children, regardless of their social, economic, national, or cultural origin.

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Uloga ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja u razvoju socijalne kompetencije romske djece

Sažetak

Istraživanje se temelji na pretpostavci da socijalna kompetencija stečena u ranom djetinjstvu služi kao preduvjet uspješnih društvenih interakcija tijekom osnovnog obrazovanja. Ta vrsta kompetencije može biti izazov za djecu koja dolaze iz marginaliziranih skupina koje su vrlo često izolirane unutar društva.

Cilj istraživanja bio je utvrditi postoji li povezanost duljine boravka u ustanovi ranog i predškolskog odgoja i razvoja socijalnih kompetencija romske djece. Istraživanje je provedeno s učiteljima osnovnih škola koji su procjenjivali socijalnu kompetenciju šezdeset romske djece u drugom razredu. Poduzorcima su uključivali tridesetero djece koja su bila uključena u sustav ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja dvije godine i tridesetero djece koja su bila uključena u sustav ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja godinu dana. Rezultati upućuju na to da sudionici često ne pokazuju ona ponašanja koja upućuju na socijalnu kompetenciju. Rezultati istraživanja ne ukazuju na statistički značajnu povezanost između socijalne kompetencije djece i njihove dužine boravka u ustanovi ranog i predškolskog odgoja.

Ključne riječi: *deprivirano okruženje; djeca; marginalizirane skupine; socijalno funkcioniranje; ustanove ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja.*