

## **PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE ON FACTORS OF INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING IMPORTANT FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Received: 5 July 2021  
Accepted: 19 February 2022

*The theoretical framework of the study is represented by two concepts: intergenerational learning and professional development. Quantitative research conducted in 2021 on a sample of 108 preschool teachers of preschool institutions in the Banja Luka region (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Srpska) aimed to examine the perspective of preschool teachers on the factors of intergenerational learning important for their own professional development. Using factor analysis (Principal component analysis, PCA), three factors of intergenerational learning were singled out from the perspective of preschool teachers, and they are: professional cooperation and personal growth; inclusion of the elderly in educational work and humanities education; prejudices and stereotypes. The findings indicate that preschool teachers strongly recognize intergenerational learning in the context of personal growth, work and career, but also notice the humane and inclusive nature of intergenerational cooperation, while not prone to intergenerational stereotypes and prejudices against colleagues from other generations, and that encouraging professional cooperation, and the promotion and support of the inclusion of the elderly can contribute to the reduction of intergenerational conflicts and prejudices.*

**Keywords:** *preschool teacher, professional cooperation, humanities education, prejudices and stereotypes*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The complexity of the educational profession and the professional development of preschool teachers, in order to ensure the quality of educational work, requires continuous education and lifelong learning of professionals (Blanuša Trošelj *et al.*, 2020, 70–71; Vujičić and Čamber Tambolaš, 2017, 1584) and their work on themselves due to continuous strengthening of professional identity in the community (Barenthien *et al.*, 2020; Kokanović, 2019, 59; Retar and Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2017; Vujičić *et al.*, 2015, 49–60) through all forms of permanent professional development of preschool teachers as a dynamic and open process, the realization of which has a historical character (Lukaš, 2020, 81; Skupnjak and Tot, 2019, 309; Sheridan *et al.*, 2009).

Considering the models of adult learning through professional development, Vizek Vidović and Vlahović Štetić (2007, 283–307) notice differences in the context of life span in the representation of wisdom, memory, expertise, fluid and crystallized intelligence, while professional experience and reflection are closely related.

The preschool teacher in a specific educational practice, usually with other professionals within the institution, seeks to identify, critically consider and improve strategies and practical circumstances for optimal child development (Šagud, 2011, 266), and the professional environment allows joint reflection and formation of a common perspective of professionals. Researches on intergenerational learning of preschool teachers indicate that they adopt ICT skills from the younger ones, and community building, self-regulation from the older ones. Attitudes about learning and teaching were learned and built from the younger and older (Geeraerts *et al.*, 2018, 491–492). Also, Brückner and Navotny (2017, 410–415) found that intergenerational learning takes place among preschool teachers in various forms of interaction. Practical experiences indicate that while older people more often possess wisdom and knowledge gained through experience, younger people more often follow modern trends and information technologies

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<sup>1</sup> The paper was created within the scientific research project *Education for Sustainable Development at an Early Age and Intergenerational Learning* co-financed by the Ministry of Scientific and Technological Development, Higher Education and Information Society, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina, decision number 19.032 / 961-93 / 19.

(Ličen, 2021, 26–54), and each of them, from its own angle, can contribute to forming a common perspective of professionals, and we can rightfully talk about the intergenerational learning of preschool teachers. The perspective of intergenerational learning is important because of demographic change. In this regard, the theoretical framework of the work is represented by two concepts – in addition to the concept of professional development, there is the concept of intergenerational learning. Ličen (2021, 6) notes that intergenerational learning should be understood primarily as a potential for the collaborative practice of different generations in order to exchange information, knowledge, experiences, values, stories, and joint development of practices that increase mutual understanding in places where people live and work and thus contribute cohesiveness and the development of a learning community. Intergenerational learning and education have been rapidly spreading in various educational environments over the last 20 years (Kaplan *et al.*, 2020, 1–10; Giraudeau and Baily, 2019, 370–376; Mannion, 2016, 310), including preschool environments, which contributes to community cohesiveness and reducing stereotypes about the elderly (Kump and Jelenc Krašovec, 2014, 170), as well as improving intergenerational dialogue through overcoming intergenerational conflicts. Researches on intergenerational learning and its application indicate positive effects for all generations involved (Gallagher and Fitzpatrick, 2018, 42; Kump and Jelenc Krašovec, 2014, 170). Researches on the intergenerational learning of preschool teachers are of recent date and primarily relate to teachers and schools. We did not come across any research that deals with the perspective of preschool teachers on intergenerational learning, so we wanted to address this issue. Starting from the above findings, we wanted to examine the perception of preschool teachers about the place that intergenerational learning occupies for them in the context of their own professional development during their working life in kindergarten.

## Method

The aim of this empirical quantitative study is to examine more closely the perspective of preschool teachers on the factors of intergenerational learning during their professional development.

The technique that was used to collect relevant research data is scaling, and it was realized in April 2021. We acknowledged ethical considerations. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous.

The sample is appropriate and was consisted of 108 preschool teachers employed in public and private preschool institutions in the Banja Luka region. After the initial analysis, three units of the sample were excluded due to extreme results (outliers) that significantly affected the appearance of the obtained distributions, so that in the end we conducted statistical analyzes on a sample of 105 respondents. The age of the educators in the sample ranged from 24 to 65 years ( $M = 42.18$ ,  $SD = 11.70$ ;  $Md = 43$ ). The surveyed preschool teachers work in preschool institutions on average for 14.16 years ( $SD = 11.27$ ;  $Md = 12$ ). However, given the topic of our research, we consider it important to note that the modal value for the variable service life is 1 because the sample consists of 20 respondents or 18.5% with only one year of service. The survey was conducted on a voluntary basis and anonymously in preschool institutions where preschool teachers are employed.

The research instrument applied in the research was independently created. It contains a five-point Likert-type scaler. It contained 42 items in the first version. After determining the metric characteristics, the scaler was reduced to 29 items. During the construction of the scaler, the authors operationalized intergenerational learning based on the existing theoretical foundations of this construct (Kaplan *et al.*, 2020; Martins *et al.*, 2019; Sanchez *et al.*, 2018; Gallagher and Fitzpatrick, 2017). The final version of the scaler shows a high level of internal consistency as evidenced by the values of the established Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. At the level of the complete scale Cronbach's Alpha, the coefficient is  $\alpha = .902$ , and the following values were determined by factors: the first factor  $\alpha = .924$ ; the second factor  $\alpha = .910$  and the third factor  $\alpha = .830$ . These values indicate a high degree of internal consistency of our research instrument. Corrected item total correlations range from 0.36 to 0.72.

Principal Component Analysis using the Varimax factor rotation method was used in the data analysis. In addition to the mentioned statistical procedures, the analysis of descriptive statistical indicators of selected components and correlation analysis was performed. Statistical analyzes were performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 20 statistical

package. In addition, Monte Carlo PCA for Parallel Analysis was used to determine the number of factors by the parallel analysis procedure. A more detailed elaboration on the applied factor analysis procedures is explained in the next chapter.

## Results and Discussion

Since the aim of our research was to examine the perspectives of preschool teachers on intergenerational learning during their own professional development, in order to identify the basic factors of intergenerational learning that preschool teachers recognize as important, we applied explanatory factor analysis, and within it the method of principal components analysis. In that way, we tried to additionally look at and specify this construct from the point of view of the participants in learning – preschool teachers. As can be seen from the data listed in Table 1, the prerequisites for conducting a factor analysis are met, ie the correlation matrix meets all the conditions to undergo a factor analysis. Namely, the value of the KMO sampling adequacy test is .769, which can be considered a medium, ie, good / very good level of this condition (Hair, *et al.*, 2014, 102; Kaiser, Rice, 1974, according to Fulgosi, 1988, 277). The Bartlett test of sphericity is also statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 2274.202$ ;  $p < .001$ ), which indicates that it is necessary to reject the null hypothesis according to which there are no correlations between the included variables.

**Table 1.** Assumptions of data adequacy for factor analysis

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.769
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2274.202
	Degrees of freedom	406
	Statistical significance	.000

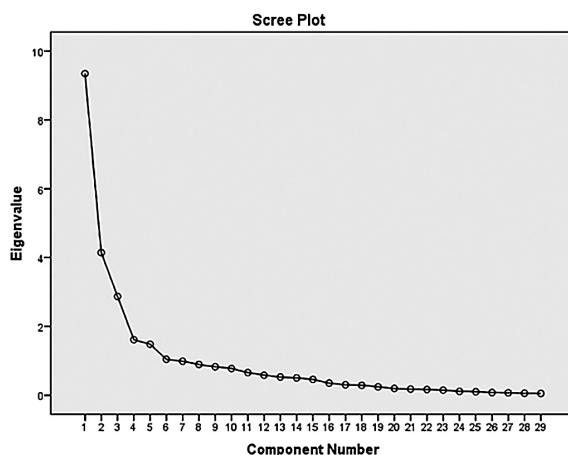
Consideration of the number of factors was performed taking into account several criteria (Table 2 and Graph 1). The Kaiser-Gutmann criterion indicates six factors whose eigenvalue is above one. However, Catell's Scree test and Horn's parallel analysis suggest three factor so-

lution retention that explains 56.41% of the total variance. Implicitly, the Kaiser-Gutmann criterion also supports such a solution, bearing in mind the monotonic decrease in the percentage of explained variance after the third factor. The criterion of factor interpretability also proved to be the most suitable in the case of a three-factor solution.

**Table 2.** Total explained variance and results of parallel analysis

Factor	Initial eigenvalues (G-K criterion)			Horn's parallel analysis *		Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	$\lambda$	Percentage of variance	Cumulative percentage of variance	Random eigenvalues	Standard deviation	$\lambda$	Percentage of variance	Cumulative percentage of variance
1	9.347	32.232	32.232	2.183	.099	8.196	28.261	28.261
2	4.141	14.279	46.511	1.992	.081	4.573	15.769	44.030
3	2.870	9.895	56.406	1.848	.066	3.589	12.376	56.406
4	1.610	5.551	61.957	1.737	.067			
5	1.480	5.102	67.059	1.622	.054			
6	1.040	3.586	70.645	1.537	.044			

\* The number of items: 29; the number of respondents: 108; the number of replications: 100.



**Graph 1.** Number of factors according to Catell's Scree test

Furthermore, we show in Table 3 the rotated matrix of the factor structure within which the items are sorted by saturation size. In addition to the Varimax rotation, oblique rotations (Oblimin and Promax) were performed, but, despite very similar factor solutions, a decision was made to keep the option with the Varimax rotation. The reason for such a decision stemmed from the fact that Varimax provides the purest factor solution with only two secondary saturations exceeding 0.30 (see Table 3). From this table, we omitted saturations less than 0.30 due to better visibility and clearer insight into the affiliation of individual items to each of the three extracted factors. Analysis of the content of items and their saturation by factors resulted in the naming of the following three factors:

- First factor: professional cooperation and personal growth;
- The second factor: inclusion of the elderly in educational work and humanistic education;
- The third factor: prejudices and stereotypes.

**Table 3.** Rotated factor structure matrix (Varimax)

Items	Components		
	1	2	3
The joint action and learning of people of different generations have a positive effect on establishing a balance between theoretical and experiential (practical) knowledge.	.837		
Intergenerational learning programs and projects are desirable for the professional development of preschool teachers.	.789		
Collaboration with preschool teachers of different generations allows us to learn from each other.	.757		
For me, cooperation with preschool teachers of other generations (who are more years older and/or younger than me) is interesting and stimulating because there is an exchange of experiences, knowledge, and views of the world and all this has a positive impact on my profession.	.743		

Intergenerational projects enable better cooperation of the preschool institution with the family and the local community.	.722		
I like to work with colleagues who are much older and/or younger than me.	.713		
Intergenerational learning enables more successful coping with challenges and overcoming problems in the daily work of preschool teachers.	.711		
I learned a lot from my older fellow preschool teachers.	.703		
In the context of lifelong learning, useful learning through the cooperation of people of different generations is also desirable.	.696		
People develop and shape themselves in a social context, so communication and connection between different generations are important.	.678		-.383
Intergenerational learning involves the mutual transfer of knowledge and experience between different generations.	.666		
For the preservation of the environment, health and culture, but also for professional development, the action of people of different generations through the transfer of knowledge and dialogue between generations is important.	.640		
The development of science and technology enables new knowledge and insights that we can acquire through the joint action of people of different generations (eg environmental knowledge, computer literacy, inclusion).	.598		
Older educators can learn and develop their competencies from younger educators, because younger educators keep up with the times, modern initiatives, media literacy.	.589		
Intergenerational learning enables the shaping of new, innovative practices.	.585		
Intergenerational learning is a practice that brings together people of different ages to learn together and achieve mutual understanding.	.557		



In the context of kindergarten, intergenerational learning takes place occasionally and spontaneously, as part of living and working together, but it can also be planned and organized in advance.	.556		
I want to develop new forms of intergenerational cooperation in which preschoolers and the elderly will participate.		.882	
Involving elderly people in educational work in kindergarten for children and me is a field of intergenerational dialogue and learning.		.878	
I support visits to nursing homes or visits to some other organizations that bring together retirees.		.856	
The organization of activities with grandmothers and grandfathers has great educational values (in relation to tradition, culture, religion, traditional games, cuisine, art, etc.).		.856	
In the educational work of the preschool institution, it is necessary to realize in a wider scope different intergenerational approaches and models.		.769	
I want to achieve richer intergenerational cooperation.		.703	
There are frequent disagreements with colleagues due to conflicts between generations that do not grow into tolerance and understanding and interfere with communication.			.889
Older preschool teachers underestimate their younger colleagues.			.830
Due to the fear from their older colleagues, young preschool teachers are not enough cooperative.			.676
Older preschool teachers are conservative and traditional and stifle the innovation of younger colleagues.		-.463	.668
Younger preschool teachers do not show respect and do not respect the rich professional experience of older colleagues.			.651
Working with colleagues of other generations is frustrating for me because we don't have the same language, worldview, and upbringing.			.550

The first factor (Table 3) – Professional Cooperation and Personal Growth – explains 28.26% of the total variance. Considering that all three factors explain 56.41% of the total variance, it can be noticed that this factor explains the variance more than the other two together, ie. it explains it most dominantly. We notice that the factor saturations within the first factor range from 0.556 to 0.837, and that we have high saturations on the other two factors, which can be considered an indicator of the quality factor structure of the instrument. In addition, we can state that the factor saturations are statistically significant because they are higher than the value of 0.512. Namely, Stevens (2002) states the criterion according to which in a sample of 100 respondents all factor saturations should be greater than the value of 0.512, which is obviously satisfied in our case.

Based on the obtained results, an isolated and defined factor, we can conclude that the educators from the sample primarily recognize intergenerational learning in cooperation with colleagues, and see the result in professional and personal development. Today it is a known fact that human learning and development, professional learning and professional development occur in all periods of life and career, which is also true for preschool teachers (Jurčević Lozančić, 2015; Blanuša Trošelj *et al.*, 2020, 73), and a person builds his knowledge biographically, ie through all life and professional events (occasionally, accidentally, experientially) and with the help of all organized educational events (formal and informal) in the context of professional and socio-cultural development (Ličen, 2020, 26–28). In this way, networks of knowledge, skills, values, and competencies are created that make up subjective “knowledge systems”, and educators notice that the exchange of experiences and worldviews of colleagues of different generations in preschool institutions contributes to the balance between theoretical and experiential knowledge. Recognizing the importance of reflective practice for the professional development of educators (Pintar, 2020, 75–103), all assumptions that contribute to the connection of theory and practice are very important, and some of them, recognized by preschool teachers, are intergenerational cooperation and learning of professionals involved in the educational process.

The second factor (Table 3) – The inclusion of the elderly in educational work and humanities education – explains 15.77% of the total

variance. The approach to lifelong learning in the context of meeting generations can be based on neoliberal utility *at work and for work* (represented in the first isolated factor) but also exclusively humanistic, which allows the integration of the elderly population into everyday social flows that is not materially viable (represented in the second isolated factor). Changes in the modern way of life that are increasingly affecting the alienation and exclusion of the third age people (which are still vital and can contribute to social life) impose a pronounced need for intergenerational cooperation for this part of the population (Kaplan *et al.*, 2020, 1–14) which enables active aging. Through another isolated factor, preschool teachers notice that people of the third age people can give their contribution by engaging in regular educational work and cooperation with the kindergarten community, and they consider it desirable. Older people develop their relational and communicative skills, knowledge of the community in which they live, if they are included in different groups in everyday life, in more or less organized social environments. The successful cooperation between kindergartens and the elderly is indicated by numerous projects, among which is the recognizable TOY (Kernan and Cortelessi, 2020). Smrke (2019, 41–43) researched the cooperation between kindergartens and nursing homes and determined, based on the statements of preschool teachers, that all involved benefit from positive attitudes about intergenerational learning and cooperation. Preschool teachers from our sample also had markedly positive attitudes regarding intergenerational learning and cooperation of preschool institutions with the third age people (Table 4, second factor).

Based on the selected factors, it can be noticed that preschool teachers recognize the dual nature of intergenerational learning. While in the first approach to intergenerational learning in the preschool teachers' answers (the first factor) the emphasis is on work and learning for work (career), in the second approach (the second factor) the emphasis is on learning to be, ie. on learning to achieve well-being, as recognized by researches on active aging and well-being (Walker and Zaidi, 2019, 32–33).

The third factor – Prejudices and stereotypes – explains 12.38% of the total variance. It refers to potential difficulties in intergenerational cooperation (Table 3). Intergenerational dialogue is associated

with differences such as different knowledge, experiences, worldviews, and ways of thinking about what they are talking about which can affect the conflict of generations and the formation of intergenerational prejudices and stereotypes.

Various studies of intergenerational learning (Brücknerová and Novotny, 2017, 398; Holyoke and Larson, 2009, 12; Lancaster and Stillman, 2010, 10–35) find that there are differences between generations in experiences, attitudes, preferences, social, emotional, media and other competencies, worldwide look, etc., which can positively affect learning, work, and cooperation and contribute to intergenerational dialogue and solidarity, but can also be the cause of numerous disagreements and conflicts, and the formation of prejudices. Generation is a construct, most often viewed as a group of people, born in the same historical period (Lyons *et al.*, 2019, 2; Geeraerts *et al.*, 2021, 181), which spans a range of about 20 years, and indicates the relationship of the predecessor and followers (Baschiera *et al.*, 2014, 34). As many as four generations can work together in a kindergarten collective. Analyzing our sample, it was noticed that we have preschool teachers from 24 to 65 years of age in it, which indicates possible differences in years of over 40 years, ie. the possibility of having preschool teachers who belong to three different generations. The results are shown in Table 4 ( $M = 2.094$ ;  $Max = 3.83$ ; values of skewness and kurtosis indicating that the values are slightly shifted to the left relative to the arithmetic mean) indicate that the preschool teachers in the sample are not prone to prejudices and stereotypes when it comes to cooperation with preschool teachers who belong to a different generation in relation to them, which is an encouraging result and is in favor of good intergenerational dialogue.

Table 4 presents the basic descriptive statistical indicators for the first two factors. The analysis of these findings indicates that educators positively assess *Professional Cooperation and Personal Growth* ( $M = 4.439$ ;  $SD = .389$ ) as well as *Inclusion of the Elderly and Humanistic Education* ( $M = 4.047$ ;  $SD = .690$ ). The values of skewness and kurtosis indicate that the values are slightly shifted to the right in relation to the arithmetic mean (low negative asymmetry) and that there is a slight deviation in terms of the values of kurtosis (leptocurtic distribution). Taking into account the goal of our research, we can conclude that

preschool teachers accept and highly value the concept of intergenerational learning in the context of professional development. Thus, these findings indicate the need to consider the concepts of intergenerational learning as important factors when planning and designing professional development.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistical parameters of intergenerational learning of preschool teachers

	N	Min.	Max.	M	Md	Mo	SD	Sk	Ku
Professional cooperation and personal growth	102	3.41	5.00	4.439	4.471	4.35	.389	-.481	-.493
The inclusion of the elderly in educational work	103	2.33	5.00	4.047	4.00	5	.690	-.261	-.637
Prejudices and stereotypes	105	1.00	3.83	2.094	2.00	1	.859	.383	-1.028

*Remarks:* The scores for the three components of intergenerational learning by preschool teachers were determined as averages of all items of one component; N-number of respondents; Min-minimum value; Max-maximum value; M-arithmetic mean; Md-central value (median); Mo-modal value; SD-standard deviation; Sk-skewness; Ku-kurtosis.

In Table 5 we show the matrix of intercorrelations between summation, i.e. average scores of three separate factors of intergenerational learning.

**Table 5.** Correlation between extracted factors of intergenerational learning

Factors	Professional cooperation and personal growth	Inclusion of the elderly and humanistic education	Prejudices and stereotypes
Professional cooperation and personal growth			
Inclusion of the elderly and humanistic education	.303**		
Prejudices and stereotypes	-.355**	-.322**	

\*\* Correlation statistically significant at the 0.01 level

The analysis of the data from Table 5 indicates that all three correlations are of lower intensity, ie. about 0.30, but that they are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. As expected, the correlation between the first and second factors is positive (indicates the direct proportionality of the variables), and the relation between the first and second factors in relation to the third factor we see a negative correlation (inverse proportionality of variables). These findings indicate that preschool teachers who express a positive evaluation of professional cooperation and personal growth also positively evaluate the inclusion of the elderly. We can also conclude that encouraging professional cooperation, and promoting and supporting the inclusion of the elderly can contribute to reducing barriers, prejudices and stereotypes in intergenerational learning (inverse proportionality).

## Conclusion

In this study, whose theoretical framework is based on the concepts of professional development and intergenerational learning, we tried to examine in the empirical part the perspective of preschool teachers on the factors of intergenerational learning important for their own professional development. Through the selected three factors, three latent dimensions of intergenerational learning were identified: professional cooperation and personal growth; inclusion of the elderly in educational work and humanities education; prejudices and stereotypes. It has been observed that the first factor explains the variance (intergenerational learning) the most and is thus the most dominant. The first two factors are highly positively evaluated by preschool teachers, which indicates their positive attitudes about intergenerational learning through professional cooperation and inclusion of the elderly in educational work. Also, the evaluation of the third factor indicates that preschool teachers are not prone to intergenerational prejudices and stereotypes that are interfering factors of intergenerational dialogue and learning. It has been noticed that preschool teachers who, within the framework of professional training, more strongly value professional cooperation and personal growth, more strongly value the inclusion of the elderly, and express themselves more negatively regarding intergenerational prejudices and stereotypes. Based on the above, we can conclude that

encouraging professional cooperation, and promoting and supporting the inclusion of elderly people can contribute to reducing barriers, prejudices and stereotypes in intergenerational learning. The pedagogical implications of these findings indicate the need to pay more attention to the concepts of intergenerational learning as important, but insufficiently treated factors when planning and conceiving the professional development of preschool teachers.

This study opens up new research questions and ideas. The next steps could be related to specific qualitative researches that would contribute to a better understanding of the topic as well as more detailed quantitative researches taking into account a number of variables (information, forms of intergenerational learning, and diversity of intergenerational projects, different generations). Given that the study dealt with defining this, still insufficiently researched construct, first hand, through the perspective of preschool teachers – learning actors, we hope that the findings of our study will be interesting not only to researchers from Bosnia and Herzegovina but also beyond.

## Literature

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## PERSPEKTIVA ODGOJITELJA O ČIMBENICIMA MEĐUGENERACIJSKOG UČENJA VAŽNIMA ZA PROFESIONALNO USAVRŠAVANJE

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*Teorijski okvir studije predstavljaju dva koncepta: međugeneracijsko učenje i profesionalno usavršavanje. Kvantitativno istraživanje provedeno 2021. godine na uzorku od 108 odgojitelja predškolskih ustanova banjolučke regije (Bosna i Hercegovina, Republika Srpska) imalo je za cilj ispitati perspektivu odgojitelja o čimbenicima međugeneracijskog učenja važnima za vlastito profesionalno usavršavanje. Korištenjem faktorske analize (analiza glavnih komponenti) izdvojena su tri čimbenika međugeneracijskog učenja iz perspektive odgojitelja i to su: profesionalna suradnja i osobni rast; inkluzija starijih u odgojno-obrazovni rad i humanističko obrazovanje; predrasude i stereotipi. Nalazi ukazuju na to da odgojitelji naglašeno prepoznaju međugeneracijsko učenje u kontekstu osobnoga rasta, rada i karijere, ali također uočavaju i human i inkluzivni karakter međugeneracijske suradnje, dok nisu skloni međugeneracijskim stereotipima i predrasudama prema kolegama iz drugih generacija. Poticanje profesionalne suradnje te promicanje i potpora inkluziji starijih mogu pridonijeti smanjenju međugeneracijskih sukoba i predrasuda.*

**Ključne riječi:** *odgojitelj, profesionalna suradnja, humanističko obrazovanje, predrasude i stereotipi*