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Attitudes of future preschool educators about parental competencies

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ABSTRACT

The early childhood is the period when parents have the greatest influence on the upbringing of their child. In order to act positively in the upbringing of their own child, parents must be competent. Being competent means to have knowledge, be efficient and skilled in realizing certain forms of behaviour and to achieve results that are expected of it. Parents are expected to develop all socially desirable and positive traits in the child. In this process, parents are seeking support from the preschool teachers because they have the greatest interaction with them when they leave the child in the educational institution. That was exactly the point in this research i.e. we wanted to see whether future educational workers are trained and whether parents make mistakes in the upbringing of their children. 347 students of the preschool education studies in Pula, Koper and Maribor were questioned. The results indicate that our respondents noticed that parents have problems in the relationships with their children because they do not have enough knowledge to access their own child and 'blame' the TV/media and the peers for it.

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1. Introduction

Parents are the preschool teachers of children and the creators of their routines, they remain on the path of life even when the kindergarten, the school and others participate in educational tasks. M. Čudina-Obradović and Obradović (2003) state that 'arrival' of a child in the family causes strong positive, but also negative feelings i.e., parents change their mind, feelings and behaviour, they also change their own self-image and the image the environment has about them.

Ljubetić (2007) estimates that all parents want to be successful in their parenting role and to offer their children a stimulating environment for their optimal development. It is therefore important for parents to develop appropriate competences in order to be able to master the tasks of parenting in a modern way. Only competent

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parents feel confidently in their parenting role, know how to recognize and meet the needs of their children as well as their own and thus provide the child with a safe and supporting environment that enables optimal development. 'Competence can be defined as a combination of skills, knowledge and opinions through which an individual is qualified to perform a particular job.' (Lončar Vickovič & Dolaček Alduk, 2009, p. 24). It appears in a process that includes intellectual, emotional and material adjustments. They allow adults to become parents or to satisfy the physical, intellectual, emotional and social needs of children (Stričević, 2011, p. 3).

2. Competence in the upbringing of children

By studying numerous sources (Anić & Goldstein, 2002; Kyriacou, 2001; Ljubetić, 2007; 2012; Minet, 1994; Mlinarević & Tomas, 2018; Waters & Sroufe, 1983;) one comes across many different definitions of competence and thus of different concepts of pedagogical competence of preschool teachers.

The most widely accepted definition of competence was given by Waters and Sroufe (1983, p. 81) according to which a capable (competent) individual 'is one that is able to use natural and personal resources (sources) to achieve a good developmental result.' Bezinović (1993, p. 8) states that competence is 'a global or specific subjective perception of the individual that is he capable of realizing certain forms of behaviour and achieving the results to which he aspires or which are expected from him.' The general satisfaction with life is under the influence of a satisfied family i.e. health, job, society and free time.

Competences, as Kyriacou (2001) states, are purposeful and goal-directed behaviours i.e. the level of expertise reflected in the precision and the sensitivity to context. Furthermore, Anić and Goldstein (2002) define competence as 'recognized expertise, the ability that someone has.' Mlinarević and Tomas (2018, p. 143) complement the definition of competences and state that it implies 'the expressed ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or other abilities, in work or study situations and in the professional and personal development, ability to understand others and successfully function in interpersonal relationships.

Competences are enhanced by education and experience. When it comes to professional competencies, Vrgoč (2005) states that it is commonly thought of the professional knowledge and skills required and typical of this activity. It is understandable that those who have mastered the knowledge and skills at a higher level have a better chance of becoming successful executives in specific activities. Competences are not innate. They are acquired during life and are a matter of personal will, desires, and opportunities. They are permanently acquired and enhanced through the parenting process (Waters & Lawrence, 1993).

Only those who are mentally, socially, emotionally and morally mature can successfully raise their child. It is also necessary to have pedagogical sense, knowledge and skills to raise a child. The parents' task is to provide the child with a healthy family atmosphere in which they can develop positive personality traits, gain love and confidence, which is a prerequisite for a healthy mental development of the child. Of

course, communication is also crucial, which clearly expresses what is thought, experienced and felt (Petani, 2010, p. 42-43).

Educational institutions, in our case kindergartens, should be places of support for parents i.e. places where parents are given an answer to 'how to act as a parent,' as well as about child-raising and development. The support that parents need, they seek primarily from the preschool teachers because they are the ones with whom a parent leaves his child. After the preschool teachers, a parent may seek support and advice from expert associates (Mlinarević & Tomas, 2018).

Competent parents should be aware that education is a learning process and that their behaviour and emotions affect the child. They should focus their attention and energy on the positive side of the child's behaviour to emphasize cooperation rather than control. They need to know that children need self-esteem for independent thinking, self-control and building a positive image of themselves. Successful parents punish their children to teach them and not punishing for them to suffer. Good parents need to anticipate problems and apply the right strategies which will solve the problems of children. They need to appreciate their children, learn from them and be ready to change (Severe, 2000, p. 5).

A competent parent is, therefore, a person who sees himself as a person who has control over his parental role and his relationship with the child, and is aware of the role of parents. Such parent thinks about raising his child as a challenge he can accept and which he is up to as he has got the necessary skills. He provides the child with life satisfaction and feeling of success. A competent parent is expected to be sensitive, informed and educated, and to know the legalities and characteristics of child development. Particular attention he should pay to the needs and abilities of his child and to know how to develop and satisfy them (Milanović et al., 2000, p. 123).

3. Methodology

The purpose of the research whether future students educational of Educational Sciences of Juraj Dobrila University in Pula, the Faculty of Education of the University of Primorska in Koper, and the Faculty of Education of the University of Maribor are trained to recognize parents' mistakes in raising their children.

The sample consists of 347 students of the *Faculty of Educational Sciences* of Juraj Dobrila University in Pula, *the Faculty of Education* of the University of Primorska in Koper and the *Faculty of Education* of the University of Maribor. The number and special features of the research sample are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Special features of the research sample.

Faculty	Number of respondents				Year of study						Total Σ
	M		F		1.		2.		3.		
	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	
Faculty of Educational Sciences, Pula (HR)	0	0.0	94	100	26	27.7	39	41.5	29	30.8	94
Faculty of Education, Koper (SI)	8	5.2	146	94.8	61	39.6	52	33.8	41	26.6	154
Faculty of Education, Maribor (SI)	2	2.0	97	98.0	32	32.3	24	24.2	43	43.5	99
Total	10	2.9	337	97.1	119	34.3	115	33.1	113	32.6	347

Source: The Authors.

From Table 1 it is noticed that the particularity of the sample with respect to the year of study is even: there are 34.3% of first-year students, 33.1% of second year, while the percentage of students from the third year of study is 32.6%.

For the vast majority of research participants – 98.7% of them - preschool education was the first choice, while to 1.3% of them it was the second choice. This special feature of the sample in the analysis of this research - as well as the gender of the respondents - due to the instability of the statistical parameters to be obtained on such a small sample, we will not use.

Measuring instrument collecting data on the attitudes of students of preschool education with regard to the competence of parents for the upbringing of their children, the measuring instrument was used which was used by Maja Ljubetić (2007) in a study similar to this on a sample of 166 parents of preschool children. Since the applied instrument was adapted to the needs of our research it was necessary to establish its basic metric characteristics.

The value of the Cronbach α coefficient of reliability is .769 and since it is higher than .70, reliability can be considered as good (George & Mallery, 2003).

Only one item– *Parents are not sure if they can have influence on their child* – had a smaller Cronbach's alpha coefficient which is .640 for that item.

The measuring instrument consisted of two parts. In the first part, there were three items which were related to the independent variables of *gender of respondents*, *the year of study* and *whether the preschool education study was the first choice for the study participants*. In the second part, besides each of the twenty independent variables a Five-point Likert assessment are used. By using the SPSS statistical package, the intercorrelation matrix of all variables and the descriptive statistics (arithmetic means and standard deviations SD) were determined.

4. Results and discussion

The results of the descriptive analysis for each faculty separately and for the sample as a whole are shown in Table 2.

The descriptive statistics of the respondents' results on the questionnaire applied shows that respondents most importantly estimate the item *The child has a better relationship with others than with parents* ($M = 3.78$). It is followed by the following items: *Raising a child is a burden for parents* ($M = 3.69$), *Parents do not have enough knowledge to approach their own child* ($M = 3.55$), *Parents think that the most important things are inherited in the genes* ($M = 3.46$), *Parents think whatever they do, the child always reacts more or less the same* ($M = 3.07$) and *Parents believe that besides so many influences (TV, peers) their influence is small.* ($M = 3.01$), which has the highest standard deviation of more than 1.096. The results of standard deviations for the examined items indicate that there were not many variations in the responses of the research participants after all.

The average score on the questionnaire as a whole is $M = 1.99$ with the standard deviation of $SD = .88$.

In order to determine if the research participants differ in their attitudes with regard to the year of study, we conducted the analysis ($R = .374$). Which means that

Table 2. Descriptive analysis for each faculty separately and for the sample as a whole.

Items	Pula		Koper		Maribor		For the total sample	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Parents feel self-assured when they act as parents.	2.30	.878	2.05	.819	1.91	.671	2.07	.808
Parents believe they would know more with children if they would have been raised better.	2.70	.960	2.65	1.051	2.45	.929	2.61	.995
The child has a better relationship with others then with parents	3.88	1.076	3.71	.990	3.80	.880	3.78	.984
Parents instinctively know what the child needs	2.31	.880	2.23	.867	2.15	.705	2.23	.828
Parents do not have enough knowledge to approach their own child.	3.59	1.082	3.56	1.072	3.51	1.08	3.55	1.075
Parents think that the most important things are inherited in the genes.	3.48	1.013	3.58	.989	3.27	.855	3.46	.965
One parent shifts the problem to the other parent.	2.79	1.106	2.95	1.047	2.74	1.026	2.84	1.058
Parents treat their children well.	2.35	.786	1.68	.722	1.48	.645	1.80	.795
Parents are not sure if they can have influence on their child.	3.14	1.001	2.47	.826	2.76	.893	2.73	.934
Parents think that their child is more demanding than other children.	2.93	1.019	2.93	1.067	3.01	1.165	2.95	1.081
Parents think they could have treated the child differently.	2.71	.957	2.27	.902	2.51	.896	2.46	.931
Parents think whatever they do, the child always reacts more or less the same.	3.19	.965	3.18	.918	2.80	.915	3.07	.944
Parents are convinced that all their actions are for the benefit of their child.	1.71	.798	1.80	.993	1.79	.848	1.77	.901
Raising a child is a burden for parents.	3.65	1.02	3.84	1.019	3.52	1.101	3.69	1.045
Parents are often not sure if they raise their child properly.	2.89	.933	3.03	.885	2.96	1.019	2.97	.937
When they see that they (parents) have made a mistake towards the child, it takes them pretty hard.	2.12	.898	2.01	1.057	2.00	.926	2.03	.976
Parents need more knowledge to treat the child more correctly.	2.23	.999	2.53	.901	2.76	1.031	2.52	.983
Parents consider what could later prove to be a mistake in upbringing.	2.82	1.026	2.88	1.056	2.84	.955	2.85	1.017
Parents believe that their influence is crucial for the development of their child.	2.24	.888	1.56	.695	1.42	.608	1.71	.081
Parents believe that besides so many influences (TV, peers) their influence is small.	3.00	1.047	3.06	1.124	2.92	1.104	3.01	1.096

Source: The Authors.

our predicate variable (*year of study*) does not significantly affect the variables from the questionnaire. It is also confirmed by the value of R^2 which is $R^2 = .140$, which means that the independent variable (*year of study*) with its influence explains only 4.6% of the analysis.

The analysis (ANOVA) has shown that the attitudes of the research participants do not differ significantly with respect to the year of study ($F = 1.493$, with reliability coefficient of .043).

The main goal of our analysis is shown in Table 3, which presents the standardized beta- coefficients, which tells us about the standardized regressive coefficient which, by its value, indicates how the independent predicate variable (*year of study*) determines the criterion or dependent variable in the questionnaire used. In fact, the

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis with the year of study as the predicate (independent) variable and the criteria (dependent) variables from the applied questionnaire.

	Standardised Coefficients				
	β	Bootstrap (1000) Estimate of std. error	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Parents feel self-assured when they act as parents.	.061	.078	2	.622	.537
Parents believe they would know more with children if they would have been raised better.	.101	.101	1	1.299	.255
The child has a better relationship with others then with parents	-.166	.085	3	3.771	.011
Parents instinctively know what the child needs.	.026	.118	1	.048	.826
Parents do not have enough knowledge to approach their own child.	-.108	.101	3	1.146	.331
Parents think that the most important things are inherited in the genes.	-.077	.126	1	.374	.541
One parent shifts the problem to the other parent.	.107	.075	2	2.050	.130
Parents treat their children well.	.055	.129	1	.180	.672
Parents are not sure if they can have influence on their child.	.033	.102	2	.105	.900
Parents think that their child is more demanding than other children.	.045	.111	1	.163	.686
Parents think they could have treated the child differently.	-.148	.129	1	1.332	.249
Parents think whatever they do, the child always reacts more or less the same.	-.035	.102	2	.119	.888
Parents are convinced that all their actions are for the benefit of their child.	.084	.127	1	.435	.510
Raising a child is a burden for parents.	-.120	.125	2	.918	.400
Parents are often not sure if they raise their child properly.	.123	.131	2	.892	.411
When they see that they (parents) have made a mistake towards the child, it takes them pretty hard.	.107	.078	2	1.867	.156
Parents need more knowledge to treat the child more correctly.	-.067	.089	3	.566	.638
Parents consider what could later prove to be a mistake in upbringing.	-.005	.112	1	.002	.963
Parents believe that their influence is crucial for the development of their child.	-.088	.119	2	.550	.578
Parents believe that besides so many influences (TV, peers) their influence is small.	.060	.100	1	.364	.547

Source: The Authors.

β coefficient tells us how many standard deviations in a dependent variable need to be changed to change a standard deviation in an independent variable (Bryman & Cramer, 2002). Items the *Parents are often not sure if they raise their child properly* has the most observable impact (.123) and it is followed by *One parent shifts the problem to the other parent* and *When they see that they (parents) have made a mistake towards the child, it takes them*, both with the beta-coefficient of .107; the least observable impact has the item *The child has a better relationship with others then with parents* and its beta-coefficient is $\beta = -1.66$.

The competence of parents for the parental role affects the overall and healthy development of the child. It enables him to develop potentials, feelings of security,

unconditional love and acceptance, give him a model for the design of a suitable behaviour and enable him to accept the human values that will shape his responsible behaviour (Ljubetić, 2007, p. 63). The modern view of parenthood, rejects the idea of a one-way influence of parents on the child and puts the interaction of the child, parent and wider society first. As a parent influences the child, so the child affects the parent with its characteristics causes him to behave and take actions that have a positive or negative impact on the child's development.

Also, the relationship between parents has a positive or negative influence on parents themselves and causes a parent to behave and act in a way that positively or negatively affects the child's development. So, we can say that the mutual relationship between parents also have a positive or negative impact on parents, which is the result of their relationship with the child. The very birth of the child, his temperament, adaptability, irritability and other characteristics affect parents. This reflects the relationship between parents and children in their interconnectedness and functioning, which creates a certain emotional climate and general conditions for development. The influence of the social environment in which the family exists (social support of relatives, friends, the workplace, the whole society) is under the influence of destructive or potential effects of the parent on the child (Čudina Obranović & Obranović, 2002, p. 46-47).

The *F*-coefficient here indicates how likely is for an impact like this to be repeated i.e. that beta will not be zero, $\beta = 0$. We can see that the *F*-coefficients range from .002 with reliability of .963 to 3.771 with reliability of .011.

Competent parent possesses meta-competencies of which the basic characteristics are: functional competence (ability to perform a certain number of tasks leading to the goal), personal or behavioural competence (the ability to choose a behaviour that suits the particular situation), cognitive abilities (ability to use specific knowledge in a specific situation), ethical and value competencies (ability to judge and use appropriate personal values in a particular situation). For the parent to talk about his ability to perform his parent role, he must include all meta-competences in his parenting role on a daily basis (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996, p. 24).

5. Conclusion

It is commonly known that the preschool period is fundamental to the overall development of the child. The task of parents is to enable the children to fully develop their abilities. To be successful, parents must have sufficient knowledge and skills and at the same time they must be confident of their competence, because only reliable and competent parents can achieve the desired educational outcomes in a child. It is therefore important that parents continually improve, complement each other and thereby ensure their success in all aspects of parental work 'Successful parents and their children are co-creators in education' (Severe, 2000, p. 5).

Educational institutions are places where parents can look for advice aimed at successful implementation of parenting roles. Because of the interaction they have with them, they ask preschool teachers for advice. The preschool teachers the one who has to give the parents proper advice in solving the problem. The preschool

teachers also has the obligation to strengthen parents' competences in raising their own child.

Based on the result obtained, it can be noticed that preschool teachers perceive that parents have problems with the children because they do not have enough knowledge to approach their own child and that they shift 'the blame' to TV and peers.

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