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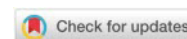
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# Partnership of Parents of Children who Need Additional Support in Learning and Preschool Teachers in Preschool Institutions from the Perspective of the Integrated Approach to Learning

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**Abstract:** This research focuses on the collaboration between preschool teachers and parents of children who need additional support in learning in kindergarten through the prism of the integrated approach to learning. The research was based on a general assumption that the success of the cooperation between preschool teachers and parents of children who need additional support in learning is inconsistent and with varying efficacy. The research was conducted in the 2019/2020 school year, on a sample group of 52 preschool teachers. The data collected by the Scaler Family involvement questionnaire ( $\alpha = .086$ ) were analysed using descriptive statistics that showed that there are significant differences in preschool teachers' assessment of mutual information sharing and activities of parents within the family, while there are none regarding parents' participation in kindergarten activities. The results of the research are presented in the form of the conclusion, with pedagogical implications provided alongside.

*Keywords:* kindergarten activities, music, educational activities, interdisciplinary team, pedagogical competencies of parents.

## Introduction

The integrated approach to learning is the functional connection and coordination of educational fields and programs that are similar or that complement each other in the realization of planned objectives. That means that being knowledgeable in one area of educational work contributes to and helps with the better acquisition of content of the other educational area ([Pravilnik o osnovama programa predškolskog vaspitanja i obrazovanja „Godine uzleta“ iz 2018](#); [Pravilnik o bližim uputstvima za utvrđivanje prava na individualni obrazovni plan, njegovu primenu i vrednovanje iz 2018](#)). Based on these facts, a preschool teacher should be "...a participant in an innovative educational process, with the aim of tracking and achieving professional and scientific goals in order to improve his/her practice." ([Jeremić, 2012a, p. 99](#)). They are expected to be an innovator in this process and a coordinator in an interdisciplinary team that works to improve the educational profession and preschool education in general. They should not be a marginal person but a professional who "...uses an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to implement, research, and improve the education process." ([Jeremić, 2012a, p. 101](#)). This learning model strives to achieve a "...stronger connection of different education areas without a clearly recognizable boundary in the realization of planned goals and objectives, whereas the knowledge that is adopted and applied in different situations becomes more permanent and easier to apply" ([Mićanović and Novović, 2018, p. 630](#)). The integrated approach to learning emphasizes the intellectual, social, emotional, and aesthetic development, supports the overall development of the child and does not focus solely on individual and mainly cognitive aspects.

The principles of collaboration between the preschool institution and the preschool teacher with the

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family and children' parents are based on honesty, trust, gradualness and bidirectionality and diversity. (Pavlović Breneselić and Krnjaja, 2017). Under the conditions in which the child has a chance to express their idea, interest, etc., children who need additional support in learning will receive support from their peers or another solution that will branch the topic into additional directions, which will encourage preschool children to think, cooperate, and participate in other kindergarten activities. Just as the parents need to be familiar with their child's stay in the kindergarten and their participation in activities, communication with other children, their psychophysical progress, so too the preschool teacher needs to be familiar with the circumstances in the child's family, with the aim of the child's overall wellbeing. As a multidimensional process, this cooperation requires additional time and patience by all participants and a partnership between the preschool teacher and parents, including the competencies of the preschool teacher to cooperate with the parents (Milenović and Jeftović, 2012a), but also the pedagogical competencies of parents to cooperate with preschool teachers (Milenović and Jeftović, 2012b). The collaboration between parents and preschool teachers using the integrated approach to learning finds its application in music activities as well. Children develop functional abilities by performing music through singing and playing instruments. Musical activities are also important because music can point out certain developmental disabilities of preschool children (Jeremić and Markov, 2015). This is indicated by the results of some studies that prove that music can be used to identify certain indicators that hint at possibilities of different developmental disabilities (Ilić, 2010). That way, music can be a tool to identify symptoms in children with Down's syndrome (Pienaar, 2012), autism, ADHD (McFerran, 2009), and other disorders in children's development and obstacles in education and learning.

Jeremić and Markov (2015, p.796) ask the question: how can we adjust the education process to children who need additional support in learning so that they feel pleasant and accepted? The answers are precisely in music, which affects people, especially preschool children, through emotions (Vickhoff, 2008). Music also triggers communication in which messages are transmitted with singing and/or playing, and communication happens through emotions (Jeremić, 2012b). The messages transmitted by music should be adjusted to the needs and cognitive abilities of children that need additional support in learning, whereby it is important to consider the social aspect of project activities that are realized in preschool institutions (socialising, group work), as well as the feeling of altruism and empathy in these children (helping, self-respect, a sense of personal worth) as important factors of their motivation. This is confirmed by additional more recently published studies on this topic (Jeremić and Milenović, 2020; Milenović and Minić, 2021).

## Materials and Methods

The research aims to determine whether there are differences in the beliefs of preschool teachers about the quality of their collaboration with parents of children who need additional support in learning and the preschool institution within the integrated approach to learning. The research started from the general assumption that the success of cooperation between preschool teachers and parents of children who need additional support in learning varies, that not all preschool teachers cooperate equally with the parents of these children, so for this reason, the different assessments of preschool teachers about the educational efficiency of their cooperation with the parents of children who need additional support in learning are understandable. The research was also based on special assumptions that the research will identify the differences in preschool teachers' assessments about the mutual information sharing between the parents of children who need additional support in learning and the preschool institution, as well as the inclusion of parents of these children in the activities in preschools.

### Sample and Procedure

The research covered 52 preschool teachers who worked with children who need additional support in learning, and who assessed the collaboration between the preschool institution and parents of children who need additional support in learning during the 2019/2020 school year.

### Instrument

A standardized combined instrument was used to assess the above collaboration – Parental Involvement Scaler with two sub-scales: 1) *Mutual information-sharing between parents and preschool teachers (MI)* and 2) *Parental involvement in kindergarten (PIK) that was partially adjusted for this research (Fantuzzo, Tighe and Childs, 2000)*. After a correction, the reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which showed a very good value ( $\alpha = .086$ ). The scaler consists of 14 items

with a three-level scale of frequency intensity: 1) always, 2) often and 3) rarely. In addition to choosing one of the answers for each item, there is also an option to leave a short comment regarding the reasons for choosing the particular answer.

### Statistical analysis

The data collected for the research purposes were analysed using descriptive statistics in the statistical software IBM SPSS 24.0, and the results of the research are shown in the form of tables.

## Results and Discussions

Table 1 shows the results of the  $\chi^2$  test that was used to assess the differences in answers given by preschool teachers on the subscale MI.

**Table 1**

*Mutual information-sharing between parents and preschool within the integrated approach to learning from the point of view of the preschool teacher*

Items (The parent of this child...)	Always		Often		Rarely		$\chi^2$	P
	F	%	f	%	f	%		
a1 Talks to the preschool teacher about how their child gets along with other children in the kindergarten.	29	55.76	17	32.69	6	11.53	15.269	.000
a2 Is interested in pedagogical education in order to improve their parental competencies.	10	19.24	14	26.92	28	53.84	10.308	.005
a3 Informs me about the interests and affinities of the child so that I can get to know them better.	27	51.92	18	34.61	7	13.46	11.577	.003
a4 Is familiar with the extent to which the child participates in everyday tasks in the kindergarten.	32	51.53	18	34.62	12	23.08	19.077	.000
a5 Attends parent meetings to stay informed about the child's success and behavior in kindergarten.	31	59.61	16	30.77	5	9.62	19.654	.000
a6 Exchanges information about the child with the preschool teacher in writing as well.	29	55.77	14	26.92	9	17.31	12.50	.001
a7 Initiates a conversation with the preschool teacher when there is a problem or they need a detailed explanation in regards to the child's education.	18	34.61	14	26.92	20	38.47	1.077	.583

The analysis of the results presented in Table 1 shows that most parents of children who need additional support in learning (53.84%) are rarely interested in pedagogical education with the aim of improving their parenting competencies with the support from preschool teachers. According to the observations of preschool teachers in the context of the integrated approach to learning, a total of 23.08% of parents rarely show interest regarding the degree to which their child participates in everyday activities in kindergarten.

The results of the conducted research are in line with some other studies that also points out the importance of pedagogical education of parents from the aspect of support children receive from their family environment (Milenović and Jeftović, 2012b). The presented results of the research also indicate the need for parents to gain trust in all preschool employees with the aim of developing a partnership between the parents and the preschool institution, in order to be able to openly communicate any problems. Pedagogically trained parents will be able to cooperate more efficiently with their children's preschool teachers. They will also have a more consistent educational effect on their children in the family environment, all in cooperation with preschool teachers. This achieves an additional effect that refers to greater connection and cooperation between the parents of all children, both in a certain educational

group and in the entire kindergarten, which is especially indicated by the results of the research shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Parents involvement in kindergarten activities within the integrated approach to learning from the point of view of preschool teachers*

Items (The parent of this child...)	Always		Often		Rarely		$\chi^2$	p
	f	%	f	%	f	%		
a1 Volunteers in different activities organized in their child's educational group.	11	21.15	12	23.08	29	55.77	11.808	.002
a2 Participates in social activities that are organized for socializing of all parents.	9	17.31	11	21.15	32	61.54	18.731	.000
a3 Participates in planning group activities.	14	26.92	17	32.70	21	40.38	1.423	.490
a4 Participates in kindergarten activities as a spectator.	10	19.23	9	17.31	33	63.46	21.269	.000
a5 Plans and programs activities with the preschool teacher.	14	26.92	6	11.54	32	61.54	20.462	.000
a6 Supports other parents.	12	23.08	16	30.77	24	46.15	4.308	.116
a7 Participates in activities related to fundraising in the kindergarten.	14	26.92	20	38.47	18	34.61	1.077	.583

By analysing the results presented in Table 2, based on the observations of the preschool teacher, we can see that the parents of children who need additional support in learning participate in kindergarten activities in a smaller percentage. We observe that a large percentage of parents rarely attends kindergarten activities as spectators (63.46%), participate in planning and programming of activities with preschool teachers (61.54%) and activities that are organized for parental socialization (61.54%).

The results of the research show that a smaller percentage of parents and children of the mass population is ready to participate in kindergarten activities; therefore, with that in mind, preschool institutions should take steps that would encourage parents to participate in planning and programming of learning activities together with preschool teachers and other professionals (Milenović and Jeftović, 2012a). If parents see that they are respected by preschool teachers and professional associates they will more eagerly participate in kindergarten activities. Encouraging families to engage within the integrated approach to learning also means inviting family members to attend kindergarten activities. The preschool teacher should encourage parents to relax and play and to emphasize that winning is of secondary importance and that in early childhood the process of learning is much more important than the outcomes and results. Preschool teachers and professional associates should talk to parents about how they can guide the child's behaviour by presenting them with specific strategies useful for achieving positive results. The collaboration between parents and the preschool institution can be further encouraged by the support from special educators and speech therapists, which is specifically defined by the Rulebook on additional educational, health and social support for children and students from 2018. The Rulebook stipulates that special educators and speech therapists provide support to both parents and preschool teachers. It is exactly the following of the recommendations of special educators and speech therapists and their consistent application in kindergarten and the family environment that will contribute to the strengthening of cooperation between preschool teachers and parents.

## Conclusion

This research concludes that the collaboration between preschool teachers and parents of children who need additional support in learning in preschool institutions from the perspective of the integrated approach to learning in the realization of project activities is achieved with varying intensity and inconsistently, depending on individual preschool teachers. That is why the expected educational efficiency of this cooperation is missing. It is precisely the integrated approach to learning that enables families to actively participate in the education of their children in public, to become aware of their latent needs and capacities, and to develop parenting competencies. The integrated approach implies that, in addition to children and preschool teachers, parents are equal participants in the education process; in that sense,

they should be informed about the development of their child at all times by professionals employed in the preschool institution. Additionally, it helps parents by allowing them to get involved in kindergarten activities, because by participating in the activities they will spontaneously acquire pedagogical knowledge that will improve their parenting competencies.

By participating in the activities, parents can see the abilities of their children in relation to other children and understand that their child progresses at their own pace or that the child requires support from preschool teachers and other professionals. Preschool teachers and professionals will determine which learning style is most suitable for the child with developmental disabilities and further adapt it to the child. Encouraging parents to participate in kindergarten activities will contribute to parents understanding that they are welcome in the preschool because, by participating, they confirm that they are equal participants in the education process. Through more frequent contact with preschool teachers and other practitioners, parents will start a collaboration based on sincere trust, as this process has the child's well-being and achieving its functionality for the next level of education and everyday life as the ultimate goal. All of that indicates the need for providing guidelines and implementing practical procedures that would contribute to better cooperation between the preschool institution and the parents of children who need additional support in learning within the integrated approach to learning.

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## Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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