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ASSESSMENT OF PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS PREPAREDNESS FOR INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Materials and research methods: The study is retrospective-prospective and controlled. For the purpose of this research, a measuring instrument used was a survey "Assessment of Preschool Teachers Preparedness in Inclusive Practice", an expanded Belan T. The final sample covered 62 participants; 37 (60%) preschool teachers were in the test group and 25 (40%) school teachers were in the control group. Average age of respondents was 38,5 years, where the youngest was 26 years old, and the oldest 59. **Results:** With regard to preparedness and work organization with a child with developmental disabilities, school teachers had a higher degree of preparedness, while preschool teachers were less prepared. There is a statistically significant difference in terms of preparedness and organization of work with a child with developmental disorders between these groups. To a greater extent, school teachers consider that they possess necessary knowledge, and to a lesser extent preschool teacher consider that they possess the necessary knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusion does not mean that we are all equal or that we all agree, but creates a new relationship toward everything that is different, encouraging mutual support and enriching our capacity to create new ideas. It rather talk about different possibilities than disabilities and questions terms such as "average" and "normal" (Švraka, and ass, 2018). Involvement of children with developmental disabilities in regular pre-school and school groups requires the application of new methods and forms of work that are appropriate to each child's potential, and the appreciation and acceptance of diversity among children should become an incentive in the process of learning and teaching rather than obstacle. Pre-school teachers and teachers become key participants in the process of educational inclusion in kindergartens and schools (UNESCO, 1994). Inclusion is expected to be an approach to an individual and a family by society, which takes into account all of its diversity in preserving and improving its physical and mental health, for optimal function, on all personal and social levels (Švraka, Salkić and ass, 2016).

Achievement of inclusion primarily depends on attitudes, knowledge, flexibility and creative ability to solve the problems of all inclusive process participants (Bratković and Teodorović, 2003). Inclusion provides every community with the opportunity to foster the development of the entire community through respect for each of its members. This does not mean equalizing all people, but recognizing the diversity of each individual. Inclusion refers to reducing discrimination and removing barriers, and as such strives for constant improvement in practice (Švraka, Avdić and ass, 2015). As the teachers and pre-school teachers are responsible for the advancement of a child with disabilities within an inclusive group, they must be trained as competent experts in their field of activity, as well as competent in analyzing the model of work and are prepare to change their working conditions. It is also important for pre-school teachers to be able to adapt educational content in light of the more modest life experience of children with disabilities, to be consistent in procedures, reactions and approaches, but also realistic in anticipation. In addition, work in the inclusive environment of the pre-school teacher requires the search for more specific professional knowledge for working with children within the inclusive group as well as reflection on the content of vocational training through lifelong learning (Rudelić, Pinoza Kukurin and Skočić

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Mihić, 2013). By analyzing many studies, it can be concluded that teachers have more negative than positive attitudes towards inclusion of children with developmental disabilities into a regular school system. Negative attitudes of teachers are a direct product of their inadequate education for working with children with developmental disabilities and lack of knowledge of the abilities, limitations and personality characteristics of these children. This problem can only be solved through additional education of teachers and pre-school teachers. Additional education should include knowledge of specific problems of children with developmental disabilities, causes of impairment and disorders, specific learning factors, methodological didactic possibilities of pupils, and the most appropriate forms of work in inclusive processes (Salkić, 2018).

Research goals

- Determine the preparedness of pre-school teachers and teachers for inclusive practice;
- Identify the importance of cooperation of parents of children with developmental disabilities with pre-school teachers and teachers;
- Identify the importance of involving professionals of different profiles into inclusive practice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is retrospective-prospective and controlled.

Instruments

The survey *Assessment of Pre-school teachers and Teachers Preparedness for Inclusive Practice*, extended survey (Belan T). The study was conducted at the Seminar *Inclusive Practice* within the Cerebral palsy associations of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Project „*Educational Inclusion in Kindergartens, Primary and Secondary Schools of the Municipality Sarajevo Center*“.

Applied variables

1. How much do you feel you are prepared, in the organization of work, to work with a child with a disability?
2. To what extent do you feel to have sufficient knowledge of children with disabilities?
3. How important do you consider important continuous cooperation of parents of children with developmental disabilities with pre-school teachers, professional associates and teachers?
4. To what extent do you consider the importance of developing a positive image of all children in the inclusive group/teaching course?
5. To what extent do you consider that it is important to prepare the premises and other children for inclusion?
6. To what extent do you consider an important involvement of rehabilitator pre-school teachers in inclusive practice?
7. To what extent do you consider it is important to include health professionals (physicians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nutritionists...) into inclusive practice?

The first two variables represent self-assessment of preparedness and knowledge of pre-school teachers to work

with children with developmental disabilities. The third, fourth and fifth variable evaluate the importance of collaboration with parents, the importance of developing a positive image of all children in the group and the importance of premises preparation. The last two variables evaluate the importance of incorporating other profiles into inclusive practice (pre-school teachers, rehabilitators, healthcare professionals ...). Responses to respondents' claims were given by rounding one of the offered answers (1-unimportant, 2-somewhat important, 3-important, 4-very important, and 5-extremely important).

Sample

The survey was conducted on a sample of 62 respondents. The test group consisted of 37 (60%) pre-school teachers - seminar participants from 30 kindergartens from Public Institution Children of Sarajevo. Control group 25 (40%) teachers - participants from 25 primary and secondary schools. The youngest respondent had 26 and the oldest 59 years. Average age of respondents was Mean=38.5 (SD=8.1).

Statistical analysis

Data processing was performed using the software IBM SPSS Statistics v. 20.0 for Windows. The data are presented in the form of tables. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used to test deviations from the normal distribution of the obtained results at a level of statistical significance of $p < 0.05$. In order to verify the existence of statistically significant differences, the Mann-Whitney U test was used as a nonparametric measure of statistical significance between two groups of respondents. Testing the significance of differences was made at the level of statistical significance of $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the results of distribution testing of the obtained results. The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests indicate that all measured parameters statistically significantly ($p < 0.05$) deviate from normal distribution, which is why the non-parametric statistics were used in further analysis. The results in Table 2 indicate that, in terms of preparedness in the organization of work with a child with developmental disabilities, *a higher degree of preparedness is present among teachers, and less prepared considered themselves the pre-school teachers*. By examining the significance of differences, it can be concluded that respondents' answers on the variable "How much do you feel you are prepared, in the organization of work, to work with a child with a disability?" Statistically differ significantly at the set level of statistical significance. Pre-school teachers evaluated themselves as insufficiently trained and incompetent to work with children with disabilities, and are uninformed about the characteristics of these children and how to work with them. Pre-school teachers younger than 39 years are estimated to be more competent for working with children with disabilities compared to pre-school teachers older than 40 years (Skočić Mihić, 2011). A large percentage of respondents (46.88%) consider themselves willing to work with children with disabilities (Belan, 2015). Research of the US Hechinger organization on the adequacy of teacher training for a wide range of students with learning disabilities has shown that teachers are not well prepared for education within an inclusive classroom (Mader, 2017).

Table 1. Distribution of results-Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	P	Statistic	Df	P
How much do you feel you are prepared, in the organization of work, to work with a child with a disability?	.254	111	.000	.876	111	.000
To what extent do you feel to have sufficient knowledge of children with disabilities?	.243	111	.000	.882	111	.000
How important do you consider important continuous cooperation of parents of children with developmental disabilities with pre-school teachers, professional associates and teachers?	.517	111	.000	.332	111	.000
To what extent do you consider the importance of developing a positive image of all children in the inclusive group/teaching course?	.518	111	.000	.336	111	.000
To what extent do you consider that it is important to prepare the premises and other children for inclusion?	.496	111	.000	.426	111	.000
To what extent do you consider an important involvement of rehabilitator pre-school teachers in inclusive practice?	.528	111	.000	.276	111	.000
To what extent do you consider it is important to include health professionals (physicians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nutritionists...) into inclusive practice?	.511	111	.000	.371	111	.000

Table 2. Preparedness of pre-school teachers and teachers in organization of work with a child with developmental disabilities

How much do you feel you are prepared, in the organization of work, to work with a child with a disability?		M	SD	Min	Max
Professional role	Pre-school teacher	2.9	0.9	1	5
	Teacher	3.7	1.0	2	5
	Total	3.3	1.0	1	5

As for the preparedness of pre-school teachers to engage in working with children with developmental disabilities or to receive a child with developmental disabilities in their group, 60% of pre-school teachers state that they are not prepared for such engagement, while 40% of pre-school teachers expressed preparedness for this type of work (Stančić and Stanisavljević Petrović, 2013). Pre-school teachers, compared with primary and secondary school teachers, have the most favorable attitudes towards inclusion of deaf children in inclusive education (Bosnar, and Bradarić-Jončić, 2008). By examining the significance of differences, it can be concluded that the test and control group respondents on the variables "To what extent do you feel to have sufficient knowledge of children with disabilities?" differ statistically at the level of $p < 0.05$. There are differences in the perception of possessing knowledge for working with children with developmental disabilities among groups of respondents. Teachers consider that they have the necessary knowledge to work with these children ($M=3.8$, $SD=0.9$), and pre-school teachers consider that they have lesser necessary knowledge ($M=2.9$, $SD=0.8$). The results of a self-assessment evaluation of competence for working with children with disabilities indicate that pre-school teachers are indecisive in assessing their personal competence for working with children with disabilities (Skočić Mihić, 2011). A large percentage of pre-school teachers (69%) consider their knowledge of working with children with disabilities is sufficient or good (Belan, 2015). Pre-school teachers have a positive attitude towards inclusion of children with developmental disabilities in regular pre-school institutions and are considered to be partially competent to work in inclusive groups (Josipović, 2016). Negative attitudes are largely present in teachers who are not sufficiently informed about pupils with developmental disabilities, have no experience in working with them, and are not adequately trained to work with these pupils (Hrnjica and Sretenov, 2003). Research shows that 71.1% of pre-school teachers have experience in working with children with developmental disabilities, and 28.9% have not (Stančić and Stanisavljević Petrović, 2013). With children with disabilities, only 13% of pre-school teachers worked, while 77% did not, and 10% of pre-school teachers did not comment on the experience of working with children with disabilities (Skočić Mihić, 2011). There are few programs that prepare pre-school teachers or teachers for an educational program in which actively participating also participate the pupils with developmental disabilities (Cameron and Cook, 2007).

The positive outcomes of inclusive education are also seen by teachers through the ability to acquire their own compensation through work with pupils with disability (Malinen and Savolainen, 2008). There is no statistically significant difference between pre-school teachers and teachers regarding the importance of continuous cooperation between parents of children with developmental disabilities with pre-school teachers, professional associates and teachers. When it comes to perceptions of the respondents about the importance of continuous cooperation between parents of children with developmental disabilities with pre-school teachers, professional associates and teachers, a higher average grade ($M=4.9$, $SD=0.4$) is achieved by pre-school teachers and a slightly lower average teachers ($M=4.8$, $SD=0.5$). Results show that pre-school teachers in the 100% consider the very important continuity of cooperation between parents of children with developmental disabilities with pre-school teachers, professional associates and teachers (Belan, 2015). Parents of children with developmental disabilities do not have a very favorable attitude towards their children's educational inclusion, as well as a certain amount of fear to the demands that they and their children set for inclusion. In order to influence the change of these unfavorable attitudes, it is necessary for the parents to have support and professional assistance in working with their children, and to involve parents actively in the educational work of their children. Parents should be a source of information on the adequacy and success of the expected form of educational process of pupils with developmental disabilities (Salkić, 2018). Research on the structure of attitudes of parents of children with hearing impairment and parents of hearing children towards educational integration shows that all factors, both parental models, are segregating, whereas the tendencies of segregation of the parents of the hearing children are somewhat less pronounced (Radovančić, 1994). The results of the test in Table 5 show that there is *no statistically significant difference* in the perception of the respondent for the variable "To what extent do you consider the importance of developing a positive image of all children in the inclusive group/teaching course?". The results of the arithmetic mean show that there is no high variability in respondents' opinion when it comes to the importance of developing a positive image of all children in the inclusive group/classroom and that most respondents consider this issue to be important, with an average rating ranging from 4.7 to 4.8. The success of inclusive education of pupils with developmental disabilities also depends on the

Table 2a. Preparedness of pre-school teachers and teachers in organizing of work with a child with developmental disabilities

How much do you feel you are prepared, in the organization of work, to work with a child with a disability?	
Mann-Whitney U	250.500
Wilcoxon W	811.500
Z	-2.757
P	.006

Table 3. Knowledge of children with developmental disabilities

To what extent do you feel to have sufficient knowledge of children with disabilities?	
Mann-Whitney U	187.000
Wilcoxon W	782.000
Z	-3.716
P	.000

Table 4. The importance of continuous cooperation of parents of children with developmental disabilities with pre-school teachers, professional associates and teachers

How important do you consider important continuous cooperation of parents of children with developmental disabilities with pre-school teachers, professional associates and teachers?	
Mann-Whitney U	450.000
Wilcoxon W	775.000
Z	-.421
P	.674

Table 5. Developing a positive image of all children in the inclusive group/teaching course

To what extent do you consider the importance of developing a positive image of all children in the inclusive group/teaching course?	
Mann-Whitney U	451.000
Wilcoxon W	1154.000
Z	-.270
P	.787

Table 6. Importance of preparation of premises and other children for inclusion

To what extent do you consider that it is important to prepare the premises and other children for inclusion?		M	SD	Min	Max
Professional role	Pre-school teacher	4.9	.3	3	5
	Teacher	4.7	.7	2	5
	Total	4.9	.5	2	5

Table 6a. The importance of preparing premises and other children for inclusion

To what extent do you consider that it is important to prepare the premises and other children for inclusion?	
Mann-Whitney U	384.000
Wilcoxon W	709.000
Z	-2.197
P	.028

Table 7. Inclusion of rehabilitation pre-school teachers (defectologists) into inclusive practice

To what extent do you consider an important involvement of rehabilitator pre-school teachers in inclusive practice?	
Mann-Whitney U	388.500
Wilcoxon W	713.500
Z	-2.494
P	.013

Table 8. Inclusion of health professionals in inclusive practice

To what extent do you consider it is important to include health professionals (physicians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nutritionists...) into inclusive practice?	
Mann-Whitney U	393.500
Wilcoxon W	718.500
Z	-1.268
P	.205

preparedness of other pupils and their parents to accept children with developmental disabilities (Van Reusen, Shoho, Barker, and Kimberly, 2001). Most pre-school teachers (93.75%) consider it is extremely important to develop a positive image of all children in the inclusive group (Belan, 2015). As a good part of the inclusion 76.1% of teachers suggest the possibility of more adequate socialization of

children with developmental disabilities as well as a more humane relationship with them (Malinen and Savolainen, 2008). Peers, especially girls, have shown willingness to accept children with disability (Hrnjica and Sretenov, 2003). The attitudes of students with no developmental disabilities according to the inclusion of pupils with developmental disabilities, their peers of elementary school age, are not

satisfactory (Hall and McGregor, 2000). Among the students there are quite a number of individual variations in attitudes towards the inclusion of students with developmental disabilities (Smoot, 2004). Based on the results of many researches it can be concluded that the students without developmental disabilities have neutral and uncertain attitudes about the inclusion of their peers with developmental disabilities. These attitudes are likely to be due to the insufficient preparation of children for inclusion in the class of children with disabilities, on the one hand, and the influence of the teachers on which they are identified on the other. Positive attitudes of these children can be built only through education (Salkić, 2018).

For the variable "To what extent do you consider that it is important to prepare the premises and other children for inclusion?" we see that most respondents share the same opinion or that the average values range from 4.7 to 4.9 indicating a small variability of the results. The results of the test show that there is a statistically significant difference in the respondent's opinion of the variable „To what extent do you consider that it is important to prepare the premises and other children for inclusion?“ Pre-school teachers statistically significantly more agree with this than teachers. The social inclusion of children with developmental disabilities, their acceptance by children without developmental disabilities, is better in pre-school inclusion, because a third of children are relatively well-received by children without developmental disabilities (Odom, 2000). Pre-school teachers in 96.87% of cases consider it is extremely important to prepare space and other children for inclusion (Belan, 2015). As a difficulty in the implementation of inclusive tuition, there is also a lack of school attendance for students with disabilities (Angelides, Stylianou and Gibbs, 2006). Adequate teacher training, well-prepared programs and better school equipment contribute to the attitude of teachers in a positive direction (Lambe and Bones, 2007). For adequate pre-school inclusion, material resources and professional qualifications of the pre-school teacher are necessary (Rudelić, Pinoza Kukurin and Skočić Mihić, 2013). As a difficulty in realizing inclusive tuition, fewer teachers point out problems related to the lack of material resources necessary for preparing classes (Angelides, Stylianou and Gibbs, 2006). Inadequately adapted and tailored school space to students' needs is one of the difficulties of inclusive education (Kassini, 2005).

There is a statistically significant difference between teachers and pre-school teachers regarding the variable "To what extent do you consider an important involvement of rehabilitator pre-school teachers in inclusive practice?". With this fact, teachers (M=5.0, SD=0.0) significantly more agree than teachers (M=4.6, SD=0.9). According to the studies, pre-school teachers as particularly important see the provision of greater assistance to the professional service of the institution, which would be done, besides pedagogues also psychologists and defectologists (Mader, 2017). In order to meet the different needs of students in the inclusive classroom, it is essential to continue cooperation with defectologists, other specialists, support staff, assistants and volunteers (Schmidt and Vrhovnik, 2015). The reasons that defectologists state as factors that make it more difficult are inclusive staff to work with these children, the number of children in regular classes, inadequately equipped work space, inadequately adapted space for the needs of these children, lack of specific teaching resources and aids, poor motivation of the teacher, the

teacher's stress and anxiety, the discouragement and debauchery of teachers (Salkić, 2018).

The results of the test show that there is *no statistically significant difference* in respondents' opinion, given their professional role, when it comes to the *importance of involving health professionals (Physicians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nutritionists...)* into inclusive practice. Most of the respondents, regardless of their professional roles, share an almost equal view (means from 4.7 to 4.9), of the importance of involving health professionals (physicians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nutritionists...) into inclusive practice. On the level of support provided by the pre-school teachers depends the quality of early and pre-school education and upbringing (Rudelić, Pinoza Kukurin and Skočić Mihić, 2013). Particularly important is the role of the pre-school teacher who, in cooperation with other members of the expert team, adjusts the work program of the group to the specific needs of the child and continuously monitors its progress and degree of socialization in the group. The pre-school teacher, by its example and influence, creates a favorable emotional climate for accepting a child with a disability (Švraka, 2005). Research has shown that 85% of pupils with development disabilities students can master general topics through the education system if they receive the necessary support (Thurlow and Rachel, 2013).

Conclusion

- Higher degree of preparedness possesses the teachers, and less prepared considered themselves the pre-school teachers, in terms of preparedness and organization of work with a child with developmental disabilities. There is a statistically significant difference between the respondent's groups.
- Teachers consider that they have the necessary knowledge to work with children with disabilities, and pre-school teachers that they have the necessary knowledge to a lesser extent. There is a statistically significant difference in the perception of possessing knowledge for working with children with developmental disabilities.
- A higher average grade is achieved by pre-school teachers and a slightly lower average by teachers when it comes to perceiving the importance of continuous cooperation of parents of children with developmental disabilities with pre-school teachers, professional associates and teachers. There is no statistically significant difference between the pre-school teacher and the teacher on this statement.
- There are certain variations in the opinions on the importance of involving pre-school teachers and rehabilitators (defectologists) into inclusive practice. Teachers are, to a lesser extent, consistent with this statement, compared to pre-school teachers. There is a statistically significant difference between teachers and pre-school teachers.
- Most of the respondents, regardless of their professional role, share a nearly equal view of the importance of involving health professionals (physicians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nutritionists...) into inclusive practice. There is no statistically significant difference between the respondent's groups.

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