

# Parents' Perspective on the Role of Preschool Education: A Validation Study

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**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** predšolsko izobraževanje, perspektiva staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja, validacija

**POVZETEK** – Raziskave kažejo, da vključenost otrok v predšolsko izobraževanje pozitivno vpliva na njihov razvoj. V Sloveniji pa predšolsko izobraževanje ni obvezno, kar pomeni, da se starši sami odločijo o (ne) vključitvi otroka v predšolsko izobraževanje. Prav zato je pomembno imeti vpogled v mnenje staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja za otrokov razvoj. V Sloveniji še ni bila opravljena celovita raziskava na to temo, zato je namen pričujočega prispevka predstaviti študijo, katere cilj je bil oblikovati in validirati lestvico Perspektiva staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja (PSvPR). Na podlagi rezultatov eksploratorne faktorске analize (EFA) in konfirmatorne faktorске analize (CFA) je bilo oblikovanih 6 področij, na katerih ima vrtec pomembno vlogo za razvoj posameznika: gibanje, digitalne kompetence, socio-čustvene spretnosti, matematika, umetnost in jezik. Preverili smo tudi zanesljivost omenjene lestvice ter za vsako od podlestvic ugotovili, da izkazuje visoko stopnjo zanesljivosti.

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**KEYWORDS:** early childhood education and care, parental perspective scale, factor analysis results, validation

**ABSTRACT** – Research shows that enrolment of children in preschool education has a positive impact on their development. However, in Slovenia, enrolment is not obligatory, and it depends on the parents' decision. It is thus important to know the parents' perspective on the role of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in child development. In Slovenia, the parents' perspective on the role of ECEC in child development has not yet been the subject of a comprehensive and independent study. This study aimed at structuring and validating the scale Parents' Perspective on the Role of ECEC (PRECEC-p). Based on the results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), 6 areas of the parents' perspective were formed: Movement, Digital competences, Socio-emotional skills, Mathematics, Art, and Language. We also verified the internal consistency for each subscale and found that all subscales show a high level of reliability.

## 1 Introduction

The enrolment of children in high-quality preschool education has a positive impact on their development (Council of the European Union, 2011). Based on research, the positive short-term and long-term effects of quality preschool education as an important learning environment are recognized at both the individual and societal levels (Goodman & Sianesi, 2005; Council of the European Union, 2011).

Quality, systematic, and organized support for the child during the critical period, i. e. in early childhood, has a long-term effect on many areas of the child's functioning, such as emotion, cognitive development, behaviour, and socialization, which cannot be adequately compensated in later stages of life (Marjanovič Umek & Fekonja, 2008; Council of the European Union, 2011; Devjak et. al., 2020, p. 22). Additionally, preschool enrolment can be related to higher academic achievement (Agirdag et al., 2015).

Wiegerova and Gavora (2018) report that parents mostly recognize the role of preschool education in developing cognitive skills and knowledge, but they also perceive its role in empowering children's social development and communication with peers, and in adapting to a routine that differs from their home environment.

Studies have confirmed the role of quality preschool education for child development (e. g. Marjanovič Umek & Fekonja, 2008; Wiegerova & Gavora, 2018). This role was recognized by parents (Hadelá et al., 2019; Karačić et al., 2022, p. 32), leading to a shift in expectations regarding the supportive role of preschool education in child development.

### *Theoretical background*

The immediate impact of the environment on a child's development and learning has been substantiated within ecological theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) and socio-cognitive constructivist assumptions (Vygotsky, 2010). Elements of the micro- and meso-system, such as family, preschool education, school, and the child's immediate surroundings, are the key components of this ecological impact. Through mutual interaction between the child and these structures, direct effects on the quality of the child's development are observed (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Through enrolment in preschool education, children engage in activities that provide greater incentives for development across various curricular domains, especially when preschool teachers adhere to Vygotsky's (2010) concept of the zone of proximal development and create a stimulating learning environment. The creation of such a supportive learning environment is a result of intentional, systematic learning and teaching in preschool education, typically outlined in national curriculum documents. In Slovenia, the key national document for high-quality preschool education in Slovenian public kindergartens – the Kindergarten Curriculum (1999) – defines the objectives of preschool education, which are comprised of six interrelated areas:

- *Movement* pertains to the domain of physical activity that ECEC providers should offer children. It involves stimulating children through diverse indoor and outdoor activities on a daily basis to acquaint them with and develop their locomotor skills, as well as assimilate certain locomotory concepts or schemes.
- *Language* encompasses a broad range of communication activities involving children, adults, and familiarity with written language. Children learn to express experiences, emotions, thoughts, and comprehend messages from others. Language development is naturally integrated into all other areas of activity.
- *Art* enables children to realize their creative potential, express and communicate through art, and develop the ability to use symbols in drawing, dance, and music. Art experiences are crucial for children, as the integration of experience and creation plays an important role in their balanced development and mental health.
- *Society* – recognizing that a human being is part of the society in which they operate and develop, children in ECEC gradually learn about their immediate social environment. They also gain insights into the broader society, becoming familiar with their own culture and the cultures of others.

- *Nature* – in the realm of nature, ECEC facilitates the child's integration into the surrounding environment, fostering a healthy and safe living environment and habits. Children learn about animals, plants, objects, and natural phenomena, exploring and discovering the natural world around them.
- In *Mathematics*, children in ECEC acquire practical experience with mathematics in everyday life. They learn mathematical expressions, develop mathematical thinking and skills, and come to view mathematics as an enjoyable experience.

Herbaut, Farges, and Giret (2024) confirm the positive effect of early enrolment in ECEC, primarily on the development of motor skills, language skills, early literacy, and early math, and to a limited extent, on non-verbal reasoning abilities. Importantly, the study revealed that children with low-level skills would benefit the most in developing these mentioned skills, as also confirmed by Mithans, Lipovec and Ograjšek (2023, p. 104).

Recent trends in ECEC in Slovenia foresee the complementary and enhancement of six curricular fields through the intentional integration of different cross-curricular competences, specifically scaffolding socio-emotional competences of children and digital competences of children.

Previous studies (e. g. Herbaut et al., 2024; Plavčak, 2022, p. 103) also underscored the importance of social relationships as a framework for the development of the child's thinking, feeling, and communication. Therefore, quality early childhood education guides children's experiences by introducing them to social activities and building a supportive scaffolding for their communication, cooperation, negotiation, bargaining, and competition skills through shared activities, conversations, play, and creativity (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Marić Jurišin et al., 2020, p. 53). Ng and Bull (2018) determined that the quality of supportive scaffolding for socioemotional skills of children is higher in intentional teaching in preschool education compared to incidental teaching.

Additionally, in the context of preschool education, it is important to systematically and intentionally incorporate the meaningful use of digital technology into the pedagogical process (Burns & Gottschalk, 2019). Considering the specifics of preschool child development, the integration of digital technology requires the intentional design of a learning environment in which we strive to create a balance between natural and meaningful digital learning environments (Malaguzzi, 1994). Based on the findings of the studies presented on the role of quality ECEC in promoting and supporting different areas of child development, we aimed to develop a psychometrically sound instrument intended to identify parents' perceptions of the role of preschool education in child development.

### *The Level of Enrolment of Children in ECEC in Slovenia*

The accessibility of organized ECEC in Slovenia is high. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2021), the share of children enrolled in ECEC is increasing. Generally, the enrolment of children in the second age bracket is higher than that of children in the first age bracket. Data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (ibid.) confirms this, with almost 79% of children attending ECEC in the previous school year. This share was lower in the first age bracket, at 69%, and

for children about to enter school, it was 91 %. Since 2013, the share of children aged between 4 and 5 enrolled in preschool education has increased by 4.2 % and reached 94 % in 2020. This increase was certainly aided by the fact that Slovenia is one of the European countries where the education of preschool children is integrated and carried out by highly educated staff in the first and second age brackets (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). Slovenia is also one of seven EU Member States where all preschool children, even in early childhood, are provided with a place in publicly funded educational institutions. Consequently, 98 % of all children enrolled in ECEC are attending the so-called full-day program (6 to 9 hours).

The data suggests that the enrolment of children aged between 4 and 5 in preschool education in Slovenia is already very close to meeting UNESCO objectives. However, the European strategic objective outlined in the Education and Training 2020 document, which aims for the enrolment rate of at least 95 % for children aged between 4 and 5, has not yet been achieved. This raises the question of which factors influence parents' decisions to enrol or not enrol their children in organized preschool education.

### *Aim of the present research*

Based on a review of the studies presented (e.g. Meyers & Jordan, 2006; Wiegrova & Gavora, 2018; Forsberg et al., 2023; Herbaut et al., 2024), we establish that it is important to understand the parents' perspectives on the role of preschool education in child development. However, not much research has been conducted, nor has an appropriate measurement scale been developed, regarding the parents' perspectives on the role of preschool education in child development.

The purpose of this research was to construct and validate a scale aimed at identifying the parents' perspectives on the role of ECEC concerning six curriculum areas of activities, as well as in relation to the social and emotional development of children and the development of their digital competences.

## **2 Method**

### *Research design and sample*

The research consisted of two studies (Study 1, Study 2). In both, a quantitative research design was used, specifically employing survey design as the chosen alternative (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Survey research is a method through which the opinions of a sample of individuals are studied via quantitative descriptions. The present research was conducted between 2022 and 2024. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1**

*Sample profile*

|                             |                               | <i>Study 1</i> |          | <i>Study 2</i> |          |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|
|                             |                               | <i>n</i>       | <i>%</i> | <i>n</i>       | <i>%</i> |
| Gender                      | Female                        | 522            | 87.3     | 385            | 88.1     |
|                             | Male                          | 76             | 12.7     | 52             | 11.9     |
| Age                         | < 25 years                    | 45             | 7.7      | 21             | 4.8      |
|                             | 25–34 years                   | 292            | 49.7     | 220            | 50.8     |
|                             | 35–44 years                   | 214            | 36.5     | 169            | 39.0     |
|                             | > 44 years                    | 36             | 6.1      | 23             | 5.3      |
| Mother's level of education | Primary or secondary          | 180            | 30.1     | 123            | 28.1     |
|                             | Short-cycle higher vocational | 178            | 29.7     | 137            | 31.3     |
|                             | Bachelor's Degree             | 180            | 30.1     | 135            | 30.8     |
|                             | Master's or Doctoral Degree   | 61             | 10.2     | 43             | 9.8      |
| Father's level of education | Primary or secondary          | 291            | 48.8     | 208            | 47.7     |
|                             | Short-cycle higher vocational | 146            | 24.5     | 113            | 25.9     |
|                             | Bachelor's Degree             | 106            | 17.8     | 80             | 18.3     |
|                             | Master's or Doctoral Degree   | 53             | 8.9      | 35             | 8.0      |

Study 1 involved 602 parents (women – 87.3%, men – 12.7%) of preschool children from all Slovenian regions, with an average age of 33.47 years ( $SD = 6.92$ ), while Study 2 involved 439 parents (women – 88.1%, men – 11.9%) with an average age of 33.72 years ( $SD = 6.15$ ). Systematic random sampling was used.

### *Data collection and analysis procedures*

For the purpose of Study 1, the measurement scale “Parents’ perspective on the role of the ECEC-PRECEC-p” was designed. The scale was based on *The Questionnaire on the Reasons for the Enrollment of Children in Kindergarten* (Hadela et al., 2019), as well as the objectives of all six curriculum areas in the Kindergarten Curriculum (1999).

The initial form of the scale consisted of 34 items, to which the participants responded using a five-point Likert scale of attitudes (ranging from 1 – “I completely disagree” to 5 – “I completely agree”). Data were collected in December 2022 using the online application 1KA. We informed the parents about the purpose and procedure of the study, guaranteed their anonymity, and explained that participation was voluntary. The surveys were conducted in accordance with all required ethical standards. For the initial 34 items, we first examined the correlation of each item with the total sum and the inter-correlation between the items. The first analysis showed that 2 items (“that the child develops different approaches in discovering nature and technical tools”, “that the child uses digital tools to solve problems in nature”) were poorly linked with the total

sum and were accordingly excluded from further analysis. The inter-correlation analysis indicated a poor correlation of another 2 items (“that the child develops a respective and responsible attitude towards nature”, “that the child uses different tools to sort things in nature”). The above-mentioned items were excluded from further analysis, which also meant that no items related to the curriculum area “Nature” were retained. Based on the fact that previous research (Herbaut et al., 2024; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Ng & Bull, 2018; Marjanovič Umek & Fekonja, 2008; Council of the European Union, 2011; Agirdag et al., 2015; Wiegerova & Gavora, 2018) did not highlight the field of nature as an area in which ECEC would have an important impact, we did not seek further solutions and continued the research without considering the role of the curricular area “nature”. The final version of the *PRECEC-p* thus consisted of 30 items.

As we wanted to verify structural validity by exploring and discover the underlying structure of data (Bryman & Cramer, 2011), we employed the exploratory factor analysis. As recommended by Field (2005), we first introduced the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s Sphericity Test. In order to extract the factors, we used the maximum probability method with Direct Design rotation. The reliability of the scale and the subscales was examined by using Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ .

For the purpose of Study 2, the modified scale (consisting of 30 items) was used, and data were collected in January 2024. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was computed to test whether the data fit a hypothesized measurement model, i.e. to test the construct validity of the scale. The indices used to determine the model’s fit quality were the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR).

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### *Study 1: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)*

In Study 1, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted. The result of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test ( $KMO = 0.960$ ) was higher than the recommended  $KMO$  value of 0.6, confirming the adequacy of sampling. However, Bartlett’s test ( $\chi^2 = 11759.722$ ,  $df = 435$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) indicated that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix, suggesting that the data are suitable for factor analysis. Using the maximum probability method with Direct Oblimin rotation, we extracted 6 factors (Table 2), which together explained 81.5% of the variance.

Despite the eigenvalue of the sixth factor being less than 1 and two factor loadings being below 0.400 ( $-0.387$ ,  $-0.355$ ), it was decided to retain factor six-*Language*. This decision was based on the fact that the items related to this factor pertain to language, literacy, and communication, which are precisely the areas that have been frequently identified as highly influential on the child’s enrolment in preschool education (e.g. Hart & Risley, 2003; Wiegerova & Gavora, 2018; Herbaut et al., 2024; Marjanovič Umek et al., 2018; Sylva et. al., 2010).

The items related to the curricular area “*Society*” were, as a result of EFA factor solution (Table 3) as well as considering the content, incorporated in Factor 3 – *Socio-emotional skills*.

**Table 2**

*Total initial eigenvalues.*

| Factor | Initial Eigenvalues |               |              |
|--------|---------------------|---------------|--------------|
|        | Total               | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
| 1      | 16.859              | 57.934        | 56.196       |
| 2      | 2.245               | 8.189         | 63.678       |
| 3      | 1.890               | 5.364         | 69.978       |
| 4      | 1.514               | 4.091         | 75.024       |
| 5      | 1.077               | 3.771         | 78.614       |
| 6      | 0.858               | 2.350         | 81.476       |

Factor 1 refers to 6 items with loadings ranging from 0.885 (... that the child experiences comfort in movement.) to 0.587 (... that the child learns about the importance of participation, respect, and taking into account diversity.). Together, these items explain 56.20% of the variance. They mostly relate to the importance of children’s movement, so we named the factor *Movement*.

Factor 2 refers to 4 items with loadings ranging from –0.937 (... the child uses digital technology to solve problems.) to –0.743 (... the child uses digital technologies for the purpose of creating art products.). Together, these items explain 8.19% of the variance. They relate to the importance of using digital technology, so we named the factor *Digital Competences*.

Factor 3 refers to 6 items with loadings ranging from 0.937 (... the child knows how to recognize his/her feelings.) to 0.540 (... the child can solve conflicts with peers.). Together, these items explain 5.36% of the variance. They relate to the importance of social and emotional development in ECEC, so we named the factor *Socio-emotional skills*.

Factor 4 comprises 5 items with loadings ranging from –0.952 (... the child develops mathematical skills.) to –0.730 (... the child develops mathematical expression.). Together, these items explain 4.09% of the variance. They relate to the importance of mathematical content in ECEC, so we named the factor *Mathematics*.

Factor 5 refers to 4 items with loadings ranging from 0.894 (... the child develops creativity in the field of art.) to 0.527 (... the child gets to know different types of art.). Together, these items explain 3.77% of the variance. They relate to the importance of art content in ECEC, so we named the factor *Art*.

Factor 6 refers to 5 items with loadings ranging from –0.746 (... the child develops verbal communication skills.) to –0.355 (... the child gets familiar with basic literary works for children.). Together, these items explain 2.35% of the variance. They relate to the importance of language development in ECEC, so we named the factor *Language*.

**Table 3***Factor loadings of the PRECEC-p scale*

| <i>Items</i>                                                                                                              | <i>F<sub>1</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>2</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>3</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>4</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>5</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>6</sub></i> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| ... that the child is aware of his/<br>her locomotor abilities.                                                           | 0.790                |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
| ... that the child develops his/<br>her locomotor skills.                                                                 | 0.792                |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
| ... that the child experiences<br>comfort in movement.                                                                    | 0.885                |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
| ... that the child gains confidence in his/<br>her body and locomotor abilities.                                          | 0.852                |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
| ... that the child gets to know and learns about<br>the basic characteristics of various sports.                          | 0.677                |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
| ... that the child learns about the<br>importance of participation, respect<br>and taking into account diversity.         | 0.587                |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
| ... the child uses digital technologies (DTI<br>to classify and categorise things in nature.                              |                      | –0.927               |                      |                      |                      |                      |
| ... the child uses DT to solve problems.                                                                                  |                      | –0.937               |                      |                      |                      |                      |
| ... the child uses DT for the purpose<br>of creating art products.                                                        |                      | –0.743               |                      |                      |                      |                      |
| ... the child learns how to understand<br>sequences (numbers, steps, data) using DT.                                      |                      | –0.783               |                      |                      |                      |                      |
| ... the child knows how to help others.                                                                                   |                      |                      | 0.720                |                      |                      |                      |
| ... the child can express feelings.                                                                                       |                      |                      | 0.916                |                      |                      |                      |
| ... the child can regulate and control<br>the expression of his/her feelings.                                             |                      |                      | 0.877                |                      |                      |                      |
| ... the child can be a good friend to peers.                                                                              |                      |                      | 0.762                |                      |                      |                      |
| ... the child knows how to<br>recognise his/her feelings.                                                                 |                      |                      | 0.937                |                      |                      |                      |
| ... the child can solve conflicts with peers.                                                                             |                      |                      | 0.540                |                      |                      |                      |
| ... the child gets familiar with<br>mathematics in everyday life.                                                         |                      |                      |                      | –0.823               |                      |                      |
| ... the child develops mathematical<br>expression (e.g. naming numbers).                                                  |                      |                      |                      | –0.730               |                      |                      |
| ... the child develops mathematical thinking<br>(e.g. observes and creates symmetrical<br>elements, spatial orientation). |                      |                      |                      | –0.789               |                      |                      |
| ... the child develops mathematical skills (e.g.<br>counting, classifying, sorting, weighing).                            |                      |                      |                      | –0.952               |                      |                      |
| ... the child sees mathematics<br>as a pleasant experience.                                                               |                      |                      |                      | –0.741               |                      |                      |
| ... the child gets to know different<br>types of art, e.g. music, dance, drama,<br>fine arts, cinematography.             |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.527                |                      |

| <i>Items</i>                                                        | <i>F<sub>1</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>2</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>3</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>4</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>5</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>6</sub></i> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| ... the child develops aesthetic perception.                        |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.662                |                      |
| ... the child develops expression through art.                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.863                |                      |
| ... the child develops creativity in the field of art.              |                      |                      |                      |                      | 0.894                |                      |
| ... the child listens and experiences language.                     |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | -0.387               |
| ... the child gets familiar with basic literary works for children. |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | -0.355               |
| ... the child develops verbal communication skills.                 |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | -0.746               |
| ... the child develops non-verbal communication skills.             |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | -0.713               |
| ... the child develops vocabulary.                                  |                      |                      |                      |                      |                      | -0.543               |

### *Reliability of the PRECEC-p measurement scale*

**Table 4**

*Cronbach's alpha for the PRECEC-p scale and the subscales.*

| <i>Subscale</i>  | <i>F<sub>1</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>2</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>3</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>4</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>5</sub></i> | <i>F<sub>6</sub></i> | <i>Wholescale</i> |
|------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Number of Items  | 6                    | 4                    | 6                    | 5                    | 4                    | 5                    | 30                |
| Cronbach's alpha | 0.951                | 0.945                | 0.939                | 0.947                | 0.919                | 0.898                | 0.971             |

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha = 0.971$ ) of the scale indicates high reliability. The reliability analysis of individual sub-scales also shows high reliability, with alpha coefficient values ranging between 0.898 and 0.951 (Table 4).

### *Study 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

In Study 2, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the 6-factor model revealed by the exploratory factor analysis using diagonally weighted least squares (DWLS) estimation. The model fit indices indicate that the agreement between the 6-factor model and the sample covariance matrix is satisfactory, with  $\chi^2(390, N = 439) = 1126.2$ , the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) at 0.066, the comparative fit index (CFI) at 0.986, and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) at 0.039. All three fit indices meet the criteria for an acceptable or good fit. Moreover, all 30 items of the scale are significantly related to the latent factors ( $p < 0.001$ ). These indices confirm the proposed factor model.

## 4 Conclusion

The aim of the study was to construct and validate the instrument aimed at identifying the parents' perspective on the role of the ECEC (PRECEC-p). The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) indicated a 6-factor solution, which was also confirmed by the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The final version consists of 30 items which were computed into 6 subscales based on factor analysis:

- ☐ Movement,
- ☐ Digital competences,
- ☐ Socio-emotional skills,
- ☐ Mathematics,
- ☐ Art, and
- ☐ Language.

The reliability values of the factors range from  $\alpha = 0.898$  to  $\alpha = 0.951$ , with the whole scale having  $\alpha = 0.971$ . The curricular field Nature was omitted due to poor correlation and inter-correlation among its items. The items initially prepared for the curricular field Society were incorporated into Socio-emotional skills, based on EFA.

The scale thus includes most of the curricular fields as well as cross-curricular competences such as socio-emotional skills and digital competences, which are otherwise not envisioned in the current curriculum. Both of these mentioned competences, socio-emotional skills and digital competences, have to be intentionally taught in order to support and scaffold the development of preschool children. The role of preschool education in child development, addressing socio-emotional competences and digital competences that are usually not part of the typical academic context, is also perceived by parents as an important area of ECEC.

The constructed and validated PRECEC-p scale is an important contribution to preschool education research. It is the first instrument that systematically, profoundly, comprehensively, and methodologically addresses the issue of parents' decision-making when applying for preschool education for their child.

The results indicate that the PRECEC-p is a useful, psychometrically sound, and appropriate reference tool for further research on the parents' perspective on the role of ECEC. The participants in the study belong to a specific (Slovenian) educational and cultural environment, which means that any attempt at generalization will necessarily be limited.

On the other hand, the instrument is meant to be used for comparing rather than generalizing data across different socio-cultural contexts. Finally, in order to maintain the equivalence of the PRECEC-p, its use in different social and cultural environments will most probably involve translation into different languages.

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## **Mnenje staršev o pomenu vključenosti otroka v predšolsko izobraževanje: preliminarna validacijska študija**

Vključenost otrok v kakovostno predšolsko izobraževanje ima pozitivne učinke na njihov razvoj (Council of the European Union, 2011). Ti učinki se kažejo tako kratkoročno kot dolgoročno in tako na individualni ravni kot na ravni družbe (Goodman in Sianesi, 2005; Council of the European Union, 2011). Kot izpostavljajo nekateri raziskovalci (npr. Marjanovič Umek in Fekonja, 2008; Agirdag idr., 2015), ima ustrezna podpora v predšolskem obdobju pomembno vlogo na različnih področjih otrokovega delovanja, kot so npr. čustva, kognitivni razvoj, vedenje in socializacija, česar se zaradi kritičnosti zgodnjega obdobja ne da kompenzirati v kasnejših življenjskih obdobjih. Ne nazadnje sta na vlogo okolja za posameznikov razvoj opozarjala že Borfenbrenner (1992) s svojo ekološko teorijo ter Vygotski (2010) s svojo sociokulturno teorijo.

Ključni slovenski dokument za področje predšolskega izobraževanja je Kurikulum za vrtce (1999), ki opredeljuje cilje predšolskega izobraževanja na 6 tesno medsebojno povezanih področjih: gibanje, jezik, umetnost, družba, narava ter matematika. Skladno z razvojem družbe pa se v zadnjem času, tudi s kurikularno prenovo in oblikovanjem Nacionalnega programa za vzgojo in izobraževanje, kaže tendenca po integraciji prečnih kompetenc, predvsem socialno-čustvenih in digitalnih. Z vidika socialno-čustvenih kompetenc je pomembno, da se že v zgodnjem otroštvu otroke podpira pri razvoju komunikacijskih, sodelovalnih, pogajalskih in tekmovalnih veščin, seveda skozi dejavnosti, kot sta igra in pogovor (Herbaut idr., 2024; Shonkoff in Phillips, 2000). Prav tako je v današnji realnosti zelo pomembno, da se v predšolsko izobraževanje sistematično, načrtno, predvsem pa smiselno umesti osmišljeno rabo digitalne tehnologije (Burns in Gottschalk, 2019).

Na osnovi pregleda obstoječe literature (npr. Meyers in Jordan, 2006; Wiegerova in Gavora, 2018; Forsberg idr., 2023; Herbaut idr., 2024) je bilo ugotovljeno, da je pomembno poznati perspektive staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja za otrokov razvoj, zato je bil cilj pričujoče študije oblikovati metodološko ustrezen instrument za ugotavljanje perspektive staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja za otrokov razvoj. Pri tem so bila vključena kurikularna področja (Kurikulum za vrtce, 1999) ter področji socialno-čustveno učenje in digitalne kompetence.

Za namen priprave instrumenta zbiranja podatkov sta bili opravljeni 2 podštudiji, pri katerih je bil uporabljen kvantitativni pristop. Študiji sta potekali med letoma 2022 in 2024. V prvi podštudiji je sodelovalo 598, v drugi pa 437 staršev predšolskih otrok.

Za namene prve podštudije je bila oblikovana lestvica Perspektiva staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja (PSvPR), ki je izhajala iz vprašalnika *The Questionnaire on the Reasons for the Enrollment of Children in Kindergarten* (Habela idr., 2019), priljubljenega za potrebe hrvaške študije omenjenih avtoric. Lestvica Perspektiva staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja (PSvPR) je vsebovala tudi trditve, ki so se nanašale na šest kurikularnih področij ter na socialno-čustvene veščine in digitalne kompetence. Prvotna verzija lestvice je vključevala 34 trditve, o katerih so se respondenti izrekli na petstopenjski lestvici stališč. Podatki so bili zbrani decembra 2022. Na osnovi korelacijske analize so bile izločene 4 trditve, tako da končno verzijo lestvice Perspektiva staršev

o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja (PSvPR) sestavlja 30 trditve. Za potrebe preverjanja strukturne veljavnosti lestvice je bila uporabljena eksploratorna faktorska analiza (EFA), pri čemer smo najprej, z uporabo Kaiser-Meyer-Olkinovega preizkusa in Bartlettovega preizkusa sferičnosti, preverili ustreznost podatkov. Za ekstrakcijo faktorjev smo uporabili metodo maksimalne verjetnosti z rotacijo Direct Oblimin. Zanesljivost lestvice je bila preverjena z metodo notranje konsistentnosti, tj. Cronbachovim  $\alpha$  koeficientom.

Za namene druge podštudije je bila uporabljena modificirana lestvica Perspektiva staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja (PSvPR) s 30 trditvami. Podatki so bili zbrani januarja 2024. Uporabljena je bila konfirmatorna faktorska analiza (CFA), s katero smo preverili pripadnosti merjenih spremenljivk teoretičnemu konstrukt, tj. za preverjanje konstruktne veljavnosti lestvice. Prileganje modela smo preverjali z indeksi RMSEA (angl. Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), CFI (angl. Comparative Fit Index) in SRMR (angl. Standardized Root Mean Square Residual).

Rezultat Kaiser-Meyer-Olkinovega preizkusa ( $KM = 0,960$ ) je višji od priporočene spodnje meje 0,6, s čimer je potrjena ustreznost vzorčenja. Rezultat Bartlettovega preizkusa ( $\chi^2 = 11759,722$ ,  $df = 435$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ) kaže, da korelacijska matrika ni enaka identični matriki, kar potrjuje ustreznost podatkov za faktorsko analizo. S pomočjo rotacije Direct Oblimin je bilo ekstrahiranih 6 faktorjev, ki skupaj pojasnjujejo 81,5 % variance. Navkljub dejstvu, da je bila lastna vrednost šestega faktorja manjša od 1 ter da je bila utež dveh spremenljivk manjša od 0,400, smo se ta faktor zaradi njegovega pomena v predšolskem izobraževanju odločili obdržati. Gre namreč za faktor, ki smo ga poimenovali jezik in pokriva področje, ki je bilo v raziskavah pogosto identificirano kot tisto, na katerega ima predšolsko izobraževanje zelo visok vpliv (npr. Hart in Risley, 2003; Wiegerova in Gavora, 2018; Herbaut idr., 2024; Marjanovič Umek idr., 2018; Sylva idr., 2010). Trditve, ki so se navezovala na kurikularno področje družba, pa so bile na podlagi solucije eksploratorne faktorske analize (EFA) ter njihove vsebine vključene v faktor 3, tj. socialno-čustvene spretnosti. Na osnovni navedenega je bilo oblikovanih 6 faktorjev.

- Faktor 1 združuje 6 trditve, katerih uteži se gibljejo med 0,885 in 0,587 in vključujejo 56,20 % skupne variance. Ker se večinoma nanašajo na otrokovo gibanje, smo ta faktor poimenovali gibanje.
- Faktor 2 združuje 4 trditve z utežmi od  $-0,937$  do  $-0,743$ , skupaj pa te trditve pojasnjujejo 8,19 % variance. Trditve se navezujejo na rabo digitalne tehnologije, zato smo faktor poimenovali digitalne kompetence.
- Faktor 3 združuje 6 trditve z utežmi od 0,937 do 0,540, ki skupaj pojasnijo 5,36 % variance. Trditve se nanašajo na pomen socialnega in čustvenega razvoja v zgodnjem otroštvu, zato smo faktor poimenovali socialno-čustvene veščine.
- Faktor 4 združuje 5 trditve, katerih uteži se gibljejo med  $-0,952$  in  $-0,730$ . Skupaj pojasnjujejo 7,09 % variance in se dotikajo pomena matematičnih vsebin v predšolskem izobraževanju, zato smo ta faktor poimenovali matematika.
- Faktor 5 združuje 4 trditve z utežmi od 0,894 do 0,527, ki skupaj pojasnjujejo 3,77 % variance in se navezujejo na pomen umetnosti v predšolskem izobraževanju. Faktor smo poimenovali umetnost.
- Faktor 6 združuje 5 trditve z utežmi od  $-0,746$  do  $-0,355$ , ki skupaj pojasnjujejo 2,35 % variance. Trditve se nanašajo na pomen razvoja jezika v zgodnjem otroštvu, zato smo ta faktor poimenovali jezik.

Za preverjanje zanesljivosti tako posameznih podlestvic lestvice *Perspektiva staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja* (PSvPR) kot tudi lestvice kot celote je bil uporabljen Cronbachov  $\alpha$  koeficient. Rezultati kažejo, da celotna lestvica izkazuje visoko zanesljivost ( $\alpha = 0.971$ ), podobno pa velja za vse podlestvice, saj se vrednosti Cronbachovega  $\alpha$  koeficienta gibljejo med 0,898 in 0,951.

S konfirmatorno faktorsko analizo smo preverili šestfaktorsko strukturo lestvice, pri tem pa smo za oceno modela uporabili metodo diagonalno obteženih najmanjših kvadratov (angl. *diagonally weighted least squares – DWLS*). Indeksi prileganja modela so pokazali, da je skladnost med šestfaktorskim modelom in kovariančno matriko ustrezna,  $\chi^2$  (390,  $N = 439$ ) = 1126,2 (koren iz povprečne kvadrirane napake ocene [RMSEA] 0,066, primerjalni indeks prileganja [CFI] 0,986, standardizirani koren iz povprečnega kvadriranega ostanka [SRMR] 0,039). Na osnovi rezultatov smo ugotovili, da izbrani indeksi prileganja potrjujejo šestfaktorsko strukturo lestvice. Polega tega je vseh 30 postavk lestvice pomembno povezanih z latentnimi faktorji ( $p < 0,001$ ).

Cilj študije je bil oblikovati in validirati lestvico *Perspektiva staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja* (PSvPR). Ekploratorna faktorska analiza (EFA) je pokazala 6-faktorsko rešitev, kar je bilo nato potrjeno tudi s konfirmatorno faktorsko analizo (CFA). Končna verzija lestvice *Perspektiva staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja* (PSvPR) tako vključuje 30 trditev, ki nasičujejo 6 faktorjev: gibanje, digitalne kompetence, socialno-čustvene veščine, matematika, umetnost in jezik. Zanesljivost podlestvic se giblje od  $\alpha = 0.898$  do  $\alpha = 0.951$ , zanesljivost celotne lestvice *Perspektiva staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja* (PSvPR) pa je:  $\alpha = 0.971$ .

Validirana lestvica *Perspektiva staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja* (PSvPR) je ustrezno utemeljen, metodološko korekten in uporaben instrument za nadaljnje raziskovanje perspektive staršev o pomenu predšolskega izobraževanja za otrokov razvoj. Na ta način predstavlja pomemben doprinos v raziskovanju predšolskega izobraževanja. Potrebno pa se je zavedati, da je bila lestvica *Perspektiva staršev o vlogi predšolskega izobraževanja* (PSvPR) validirana v socio-kulturno-izobraževalno specifičnem okolju, zato jo je potrebno za morebitne raziskave v drugih okoljih ustrezno preveriti in prilagoditi.

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