ECEC practitioners' perception of quality educational practices for children at risk of social exclusion: relation to their professional development

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Theoretical framework

- Social exclusion is a complex, multidimensional process, which involves a lack or total absence of 'resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas' (Levitas et al., 2007: 9).

- The benefits of high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) as a prerequisite and opportunity for the development of children and families at risk of social exclusion, in particular, are widely recognized.

- Early childhood educators play a key role in identifying the conditions and opportunities in ECEC to reduce inequality in educational opportunities.

Aim

➢ to examine their perceptions of quality educational practices regarding children at risk of social exclusion (RSE).

Method

➢ SAMPLE: national stratified random sample of 1,142 Croatian preschool teachers

➢ The representative national stratified sample contain 1142 preschool teachers (female = 1037; male = 11) from 66 Croatian ECEC. It represents 10,4 % of all 635 ECEC institutions in Croatia1. The random samples of the institution were taken in equal proportions forming a total sample according to the following four criteria: geographic location and the type of settlements, the founder, and the size

Method

➢ MEARURMENT INSTRUMENT:

➢ *The Quality Education Practice Regarding Children at RSE Scale*

➢ was constructed by the project team members: Sandra Antulić Majcen, Dejana Bouillet, Vlatka Domović, Maja Drvodelić, Marina Panić, Monika Pažur, Ksenija Romstein, Sanja Skočić Mihić, Esmeralda Sunko, Ivana Visković and Adrijana Višnjić Jevtić. The scale examines how teachers perceive ECEC institutions' conditions and opportunities to provide educational activities and interventions on 22 items.

Theoretical framework is based on ISSA (International Step..., 2010) standards of quality educational practice and activities for children at RSE in dimension of respect for diversity (e.g., 'Implementing specific activities focused on embracing diversity in the ECEC classroom'), building partnerships with parents (e.g., 'Involving family members of children with at in decision making related to the ECEC classroom, such as curriculum development, activities, assessments, etc.'), and children's development and learning (e.g., 'Guiding children at RSE in assessing the behavior and work of children, preschool teachers, and other adults').

Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale with the following response options: 1 (none), 2 (to a small degree), 3 (somewhat) and 4 (completely).

The independent variables were teachers' age, work experience, degree, and participation in continuous professional training for children at RSE.

Conditions and opportunities for ECEC quality in my institution for children at RSE for …

1. Respecting diversity	β	h²	Range	M (SD)
			2.20–5	4.32(0.50)
… conducting specific activities directed toward accepting diversity in ECEC classroom	.801	579	1–5	4.34 (.731)
… making opportunities for learning diversity acceptance among children	.789	616	2–5	4.54 (.611)
… conducting activities directed toward gaining an insight into effects of biases on emotions of members of socially vulnerable groups	.706	552	1–5	4.10 (.838)
… active work on development of group culture and togetherness of all children in the ECEC classroom	.680	505	1–5	4.47 (.680)
… conducting dialogue with children about various conditions of growing up in families (single parent families, poverty in the family, etc.)	.607	447	1–5	4.28 (.822)
… classroom arrangement with illustration on diversity of children (identity, race, physical appearance, developmental disabilities, etc.)	.540	360	1–5	4.18 (.883)
… addressing the unsubstantiality of attitudes based on prejudice and biases towards cultural, gender, and other minorities (e.g., with own example)	.537	440	1–5	4.19 (.881)
… encouraging children at RSE to express own opinions	.360	324	1–5	4.56 (.596)
… equal respect of religious customs, co-existing in the society	.358	331	1–5	4.22 (.941)
… encouraging initiatives, autonomy and independency of children, regardless of their developmental, health, family, social, cultural and other specificities	.349	347	1–5	4.33 (.709)

Conditions and opportunities for ECEC quality in my institution for children at RSE for …

2. Building partnerships with parents	β	h²	Range	M (SD)
			1–5	*3.57 (0.78)*
… including family members of children at RSE in decision making regarding ECEC classroom (development of the curriculum, activities, assessments, etc.)	.759	634	1–5	3.12 (1.095)
… making opportunities for connecting families with different backgrounds, cultures, and views	.742	622	1–5	3.50 (1.056)
… involving family members of children at RSE in curricular activities in the ECEC classroom	.724	584	1–5	3.53 (1.048)
… integration of different family identities and cultures in the curriculum of ECEC classroom	.719	644	1–5	3.82 (.958)
… usage of language and activities devoid of gender and other biases	.495	483	1–5	3.91 (1.008)

Conditions and opportunities for ECEC quality in my institution for children at RSE for …

3. Children's development and learning	β	h²	Range	M (SD)
			1.17–5	3.87(0.66)
… directing children at RSE in the assessment of behavior and work of others (children, preschool teachers, and other adults)	-.793	654	1–5	3.46 (.986)
… introducing children at RSE with educational goals and encouraging children to think about process of own learning	-.711	674	1–5	3.95 (.838)
… encouraging children at RSE to document own learning process	-.692	576	1–5	3.49 (.980)
… encouraging the higher mental processes and problem-solving skills of children at RSE	-.607	644	1–5	3.96 (.806)
… applying strategies that facilitate self-regulation behavior of children at RSE	-.521	573	1–5	4.07 (.754)
… offering children at RSE choices and support in understanding consequences of the choices made	-.468	552	1–5	4.25 (.716)

Intercorrelations among the dimensions and sociodemographic variables

		Respecting diversity	Parental partnership	Enhancing development
Factors	*Respecting diversity*	1.000	.600***	.684***
	Parental partnership		1.000	.598***
	Enhancing development			1.000
Preschool teachers	Age	-.043	-.102**	-.075*
	Working experience	-.036	-.095**	-.087**
	Formal level of education	-.058	-.123**	-.062*
Institution	Number of children in ECEC classroom	-.075*	.027	.063*
	Special programs/curriculum	.046	.083**	.054*

Teacher training in topic of RSE

Teachers' participation in training on the topic of children at RSE during last year	N (%)	1	2-3	>4
Yes	230 (20.1%)	129(10.2%)	90 (7.9%)	23 (2%)
Given descriptive data of training	178 (77,73%)			

Teachers' professional development and training on the topic of children at RSE		N (%)
Form of learning	Literature use	774 (67.8%)
	Exchange of examples of good practice	680 (59.5%)
	Reflection on own practice	470 (41.2%)
	Training in specific programs	282 (24.7%)
	Participating in learning community	166 (14,5%)
	Research data use	149 (13%)

Correlation of preschool teachers' assessments on in-service training regarding children at RSE
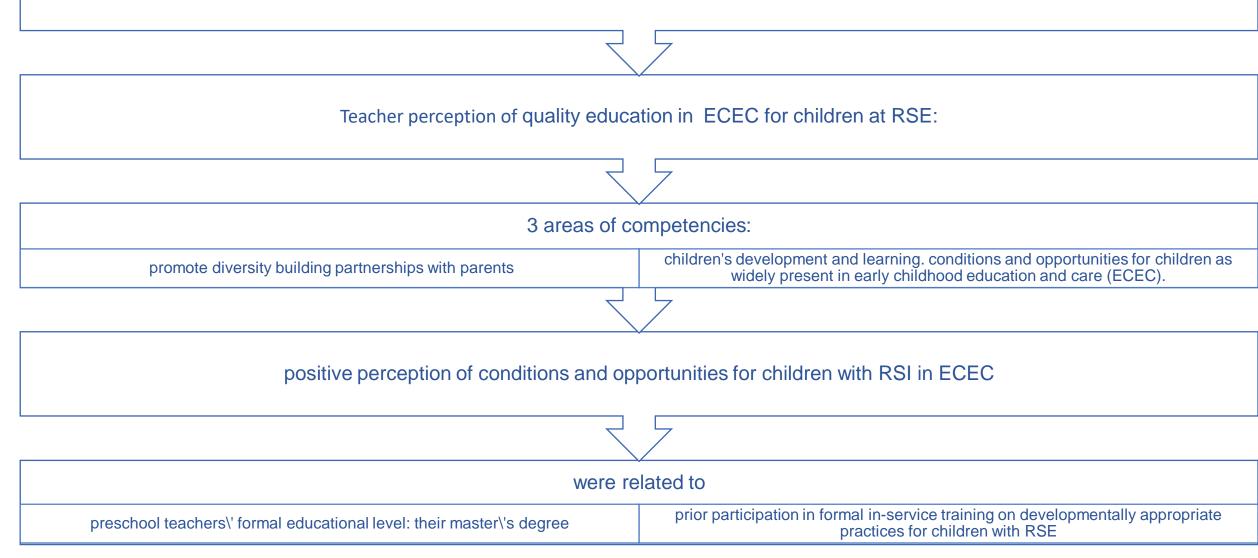
In-service training on the topic of children at RSE		N (%)	Respecting diversity	Parental partnership	Enhancing development
Participation in training last year [S]		230	.056	**.093****	.044
	Once [K]	117			
	Two to three	90 (7.9%)			
	Four or more	23 (2%)			
PD: exchange examples of good practice [K]		680	.057	**.085****	**.092****
PD: reflection on own practice [K]		470	.048	**.121****	**.140****
PD: specific programs [K]		282	.048	**.068***	.035
PD: literature use [K]		774	**.124****	**.099****	**.110****
PD: research data use [K]		149 (13%)	**.082****	**.156****	**115****
PD: participating in learning community [K]		166 (2.8%)	.010	**.093****	**.114****

Findings

1/5 teachers had recently attended continuous professional development regarding children at RSE

Teacher perception of quality education in ECEC for children at RSE:

3 areas of competencies:

| promote diversity building partnerships with parents | children's development and learning. conditions and opportunities for children as widely present in early childhood education and care (ECEC). |

positive perception of conditions and opportunities for children with RSI in ECEC

were related to

| preschool teachers\' formal educational level: their master\'s degree | prior participation in formal in-service training on developmentally appropriate practices for children with RSE |

Conclusion

suggest the need for high-quality teacher training to acquire competencies in providing support to this group of children and their parents

the concept of risk of social exclusion is very broad and somewhat vague in nature. Although the terminology is widely used in ECEC practice, the epistemology is still uncertain.

Longitudinal and cross-cultural studies should be undertaken for ECEC in-training programs for children at RSE.

Further, mixed method approaches with participative methodologies, such as photovoice or double photo voice in real-life situations, should also be considered.

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