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Preschool Teachers' Professional Training in the Field of Inclusive Education in The North of Kosovo and Metohija

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Abstract: The issue of inclusive education is focused on providing the high quality education for all learners through the process of introducing the changes concerning the educational approach and the modification of educational content depending on the learners' individual needs for additional support. The analyses of inclusive policies and inclusive practice in Europe indicate that the characteristics of social context significantly impact the development of inclusive practice. Self-assessment for professional training is a vital condition for enhancing competences through continuous learning and reflexive practice with the aim of achieving the final learning outcomes of all pupils. The aim of the research was also to determine the dominance of certain ways of training within the regular professional training, in regard to the quality and availability of education and support for work that can be provided by the preschool institution where these teachers are employed. The sample comprises of 130 preschool teachers of the following preschool institutions in the north of Kosovo and Metohija. Taking into account the results of the conducted research, the respondents outlined as the most useful findings and skills that are necessary for working with children with disabilities the following ones: the identification of characteristics of certain difficulties among children, the adjustment of methods, ways of teaching, materials and space to working with children who need additional educational support, the creation of individual educational plan for a child who needs additional educational support and communication skills for working with parents.

Keywords: inclusive education, professional training, preschool institution, competences.

Introduction

The issue of inclusive education is focused on providing the high quality education for all learners through the process of introducing the changes concerning the educational approach and the modification of educational content depending on the learners' individual needs for additional support. In order to realize the inclusive education, the employees in the educational system must be ready to enable themselves for supporting the children and the learners they work with.

Although the inclusive educational approach has been promoted for the last several decades and it was established as a norm in 2006 (Krischler et al., 2019), the change of the educational paradigm in educational institutions in Serbia from medical model to the pedagogic one started through legal reforms in 2009. After all employees in educational institutions were obliged to the umbrella law on education (Zakon o osnovama sistema obrazovanja i vaspitanja, 2009), its realization was regulated through the following rulebooks: the Rulebook on additional education, healthcare and social support of the child, a pupil and adult (Pravilnik o dodatnoj obrazovnoj, zdravstvenoj i socijalnoj podršci detetu, učeniku i odraslom, 2018) and the Rulebook on closer instructions for determining the right to an individual education plan, its implementation and evaluation (Pravilnik o bližim uputstvima za utvrđivanje prava na individualni obrazovni plan, njegovu primenu i vrednovanje, 2018) ("Sl. glasnik RS", No 74/2018). However, the process from the legal regulations to the practical implementation has not been easy (Krstić,

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2017), therefore the development of the inclusive education is supported through organizing lectures, debates, trainings for planning, its implementation and evaluation, the Individual Education Plan (IEO), availability of appropriate references, through establishing Interdepartmental Commissions at the local level as well as the Inclusive Education Unit at the republic level (Maksimović and Stamatović, 2021).

In terms of the absence of this field in initial education, the inclusive approach has frequently been criticized with pessimistic attitude, hence the realization of children's/pupils' rights who need additional support is doubted. The research on teachers' attitudes in Serbia (Macura-Milovanović and Vujsić-Živković 2011) indicate that students start their professional practice with negative attitudes towards inclusive education, moreover that pupils who need additional support should be educated in specialized schools. Kostović and associates also wrote about the willingness of schools for inclusion (Kostović, Zuković and Borovica, 2011). In addition, some research among teachers (Popović et al., 2020) point out that they do not evaluate themselves as competent enough for inclusive education. A competent teacher is the one who is able to identify educational values within transaction with all pupils (Radulović et al., 2010). The main indicators that refer to the competent teacher for working in the inclusive practice are the acceptance and understanding of the diversity among children and the difference concerning the satisfaction of their needs, as well as the readiness for finding strategies (for cooperation with parents and other individuals) for improving their development and learning. The benefit of such an approach toward a child is reflected in the maximum development of potentials that he/she has.

The analyses of inclusive policies and inclusive practice in Europe indicate that the characteristics of social context significantly impact the development of inclusive practice (Ainscow and César, 2006; Krstić, 2017; Ratković, Hebib and Šaljić, 2017). Previously mentioned findings imply the need for creating consciousness concerning the relevance of applying resources that can be used for professional trainings and at the same time enhance the social commitment to this issue. One more important aspect of the support to the children who need additional educational support is also the parents' awareness and commitment, whereas employees in educational institutions also have a significant role (Zuković and Popović 2011). Self-assessment for professional training is a vital condition for enhancing competences through continuous learning and reflexive practice with the aim of achieving the final learning outcomes of all pupils (Jerotijević and Mrše 2010). There are only few research on the competences of preschool teachers for working in inclusive practice in our region. Their authors agree with the fact that conceptual changes in the preschool teachers' initial education are necessary because preschool teachers are not sufficiently prepared for working in the inclusive practice from the professional point of view (Milenković and Nikolić, 2015; Nikolić, Korać and Lazarević, 2020). Furthermore, enhancing the mechanism of cooperation among experts from the institutions of education, healthcare and social protection is needed (Zlatarović and Mihajlović, 2013). The results also point that the support of inclusive education through professional training and horizontal connecting is rare, as well as that the plans of educational institutions predict trainings for developing competences for working with children who need additional educational support, but not different ways of learning through horizontal exchange and team work (Radivojević et al., 2007: 55).

The importance and need for professional training of preschool teachers for working with children who need additional support are based on the results of some earlier research (Jordan, Schwartz and McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Seçer, 2010), which show that most professional training within this field implies more preschool teachers' positive attitudes concerning the inclusive process in the preschool institution. Thus, the crucial significance of the development of inclusive policy and practice, focusing on the problem and raising the interest of preschool teachers about personal roles and the possibilities of applying certain strategies in practice, is reflected in the participation of as many various models and programs of preschool teachers' professional training as possible (Corbett, 2002). The ways of approach toward dealing with these issues are different and depend largely on the social context.

Taking into account the European Framework for Inclusive Education, legal regulations, but the current national support of the development of the inclusive practice too, and the contextual framework of the region where the research was conducted, the paper points out the research findings that are the result of preschool teachers' self-assessment concerning the necessary assistance through professional training for understanding children who need additional support, in order to provide them with adequate and timely support of their development and learning.

Materials and Methods

The subject matter of this research was to examine how preschool teachers assess the possibilities of professional training in the field of inclusive education. The authors' primary idea was to use the final results for professional engagement, support and creating adequate and various ways for training the preschool teachers for working with children with disabilities, who need additional educational support. In other words, this research highlights the need for considering the preschool teachers' attitudes towards the factors of inclusion that impact its quality since the preschool teachers are bearers of educational activities while working with children who need additional educational support. The appreciation of their perceptions can reveal significant preconditions of good inclusive practice.

The aim of the research was also to determine the dominance of certain ways of training within the regular professional training, in regard to the quality and availability of education and support for work that can be provided by the preschool institution where these teachers are employed. The aim itself was achieved through several tasks such as: to determine how preschool teachers assess the availability and quality of education concerning the children who need additional educational support within regular professional training; to map preschool teachers' attitudes towards the availability and quality of support in the institution; to examine which knowledge and skills, according to preschool teachers, would contribute to their competences and self-confidence while working with children who need additional educational support; to determine which way of professional training preschool teachers find the most useful one.

For the requirements of the research the following scales were applied: The scale of basic socio-demographic characteristics (which was constructed for the purposes of the research and the consideration of socio-demographic variables) and the Scale of self-assessment of competences and the quality of training for working in the inclusive kindergarten which was constructed by Mamić (2012) but it was modified for the purposes of this research. This scale consists of the following segments, sub-scales:

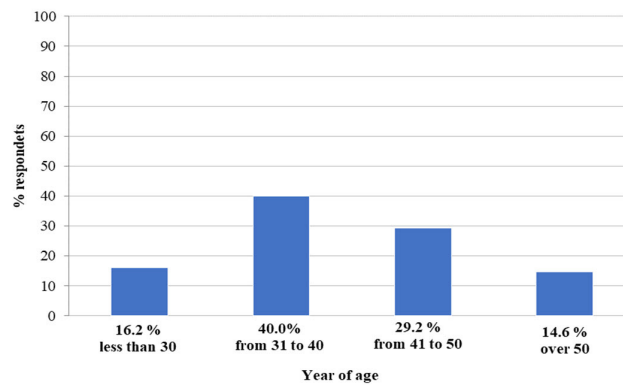
1. *The scale of availability and quality of trainings within regular professional training* that contains 6 items (Cronbach's Alpha 0,931- It is widely known that the values of Cronbach's α that are above 0,70 are acceptable (Pallant, 2009, according to Kompirović, 2021: 96).) by means of which the preschool teachers were examined how they assess the availability and quality of trainings concerning the children who need additional educational support on the scale from 1 to 5, 1 refers to the lowest, while 5 refers to the highest level of availability and quality of trainings. The following variables were considered: availability of trainings, the amount of new information, the quality of new information, applicability of gained knowledge, the contribution of training to the competence for working with children and the contribution of training to the self-confidence for working with children who need additional educational support.

2. *The scale of availability and quality of support in the preschool institution* that contains 17 items (Cronbach's Alpha 0,972) by means of which the preschool teachers were examined how they assess the availability and quality of support that they get in the institution where they work, on the scale from 1 to 5, 1 refers to the lowest, while 5 refers to the highest level of availability and quality of support. The following variables were considered: the availability of the experts' support, the amount of the gained information, the quality of the gained information, the applicability of suggestions, the contribution of cooperation to competences and self-confidence, the availability of didactic tools, the amount and quality of didactic tools, the applicability of available didactic tools, teachers' effort for creating didactic tools, the contribution of didactic tools to self-confidence, the possibility of engaging the personal assistant, the contribution of personal assistant, appropriate number of children in a group, the contribution of appropriate number of children to the quality of work and physical adaptation of the space.

3. *The list of knowledge and skills of preschool teachers for inclusive approach in education* that was used for ranking the most important knowledge and skills of preschool teachers while working with children who need additional educational support. The respondents were ranked by means of the scale from 6 which refers to the highest level to 1 which refers to the lowest one.

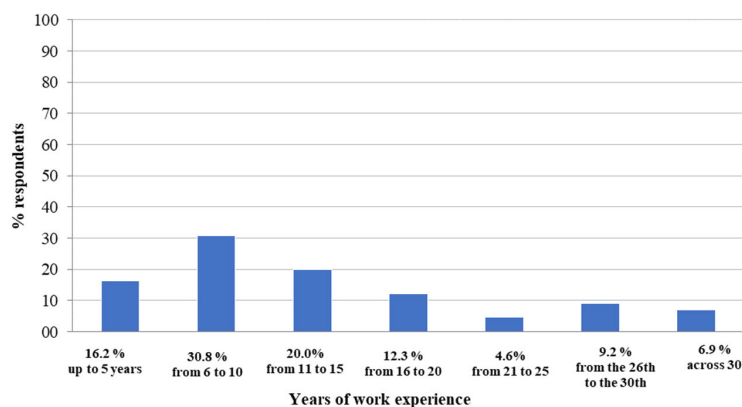
4. *The list of the most useful forms of preschool teachers' professional training* that contains 4 possible answers, where the preschool teachers could choose two of them that describe best which forms of trainings they find the most useful ones.

The research was conducted in September, 2021, in all preschool institutions in the north of Kosovo and Metohija. The sample comprises of 130 preschool teachers of the following preschool institutions: *Naše dete* in Zubin Potok, *Lane* in Zvečan, *Danica Jaramaz* in Kosovska Mitrovica, *Bambi* in Sočanica, *Naša radost* in Leposavić and *Veselo detinjstvo* in Lešak.



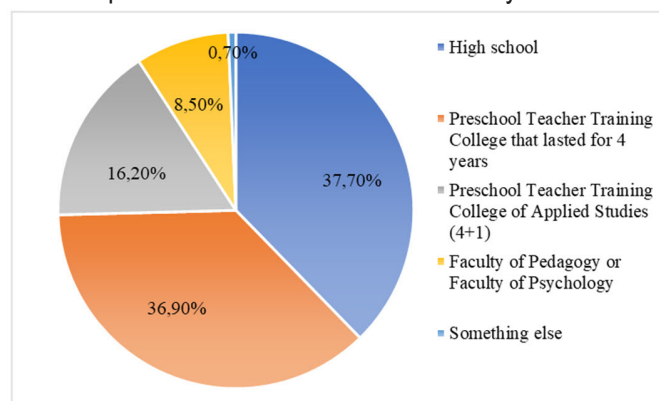
Graph 1. Sample structure in regard to the respondents' age

Considering the structure of the sample in terms of the respondents' age, most of them belong to the middle age from 31 to 40 that is from 41 to 50.



Graph 2. Sample structure in regard to the respondents' working experience in the preschool institution

For the purposes of the analysis but due to insufficient presence of certain categories that are grouped according to the variable of working experience, the respondents were divided into two groups: the first one contains the respondents who have less than 10 years of working experience (47%) while the second one contains the respondents who have more than 10 years of working experience (53%).



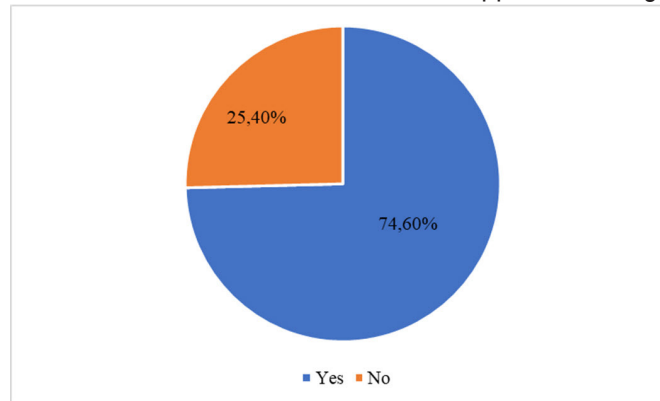
Graph 3. Sample structure in regard to professional qualifications

Taking into account respondents professional qualifications, approximately the same percentage of respondents (more than the third) graduated from high school (37,7%) or the Preschool Teacher Training College that lasted for 4 years (36,9%). 16,2% of respondents graduated from the Preschool Teacher Training College of Applied Studies (4+1), whereas 8,5% of them graduated from the Faculty of Pedagogy or Faculty of Psychology. In terms of gender, there were more female respondents, more precisely 127 (97,7%) of them, in comparison with the male ones, only 3 (2,3%) of them, which is not surprising at all considering the fact that mostly women are interested in this profession. Consequently, the variable of gender is not taken into account within further analysis and discussion of results.

The data were analyzed by means of the following procedures of the statistical program for data analysis SPSS 21: descriptive analysis, t-test and one-way analysis of variance.

Results and Discussion

The assessment of the availability and quality of trainings within regular professional training. These lines of the paper present the way preschool teachers assess the availability and quality of trainings concerning children who need additional educational support within regular professional training.



Graph 4. Attending training related to working with children who need additional educational support

According to the gained results, every fourth respondent (25,4%) attended some training related to working with children who need additional educational support, while 74,6% of them haven't had such an experience yet. This fact is humiliating because only the fourth of the whole sample attended some form of professional training. However, this finding is similar to the ones of the earlier research which indicate that barely 28 preschool teachers (approximately 21%) attended some of the professional trainings that are concerned with the issues of working with children with disabilities (Stančić and Stanisavljević Petrović, 2013).

What is more important is illustrated within the fact that less than half of preschool teachers who attended some form of additional training (44,8%) had only three trainings, while the third of them (34,5%) attended only one training, and every tenth respondent attended two trainings related to the previously mentioned issue. The data that refer to professional trainings of preschool teachers for working with children who need additional educational support at the preschool age seem very modest. If the final goal is more appropriate relationship to the children who need additional educational support as well as their education and the complete inclusion in the educational system even at the initial, preschool level, then the data indicate that it is necessary to consider the issue of high quality preparation and preschool teachers' training for identification of such children and further work with them.

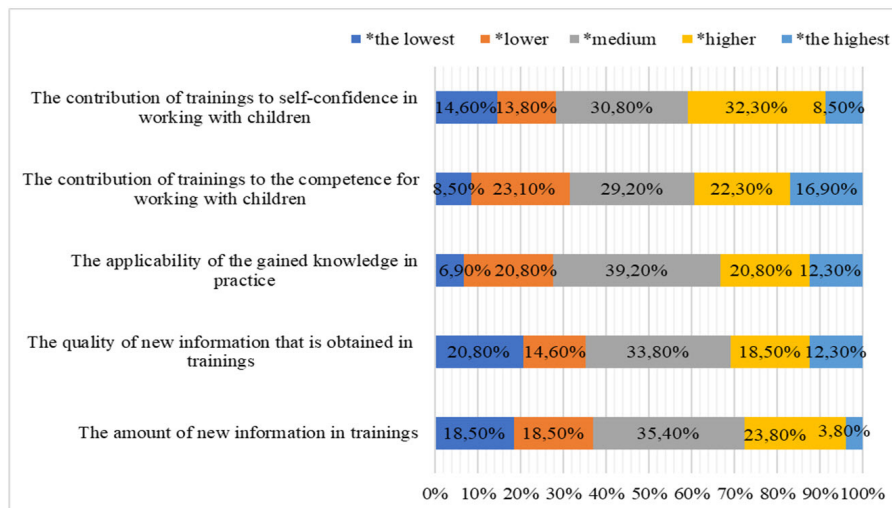
Table 1 presents the main statistical data of the preschool teachers' assessment in terms of the availability and quality of trainings within regular professional training that refer to working with children who need additional educational support.

Table 1

Descriptive statistical indicators of the availability and quality of trainings within regular professional training

	N	Min	Max	AC	SD
The assessment of availability and quality of trainings that refer to working with children who need additional educational support within regular professional training	130	6	30	17,73	6,078

As can be seen from the Table 1, data range from 6 to 30, as well as the total achieved results, which indicates that the respondents assessed the availability and quality of trainings concerning children who need additional educational support within regular professional training with all values of the scale, from the lowest to highest ones. Considering the average result, it can be concluded that approximately one third of the preschool teachers, as for the investigated sample, assessed this item with the average result (AM=17,73, SD=6,078).



Graph 5. Distribution of results within the items of the scale Availability and quality of trainings for working with children who need additional educational support within regular professional training

Taking into account the average result from the scale, it can be concluded that most respondents (39,2%) assessed the level of applicability of the gained knowledge in practice with the medium grade. The similar result of preschool teachers' answers can be noticed in terms of the amount (35,4%) and the quality (33,8%) of new information which is obtained in the trainings that they attended. Although they assessed the contribution of trainings to the self-confidence with medium grade (30,08%), the fact that they also consider trainings as the factor that could help and enhance their self-confidence for work is the promising one (higher 32,3% and the highest 8,5%). The distribution of results in the Graph 5 also indisputably indicates the fact that preschool teachers are not satisfied with the availability and quality of trainings within regular professional training in terms of working with children who need additional educational support. This implies the finding that most preschool teachers' assessments are focused on the range of answers from the lowest to the medium level (the lowest 11,5%, lower 36,2% and the medium level 25,4%), which entails more than two thirds of the sample. Such outcome indicates the conclusion that preschool teachers think that the trainings where they could professionally train themselves and improve their competences are not available to them. On the other hand, preschool teachers are pretty much aware of the fact that such trainings would contribute to their competences for working with children who need additional educational support (higher 22,3% and the highest level 16,9%). If the context of the sample is considered, the answers of the insufficient presence and availability of the trainings could be the consequence of the peculiar isolation of the region of the northern part of Kosovo and Metohija, to which the sample belongs. Namely, this is an area of the difficult and prolonged social crisis (Stanojević, Krstić and Jaredić, 2013), bad security situation which both impact badly on the functioning of the complete social context and system. In such social circumstances, there is the lack of offers of professional trainings which could help the preschool teachers to improve their professional and educational capacities for working with children through various seminars, workshops, conferences etc.

In order to determine the differences concerning the respondents' answers in regard to working experience, t-test was applied. By means of the independent sample t-test it is concluded that there are statistically significant differences between the two previously mentioned groups of respondents which indicate that the respondents with less working experience show more positive attitude in terms of the availability and quality of trainings related to children who need additional educational support. These differences are found within the following items: *the availability of trainings* (group of respondents with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=3,18, SD=1,133, group of respondents with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,41, SD=1,048, $t(128)=4,049$, $p=0,000$); *the amount of new information in trainings that you attended* (group of respondents with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=3,07, SD=1,014, group of respondents with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,49, SD=1,158, $t(128)=3,006$, $p=0,003$); *the quality of new information obtained in trainings that you attended* (group of respondents with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=3,21, SD=1,127, group of respondents with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,57, SD=1,345, $t(128)=2,987$, $p=0,003$); *the applicability of the gained knowledge in practice* (group of respondents with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=3,34, SD=1,031, group of respondents with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,90, SD=1,100, $t(128)=2,374$, $p=0,019$) and *the contribution of trainings to your self-confidence*

for working with children who need additional educational support (group of respondents with less than 10 years of working experience -AS=3,38, SD=0,934, group of respondents with more than 10 years of working experience -AM=2,78, SD=1,305, $t(128)=3,011$, $p=0,003$). There aren't significant statistical differences between these two groups of respondents considering the other items.

One-way analysis of variance for the variable age of respondents pointed out that there are statistically significant differences among four groups of respondents in terms of *the availability of trainings through which preschool teachers professionally improve themselves for working with children who need additional educational support*. Subsequent tests determined that respondents who are less than 30 years old (AM=3,52, SD=0,750) assessed the availability and quality of trainings more positively than their older colleagues who are 41 to 50 years old (AM=2,39, SD=0,974) and more than 50 years old (AM=2,16, SD=0,898), $t(130)=7,633$, $p=0,000$. Moreover, respondents who are 31 to 40 years old (AM=2,96, SD=1,283) assessed this aspect of professional training more positively than their colleagues who are more than 50 years old. Statistically significant differences were also found in terms of the aspect of *the assessing the amount of new information* so that respondents who are less than 30 years old (AM=3,19, SD=0,928) and the ones who are 31 to 40 years old (AM=2,94, SD=1,162) assessed more positively the amount of new information in comparison with the colleagues who are more than 50 years old (AM=2,16, SD=1,214), $t(130)=3,855$, $p=0,011$.

Furthermore, there are also differences in regard to the *applicability of the gained knowledge in practice*, which means that the respondents who are less than 30 years old (AM=3,62, SD=0,865) assessed this aspect more positively than their colleagues who are more than 50 years old (AM=2,53, SD=0,964), $t(130)=3,560$, $p=0,016$. Preschool teachers who are less than 30 years old (AM=3,52, SD=1,078) have statistically significant more affirmative attitude in terms of *the contribution of trainings to self-confidence for working with children who need additional educational support* in comparison with the respondents who are more than 50 years old (AM=2,32, SD=1,376), $t(130)=4,256$, $p=0,007$.

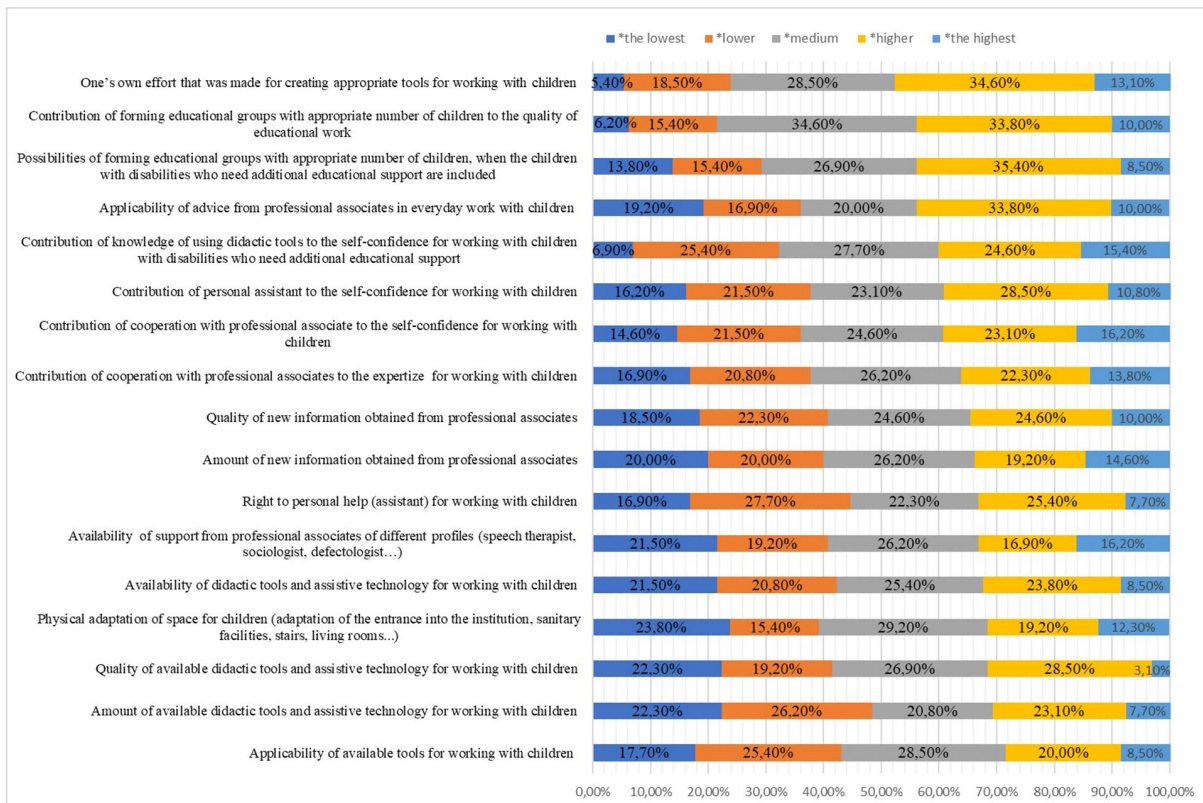
Taking into account the education of preschool teachers, there is a statistically significant difference between the respondents who graduated from high school (AM=3,57, SD=1,190) and the ones who graduated from the Preschool Teacher Training College that lasted for 4 years (AM=2,90, SD=1,276), $F(130)=3,365$, $p=0,021$, which implies the fact that respondents of lower level of education assessed *the contribution of trainings to their competence for working with children who need additional educational support* more positively and that could be regarded as the contribution of the length of the preschool teachers' initial education.

The assessment of the availability and quality of support in the preschool institution. Table 2 contains the main statistical parameters of the preschool teachers' assessment in regard to the availability and quality of support that they get in the preschool institution.

Table 2
Descriptive statistical indicators of the availability and quality of support within the institution

	N	Min	Max	AM	SD
The assessment of the availability and quality of support that you get in the institution where you are employed	130	17	80	49,0	17,573

As can be seen from the Table 2, taking into account the average result of the previously mentioned scale (AM=49,0, SD=17,573), it can be concluded that the results related to the items of the availability and quality are mainly distributed within average grades, which indicates that approximately every fourth of preschool teachers assessed this aspect as the medium one (on the scale from the lowest to the highest level).



Graph 6. Distribution of results concerning the items of the scale Availability and quality of support in the preschool institution

The Graph 6 provides insight into results according to which preschool teachers' attitudes concerning the quality of support that they get in the preschool institution is at medium level which implies the average level, while in terms of certain segments it even implies the serious deficiency and the lack of support that is necessary for appropriate work with children.

Considering these results, the assessments that are below the average, which contribute to the fact that material-organizational-technical facilities for working in the institution and adequate support by professional associates of different profiles lack and that they are not included to the appropriate extent, refer to the following items: quality (the lowest level 18,5% and lower level 22,3%) and amount of new information obtained from professional associates (the lowest level 18,5% and lower level 22,3%), right to the personal help (assistant) for working with children (the lowest level 16,9% and lower level 27,7%), availability of support from professional associates of different profiles (speech therapist, sociologist, defectologist...) (the lowest level 21,5% and lower level 19,2%), availability (the lowest level 21,5% and lower level 20,8%), amount (the lowest level 22,3% and lower level 26,2%) and quality of didactic tools and assistive technology for working with children who need additional educational support (the lowest level 22,3% and lower level 19,2%), physical adaptation of space (adaptation of the entrance into the institution, sanitary facilities, stairs, living rooms...) (the lowest level 23,8% and lower level 15,4%) and applicability of available tools for working with children (the lowest level 17,7% and lower level 25,4%). These research results differ from the Rulebook on continuous professional training and promotion to the titles of teachers, preschool teachers and professional associates (Pravilnik o stalnom stručnom usavršavanju i napredovanju u zvanja nastavnika, vaspitača i stručnih saradnika, 2021), where the focus is on planning the professional training at the level of preschool institution. Inconvenient attitudes towards the support for implementing inclusion are emphasized in some earlier research with preschool teachers, primary school teachers and secondary school teachers (Dulčić and Bakota, 2008; Kranjčec Mlinarić, Žic Ralić and Lisak, 2016; Stančić, Kiš-Glavaš and Nikolić, 2015). According this research results, it is surprising that the assessment of support from specialist services is very low, although all preschool institutions in the north of Kosovo and Metohija have at least one engaged associate.

In view of the analyzed results, it can be concluded that preschool teachers highly assess their own effort for creating appropriate tools for working with children (higher level 34,6% and the highest level 13,1%) and the possibility of forming educational groups with appropriate number of children (higher

level 35,4% and the highest level 8,5%). Moreover, preschool teachers highly assessed *advice from professional associates in everyday work with children* (higher level 33,8% and the highest level 10,0%), in spite of the fact that they are not satisfied with their support. In addition, they think that *knowledge for applying didactic tools and assistive technology highly contribute to their self-confidence for working with children who need additional educational support* (higher level 24,6% and the highest level 15,4%), as well as *the engagement of the personal assistant* (higher level 28,5% and the highest level 10,8%).

In order to determine the differences within the respondents' answers in terms of the working experience, t-test was applied. By means of the independent sample t-test it was determined that there are statistically significant differences between the two groups of respondents (the group with less than 10 years of working experience and the group with more than 10 years of working experience), which in terms of the availability and the quality of support in the institution point out more positive attitude of respondents with less working experience. These differences can be noticed within the following items: *availability of support by professional associates of different profiles (speech therapist, sociologist, defectologist...)* (the group with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=3,21, SD=1,343, the group with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,57, SD=1,323, $t(128)=2,767$, $p=0,006$; *amount of new information obtained from professional associates* (the group with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=3,21, SD=1,318, the group with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,59, SD=1,287, $t(128)=2,706$, $p=0,008$; *quality of new information obtained from professional associates* (the group with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=3,15, SD=1,236, the group with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,59, SD=1,240, $t(128)=2,542$, $p=0,012$; *contribution of cooperation to the professional expertise of preschool teachers for working with children* (the group with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=3,31, SD=1,162, the group with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,64, SD=1,328, $t(128)=3,059$, $p=0,003$; *contribution of cooperation with professional associates to the self-confidence of preschool teachers for working with children* (the group with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=3,31, SD=1,104, the group with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,81, SD=1,417, $t(128)=2,257$, $p=0,026$; *availability of didactic tools and assistive technology* (the group with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=3,08, SD=1,320, the group with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,49, SD=1,158, $t(128)=2,710$, $p=0,008$; *amount of available didactic tools and assistive technology for working with children* (the group with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,97, SD=1,251, the group with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,42, SD=1,230, $t(128)=2,510$, $p=0,013$; *the quality of available didactic tools and assistive technology for working with children* (the group with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,98, SD=1,133, the group with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,46, SD=1,195, $t(128)=2,536$, $p=0,012$ and *the applicability of available tools for work* (the group with less than 10 years of working experience - AM=3,05, SD=1,231, the group with more than 10 years of working experience - AM=2,51, SD=1,133, $t(128)=2,614$, $p=0,010$). Statistically significant differences for the rest of items between these two groups of respondents are not determined. The more positive attitude the respondents expressed, the less working experience they had which is not unexpected nor surprising because some earlier research showed that the age and working experience of preschool teachers, primary school teachers and secondary school teachers can impact the attitudes towards inclusive education (Vlah, Međimorec Grgurić and Bafiri, 2017; Skočić Mihić, Gabrić and Bošković, 2016). Such results can be explained by the fact that preschool teachers with less than 10 years of working experience had an opportunity to educate themselves through different levels of education, to educate themselves in classes in which children who need additional educational support were included too, or they had more opportunities to listen and learn about inclusive education within their university education.

By means of one-way analysis of variance it was also determined that there are statistically significant differences among preschool teachers of different age. The ones with less than 30 years of working experience (AM=3,57, SD=1,248) have statistically significant more affirmative attitude in terms of the *contribution of support by professional associates of different profiles (speech therapist, sociologist, defectologist...)* in comparison with the ones who are between 41 and 50 years old (AM=2,50, SD=1,268) and the ones who are more than 50 years old (AM=2,47, SD=1,219), $t(130)=3,680$, $p=0,014$. These results indicate that younger preschool teachers are probably more willing to ask for help in case they need any, thus they improve themselves regarding this matter more, since they have less working experience.

Moreover, their attitude is more affirmative in terms of *the amount of new information obtained from professional associates, the quality of new information obtained from professional associates, the contribution of cooperation with professional associates to their own expertise, the availability and amount of didactic tools and assistive technology for working with children*. They also assessed more positively *the quality of available didactic tools and assistive technology for working with children, the applicability*

of available tools, the aspect of support from professional associates, one's own effort for creating appropriate tools for working with children, the contribution of knowledge of using didactic tools and assistive technology to the self-confidence for working with children, the right to personal help (assistant) for working with children, the contribution of the assistant to one's own self-confidence for working with children.

Considering the professional qualifications, there is a statistically significant difference between the respondents who graduated from high school (AM=3,29, SD=1,369) and the ones who graduated from the Preschool Teacher Training College of Applied Studies – 4+1 (AM=2,29, SD=1,189), $F(130)=3,202$, $p=0,026$, which means that the respondents of lower level of education assessed more positively *the availability of support from professional associates of different profiles (speech therapist, sociologist, defectologist...)*, as well as *the amount* (AM=2,29, SD=1,189), $F(130)=3,525$, $p=0,017$ and *the quality of new information obtained from professional associates* (AM=2,24, SD=0,995), $F(130)=4,061$, $p=0,009$. In addition, there are also statistically significant differences between the preschool teachers who graduated from high school (AM=3,41, SD=1,257) and the ones who graduated from the Faculty of Pedagogy or Psychology (AM=2,55, SD=1,293), $F(130)=3,029$, $p=0,032$. These obvious differences outline the fact that respondents of lower level of education have more affirmative attitude towards the aspect of support which refers to *the applicability of advice of professional associates in everyday work, that is in terms of the contribution of cooperation with professional associates to their expertise for working with children who need additional educational support* (AM=2,36, SD=1,206), $F(130)=3,154$, $p=0,027$. Furthermore, there are statistically significant differences among the preschool teachers who graduated from high school (AM=3,49, SD=1,244), on the one hand, and the ones who graduated from the Preschool Teacher Training College of Applied Studies – 4+1 (AM=2,57, SD=1,165) and from the Faculty of Pedagogy or Psychology, on the other hand (AM=2,36, SD=1,120), $F(130)=4,170$, $p=0,007$. Such differences indicate that the lower the level of education is, the more affirmative attitude they have towards the aspect of support that refers to *the contribution of cooperation with the professional associates to the self-confidence for working with children who need additional educational support*. More convenient attitudes of preschool teachers who graduated from high school could be explained as the result of educational and professional deficiency in regard to the inclusion. Due to the lack of practical and educational experience concerning the knowledge about children who need additional educational support, preschool teachers of this level of education consider every way of support, help and cooperation with professional associates and the rest of participants of the educational process as the valuable benefit to developing and improving ones' own competences for working with children. On the other hand, it is possible that preschool teachers who graduated from Preschool Training College of Applied Studies and the ones who obtained a master's degree, as well as the ones who graduated from the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, have more strict criteria when it comes to the evaluation of necessary knowledge and competences and the help they need from professional associates.

The analysis of variance showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the respondents who graduated from high school (AM=3,12, SD=1,201) and the ones who graduated from the Preschool Teacher Training College of Applied Studies - 4+1 (AM=2,33, SD=0,913), $F(130)=3,028$, $p=0,032$, to the effect that the respondents who graduated from high school assessed more positively *the applicability of available tools for working with children who need additional educational support*.

Furthermore, there is a statistically significant difference between the respondents who graduated from high school (AM=3,43, SD=1,137) and the ones who graduated from the Faculty of Pedagogy and the Faculty of Psychology (AM=2,64, SD=1,286). Consequently, the respondents of lower level of education more positively assessed the aspect of support that refers to *the contribution of knowledge for using didactic tools and assistive technology for self-confidence for working* $F(130)=2,990$, $p=0,034$, as well as for *the right to personal help (assistant) for working with children with disabilities for additional educational support* $F(130)=4,253$, $p=0,007$.

Likewise, there is a statistically significant difference between various groups of respondents in the sense that the respondents of lower level of education assessed more positively *the contribution of personal assistant to the self-confidence for working with children who need additional educational support* $F(130)=9,287$, $p=0,000$ and *the contribution to forming educational groups with appropriate number of children concerning the quality of educational work* $F(130)=3,426$, $p=0,019$, as well as *physical adaptations of space (adaptation of the entrance into the institution, sanitary facilities, stairs, living rooms...)* $F(130)=3,760$, $p=0,013$.

The assessment of knowledge and skills of preschool teachers for inclusive approach to education. The Table 7 shows the distribution of answers related to the most important knowledge and skills of preschool teachers for working with children who need additional educational support.

Table 7

The distribution of the respondents' answers about the most important skills and knowledge for working with children who need additional educational support

Knowledge and skills	Importance					
	*the highest	*enough	*little less	*medium	*less	*the least
Identification of characteristics of various difficulties among children	34,60%	16,20%	8,50%	17,70%	19,20%	3,80%
Adjustment of the method, the form of teaching, materials and space for working with children who need additional educational support	28,50%	16,90%	23,10%	16,20%	10,00%	5,30%
Strategy of including children who need additional educational support in activities and encouraging the interaction with peers in the group	33,80%	24,60%	12,30%	18,60%	3,80%	6,90%
Creating the individual educational plan for the child who need additional educational support	26,90%	19,20%	19,20%	25,40%	6,20%	3,10%
Strategy of solving the problem of unwilling behavior of children who need additional educational support	31,50%	26,20%	16,10%	13,10%	8,50%	4,60%
Communication skills for working with parents	39,20%	13,80%	18,60%	23,80%	0,00%	4,60%

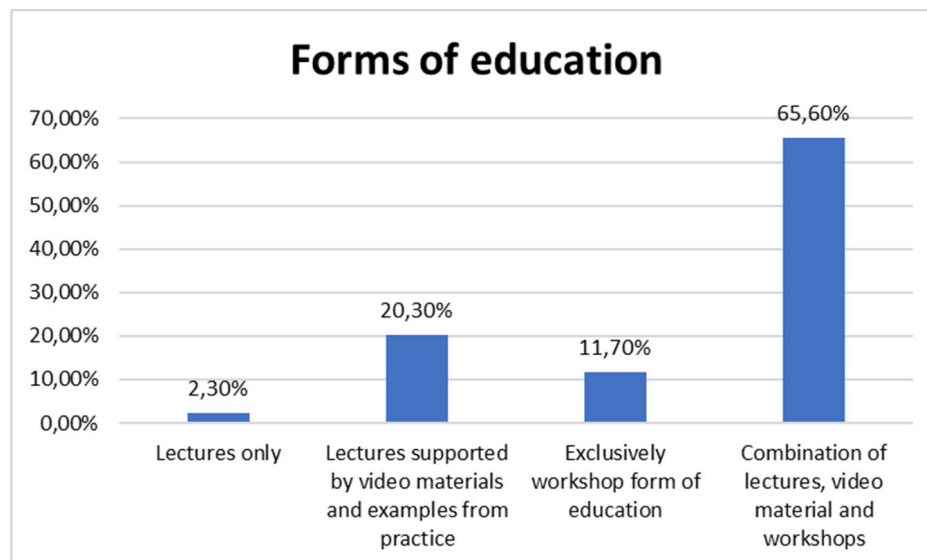
The respondents had the opportunity to rank in regard to their knowledge and skills that is to assess what could contribute most or least to the development of their competences and self-confidence for working with children who need additional educational support.

The respondents ranked as the most important thing *the identification of characteristics of various difficulties among children*. Apart from that, more than half of respondents consider the two categories in terms of the most significant (much and enough) for the following items: *the adjustment of methods, forms of teaching, materials and space for working with children who need additional educational support, the creation of individual educational plan for the child who need additional educational support and communication skills for working with parents*.

On the other hand, more than 30% of respondents consider the two categories in terms of the least significant (less and the least) for the following items: *the strategy of including children who need additional educational support in the activities and encouraging interaction with peers in the group, the strategy of solving the problem of unwilling behaviour among children who need additional educational support and communication skills for working with parents*.

The assessment of the most useful forms of professional training of preschool teachers.

Professional training of preschool teachers in preschool institutions and teachers in regular schools in Serbia is regulated by the Rulebook on continuous professional training and promotion to the titles of teachers, preschool teachers and professional associates ([Pravilnik o stalnom stručnom usavršavanju i sticanju zvanja nastavnika, vaspitača i stručnih saradnika, "Sl. glasnik RS", 109 19/2021](#)). *The Law on the Foundations of the Education System ("Sl. glasnik RS", br. 88/2017, 27/2018 - dr. zakon, 10/2019, 27/2018 - dr. zakon, 6/2020 i 129/2021)* prescribes that primary and secondary school teachers as well as preschool teachers must improve themselves permanently in order to advance their educational work more successfully. Therefore, preschool teachers' attitudes concerning the most useful forms of professional training were mapped.



Graph 7. The most useful forms of trainings for preschool teachers' competence for the inclusive approach in education

Taking into account the Graph 7, the fact that combining the lectures, material and workshops could be the most useful form of training dominates (65,6% agreed with it), whereas the other forms are less significant. This result points out the invaluable significance of pictures, sounds and words for teaching even the adult learners and it reminds of the well-known quote of the Chinese philosopher Confucius "tell me and I will forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I will understand." This is very important because it can be used as a direction for the organization of trainings.

Conclusion

The preschool institution is the first educational institution in the whole education system of children. In the earliest age of development, the child gets different ways of support in the very group that is coordinated by the preschool teacher. However, the preschool institution should provide the possibility for developmental competences of the children with typical development, as well as of the children who need additional help and support in the development. Additional ways of support demand certain conditions for work, then preparation and planning, and the preschool teachers' competence too. On the other hand, firstly preschool teacher' positive attitudes towards the inclusive works, then motivation for work, characteristics of their personalities, as well as the need for permanent development and improvement for different forms of competence, contribute to better understanding of the issue and preschool teachers' professional work. The imperative of preschool teachers' inclusive work within the preschool institution implies the correct assessment and pedagogical tact of preschool teachers to create the socio-emotional atmosphere in the group where the feeling of satisfaction, while being a part of it, is equally present among all children.

According to the results of the conducted research, as for the investigated sample, it is determined that considering the availability and the quality of training concerning children, who need additional educational support, the respondents with less working experience have more positive attitudes than the respondents with more working experience, as well as that the respondents of lower level of education have more affirmative attitudes in comparison with the preschool teachers of higher level of education. The availability of high quality trainings that could help the preschool teachers through professional improvement with working with children who need additional educational support is at the medium level. The presence of medium assessments indicates that it is necessary to deal more with these issues, whereas the research findings emphasize that it is necessary to ensure more trainings, increase their number and the quality of information that is offered to preschool teachers within them. The percentage of preschool teachers who attended no training at all for the last three years is really high (74,6%), which is very bad and opposite to the policy of inclusion and that is the lifelong learning and improvement. There are doubts concerning the availability and the quality of support that preschool teachers get in the institution where they work because the assessments of average and below average level of support

imply that preschool teachers are not so much satisfied.

The ones with less working experience and who are less than 30 years old showed more positive attitudes towards the availability and the quality of support that they get in the institution where they work. Taking into account the results of the conducted research, the respondents from the northern part of Kosovo and Metohija outlined as the most useful findings and skills that are necessary for working with children, who need additional support, the following ones: *the identification of characteristics of certain difficulties among children, the adjustment of methods, ways of teaching, materials and space to working with children who need additional educational support, the creation of individual educational plan for a child who needs additional educational support and communication skills for working with parents*. Furthermore, they considered the combination of lectures, video materials and workshops as the most useful form of the preschool teachers' professional training. The research findings are valuable because they are first-hand, namely from the main representatives of the inclusive process, therefore it is necessary to focus on them and use them as directions that should be worked on in order to improve the quality of the inclusive practice in preschool institutions, because according to the results, there are still some lacks the preschool teachers are faced with.

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, it can be concluded that in order to develop and enhance the good inclusive practice in the region of the northern part of Kosovo and Metohija, it is necessary to provide permanent preschool teachers' improvement during their studies and after they graduate, i.e. preschool institutions should be the unique resource support in terms of facilitating various trainings concerning inclusion that are recommended by the very laws of the Republic of Serbia that regulate the system of education. Moreover, the internal structure of the preschool institution in terms of organization, material and technical facilities of the institution for working in the inclusive environment, as well as the willingness of the professional associates of different profiles should be the support, assistance and partners to the preschool teachers' who work with children who need additional educational support. In other words, they are regarded as the highly positioned preconditions for the successful realization of the preschool inclusive practice.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, D.R.P and T.P.K.; methodology, T.P.K. and A.M.B; software, A.M.B. and T. S. R.; formal analysis, T.P.K.,D.R.P., A. M.B., and T. S. R. ; writing—original draft preparation, T.P.K.,D.R.P., A. M.B., and T. S. R. ; writing—review and editing, T.P.K. and D.R.P., All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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