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## TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS DURING STUDIES FOR COOPERATION WITH PARENTS<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *Taking into account the extremely large contributions that the cooperation of teachers and parents has on the development of the child, the aim of this research is aimed at determining the qualifications of teachers during studies for cooperation with parents. 225 teachers from the Republic of Serbia participated in the research. The obtained results show that teachers believe that they have acquired the necessary theoretical knowledge about the importance of cooperation with parents, while the low level of teacher consent is represented in the claims concerning the practical part of cooperation with parents. Teachers did not have enough opportunities during their studies to see how the process of cooperation in practice takes place, as well as to attend various forms of cooperation with parents. The analyzed results of the research show that it is necessary to direct more attention to the practical part concerning the training of teachers during studies for cooperation with parents, where teachers will be able to practically apply and experience the process of cooperation in a real environment.*

**Key words:** *teacher training; cooperation; parents; competencies; partnership.*

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## Introduction

Nurturing and establishing cooperation between teachers and parents is an important factor in modern institutional education. In modern settings, the emphasis is increasingly placed on the involvement of parents in school life (Rodrigues et al., 2015). Contributing to this are the positive outcomes that joint cooperation has on child development (Milošević, 2002; Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Smith et al., 2020). The role and task of modern teachers is, in addition to working in the classroom, to pay attention to cooperation with parents and their involvement in school activities. The document *Standards of Competences for the Teacher Profession and Their Professional Development* lists the following groups of competencies: competencies for the teaching area, subject and teaching methodology; teaching and learning competencies; competencies to support student personality development; competencies for communication and cooperation (Pravilnik o standardima kompetencija za profesiju nastavnika i njihovog profesionalnog razvoja, 2011). So, in addition to the range of competencies that modern teachers should possess, there are also competencies for communication and cooperation. School management that strives to achieve successful results in upbringing and education must give importance to the relationship between parents and teachers (Akbaşlı & Kavak, 2008). School actors should encourage parental cooperation and involvement through shared responsibilities and joint decision-making (Smith & et al., 2012). During their studies, teachers should acquire skills and knowledge about the relevance of cooperation between family and school, and then through professional work improve and upgrade the skills of nurturing, improving and initiating cooperation with parents. In addition to formal education, modern teachers should dedicate themselves to non-formal forms of education that will contribute to strengthening and/or improving their competencies for communication and cooperation with parents. In addition to knowledge, teachers should be prepared to establish and nurture cooperation, overcome obstacles that may arise in the process of cooperation, adequate pedagogical response in situations of refusal of cooperation by parents, conducting conversations and applying different ways in cooperation with parents. Current problems lie in the methodology of educating future teachers who are not sufficiently prepared to work with parents, and as a consequence of such incomplete training is their inability to cooperate with parents (Marzec, 2020). It has been observed that preparation for family-school cooperation in teacher education is an underdeveloped segment in many

countries (Willemse et al., 2018). In her research, the author Višnjić-Jevtić (2018) states that some higher education institutions for the training of educators in Croatia have special compulsory subjects that focus on cooperation with the family, while others deal with this topic within Family Pedagogy or other subjects. Through various compulsory and elective subjects in the process of higher education, it is necessary to prepare future teachers for the process of cooperation with parents. Therefore, in the preparation of future teachers, the focus should be directed towards their training and for quality communication, interaction and cooperation with parents, which will be based on valid pedagogical postulates. Through various forms of practical action, it is necessary to prepare teachers to see the relevance of cooperation with parents and to have the opportunity to see what cooperation between teachers and parents looks like in practice, what is the role of teachers in cooperation, and what communication and social skills teacher should possess to make the cooperation successful. Therefore, it is not enough to focus only on theoretical knowledge acquired about cooperation, but it is necessary to show how this process takes place in the school environment through various practical activities. Based on various theoretical considerations, we can schematically show the importance of training teachers for cooperation with parents during their studies. Based on the schematic representation (Figure 1), we see that teacher training for cooperation with parents during studies should lead to teachers acquiring knowledge and skills about the importance of cooperation with parents. The focus should be on the development of teachers' skills and enabling teachers to participate in various activities with parents during practice (within studies). All of the above should lead to the acquisition and development of theoretical and practical knowledge and skills of teachers in this area for application in their own practice and work.

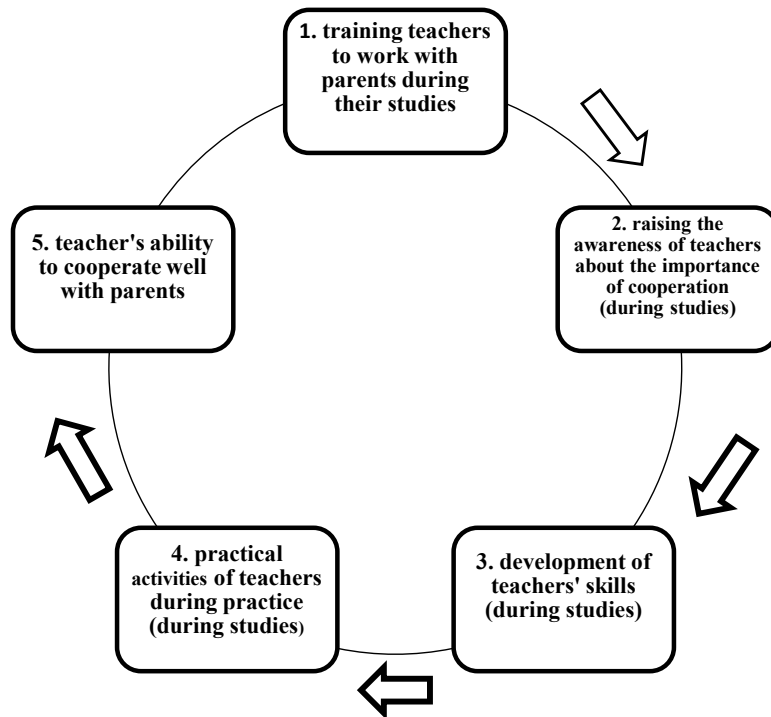


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the relevance of teacher training for cooperation with parents during studies

The orientation and commitment of teachers to the aspect of cooperation with parents influences the creation of a partnership. „Together they form a partnership to work together for the betterment of the children and the community at large“ (Xiaoyang et al., 2018:1263). Building a partnership is an imperative of modern upbringing and education. Preparation and training of teachers during formal education is one of the most important factors through which they should master the knowledge and skills of cooperation and building partnerships with parents of students. In order for teachers to be successful facilitators of cooperation with parents, a key factor is their preparation and training during their studies within formal education. Therefore, with this article we will try to answer the extent to which teachers acquired knowledge and skills during the study to establish and nurture cooperation with parents.

## Methodological framework of research

The subject of this research is the qualifications of teachers during their studies to establish and nurture cooperation with parents. The aim of this article is to determine the qualifications of teachers to establish and nurture cooperation with parents during their studies. The following research tasks also arise:

1. examine whether teachers have acquired knowledge in the aspect of cooperation with parents during their education;
2. examine whether teachers during their education had a practical opportunity to see and participate in the process of cooperation with parents;
3. examine whether, in the opinion of the teachers of the higher education institution, more attention should be paid to theoretical and practical knowledge and skills related to cooperation with parents;
4. examine whether teachers can say for themselves that they have competencies for cooperation with parents.

Descriptive method, survey and scaling techniques were applied. Based on tangent literature, we created a special instrument for this research - a survey questionnaire with an assessment scale (TQCWP). Data were collected using an electronic instrument. Teachers filled in the instrument which clearly stated the guidelines for filling in. The questions were clearly formulated and concerned the subject of the research. Among the basic socio-demographic characteristics, it was necessary for teachers to state their gender, level of education and years of work experience in the teaching profession. 225 teachers from the territory of the Republic of Serbia participated in this empirical research. 22.7% of male and 77.3% female teachers participated (Chart 1). According to the years of work experience in the teaching profession, the following participated: up to 5 years of work experience - 19.6% of teachers; up to 10 years of service - 30.7%; from 11 to 15 years of service - 31.1% of teachers; more than 15 years - 18.6% of teachers (Chart 2). According to the completed level of education, the following participated: 11.1% of teachers with completed college; 51.1% of teachers with a university degree and 37.8% of teachers with a master's degree (Chart 3).

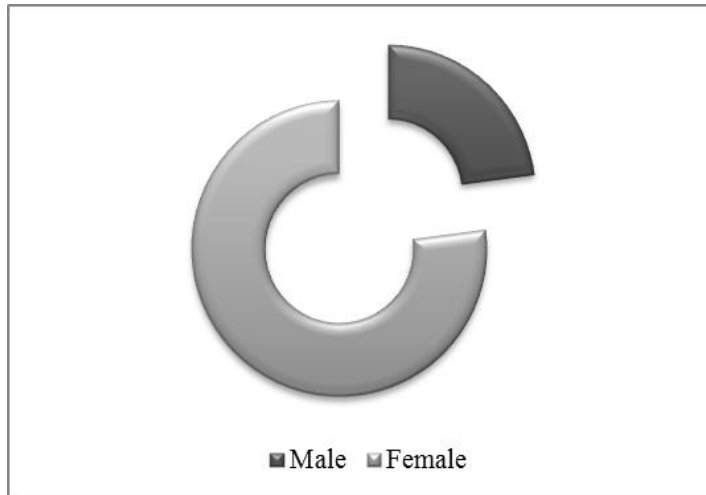


Chart 1. Sample structure by gender

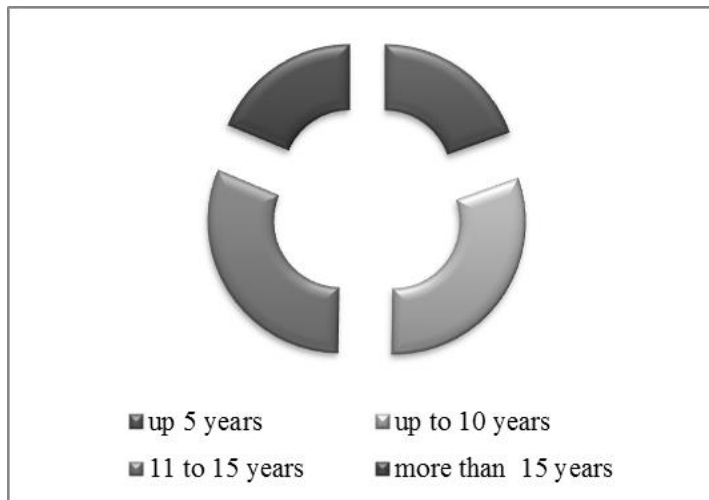


Chart 2. Sample structure by years of service

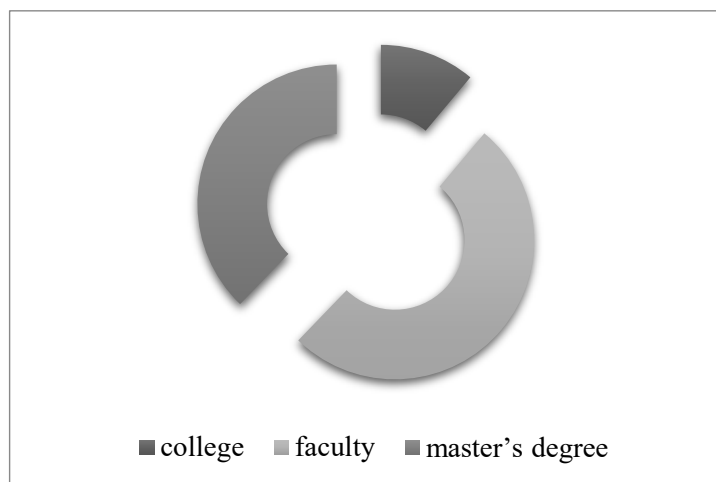


Chart 3. Sample structure by level of education

### Research results

As it is very important to train pedagogical staff for cooperation with parents, the first research task was to examine whether teachers acquired knowledge in the aspect of cooperation with parents during their education. The agreement of the teachers with the offered statements is the following: during the studies I gained enough knowledge regarding fostering cooperation with parents ( $M=4.53$ ;  $SD=0.713$ ); during my studies I gained knowledge on how to initiate and encourage cooperation with parents ( $M=4.49$ ;  $SD=0,726$ ); during the studies, attention was paid to the content of cooperation and partnership between family and school ( $M=4.53$ ;  $SD=0.675$ ); during the studies, attention was paid to forms of cooperation with parents ( $M=4.34$ ;  $SD=0.775$ ); during my studies I gained knowledge about involving parents in school activities ( $M=4.25$ ;  $SD=0.883$ ); during my studies I was acquainted with obstacles that may hinder cooperation ( $M=4.48$ ;  $SD=0.791$ ); during my studies I gained knowledge on how to react to negative actions of parents and refusal to cooperate ( $M=4.46$ ;  $SD=0.767$ ). Based on the presented answers of the respondents, we notice that their agreement with the stated statements is very positive. We can see and conclude that teachers during their studies acquired theoretical knowledge about cooperation with parents, as well as the characteristics and specifics of the process of cooperation.

In addition to theoretical knowledge, we wanted to see if teachers had the opportunity during education to meet in practice with the implementation and process of cooperation. Our next research task was to examine whether teachers during their studies had a practical opportunity to see and participate



in the process of cooperation with parents. The agreement of the teacher with the offered statements is the following: I had the opportunity to see in practice (within the study) how teachers cooperate with parents ( $M=3.92$ ;  $SD=1.060$ ); I had the opportunity to get advice in practice (within the study) from experienced teachers on how good cooperation with parents should look like ( $M=4.44$ ;  $SD=0.844$ ); I had the opportunity to attend various forms of cooperation with parents in practice (within studies) ( $M=3.48$ ;  $SD=1.078$ ). Teachers' answers show lower agreement with the statement that they had the opportunity to see how the cooperation between teachers and parents takes place in the school environment, as well as low agreement with the statement that they had the opportunity to attend various forms of cooperation with parents, while high agreement is present in the claim that they received advice from experienced teachers on what quality cooperation should look like. Certainly, the focus is more on theoretical knowledge than on their practical application. In addition to theoretical knowledge of cooperation with parents, teachers during formal education should have the opportunity to observe and actively participate in cooperation with parents in a real environment. In this way, they have the opportunity to apply the acquired knowledge and practice.

The next formulated research task was to examine whether, in the opinion of the teachers of the higher education institution, more attention should be paid to theoretical and practical knowledge and skills related to cooperation with parents. The agreement of the teachers with the stated statement is very positive ( $M=4.73$ ;  $SD=0.526$ ). To the open question how higher education institutions can prepare future teachers for cooperation with parents, the answers of teachers are grouped into the following groups: introduction of compulsory subjects in undergraduate and master studies (if they are not already in the syllabus of a higher education institution); the possibility of practical application of knowledge about cooperation through practice in schools, with the support of experienced teachers from the school and subject teachers from the faculty; in the higher years of study, independent organization of some form of cooperation with parents at school. Teachers' answers and suggestions are concrete and clearly directed towards the practical aspect concerning the cooperation of teachers with parents.

Examine whether teachers can say for themselves that they have competencies for cooperation with parents. 63.6% of teachers describe themselves as having well-developed competencies for working with parents, but they are still working to improve their skills through non-formal forms of education; 28.4% of teachers state that they think they need more experience to be able to say for themselves that they have competencies with cooperation

with parents and 8% of teachers state that they consider themselves not to have the competence to work with parents. The calculated chi-square test shows that there are statistically significant differences between the teacher's assessment of competencies for cooperation with parents and the level of education ( $\chi^2=17.387$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.002$ ). There are no statistically significant differences between teachers' assessment of the possession of competencies for cooperation with parents and variables of gender and years of service.

## Conclusion

Preparing and training teachers for the process of cooperation with parents is an important segment of the formal education of this staff. In addition to preparing teachers for teaching, attention should be focused on work, cooperation and building partnerships with parents. With this paper, we tried to see the assessment of teachers on their training for cooperation with parents during formal education. The obtained results of our research show that teachers believe that they acquired knowledge about the importance of cooperation with parents during formal education. The low level of consent of teachers is present in the claims concerning the practical part of cooperation with parents. Teachers believe that higher education institutions that train teachers should pay attention to theoretical and practical knowledge and skills in the process of establishing and nurturing cooperation with parents. Teachers suggest that during formal education, attention should be paid to the introduction of compulsory subjects (if these subjects do not exist in syllabus) related to cooperation with parents, as well as greater representation of practical work in which future teachers will prepare for cooperation with parents. Based on these results, future research may focus on concrete proposals aimed at preparing future teachers for cooperation with parents. Also, in addition to formal education, it is necessary to focus on other forms of professional development of teachers in terms of nurturing and initiating cooperation with parents.

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