

# Documenting the development and achievements of early and preschool children: Different curricular approaches

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**Abstract:** The public education policy of an individual country determines, among other things, the ways of documenting the educational process and children's outcomes. This paper explores the opinion of preschool teachers about documenting children's development. The sample included preschool teachers from two systems, or two different curricular approaches. One exists in the Republic of Croatia (curriculum based on the competence framework) and other in Bosnia and Herzegovina (curriculum based on normative outcomes). The measuring instrument *Questionnaire of Preschool Teachers' Opinions on Monitoring the Psycho-physical Status of Children* ( $\alpha = .847$ ), was constructed for research purposes. The *Questionnaire* was based on relevant literature and insights into existing educational practices. On a dichotomously structured 4-level scale, preschool teachers estimated that the most important purpose of documenting children's development is the planning of developmental incentives ( $M=3.63$ ;  $SD=0.495$ ). They agree that monitoring should be continuous throughout the entire academic year ( $M=3.53$ ;  $SD=0.666$ ). Likewise, preschool teachers are less inclined to one-time assessments of a children's psycho-physical status, considering "a testing" unlikely to provide a realistic image of their development ( $M=1.88$ ;  $SD=0.797$ ). No correlation was found between preschool teachers' age, length of service, and level of education. Using the *t-test* of independent samples, a mild/weak, but statistically significant difference in the preschool teachers' assessment between the subsamples was determined.

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## Introduction

It is possible to analyze the quality of an early and preschool education institution (hereafter ECEC) through the structure determined by the public education policy of a particular country, the quality of the educational process and the achieved outcomes of children (European Union, 2019). (Self)evaluation, as a part of the continuous development process, should be one of the fundamental features of ECEC pedagogical quality. Documentation is one of the tools of (self)assessment. At the same time, it can also be a way of monitoring and encouraging the development of children, the educational process and preschool teachers.

Documenting can be interpreted as the process of collecting and classifying various materials that describe events and/or monitor a process. Pedagogical documentation assumes a process that should include continuous spiral monitoring, evaluation and planning of the structural and process dimensions of ECEC in relation to the expected and desired outcome. It should be (and is distinguished by this) focused on development, and not only description and/or evaluation of the process i.e., the outcome. Documentation that only "describes" situations and developments, although it can significantly contribute to understanding, basically has no long-term strength and most often does not lead to quality changes. Quality, that is, "strong" documentation is the one that initiates the reflective development of practice and is the starting point for further action (Feraris, 2013).

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The method and purpose of documentation are mainly determined by the national educational curriculum as a framework of public education policy. Analysis of contemporary curricula in the world (Pribišev Beleslin, 2019) shows that, in terms of structure and outcomes, it is possible to single out three basic approaches: curricula based on areas of development and outcomes (e.g., United Kingdom, Bosnia and Herzegovina); curricula directed towards areas of study (e.g., France, Finland, Hungary, Portugal, Croatia) and curricula based on principles and cultural postulates (e.g., New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, Sweden, Japan...).

Curricular document, at the level of public educational policy and at the level of ECEC institution, as a rule, refer to the desired achievements and expectations of the individual (Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2018). The *Global Agenda 2030* (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2016) puts learning outcomes at the center of the international education monitoring framework. Learning outcomes are related to the quality of the educational process and the relationships between the stakeholders of that process, as well as the professional competencies of preschool teachers (Visković, 2021; Wood & Hedges, 2016). Some research indicates that the outcomes are best if they combine pedagogical aspects, a stimulating social and material environment with set high and achievable goals (Mullis et al., 2020). Structuring of the environment (material and social) should be directed towards the next phase of children's development so that the stimulating contents are interesting, but not (too) demanding (Vujičić, 2021). The predictor of such planning, and indirectly of documentation, should be an action of observation. Bećirović-Karabegović (2014) states that the observation of educational practice should be daily, complete and continuous, but also unobtrusive. It should not be focused only on the description of the social situation, but should also problematize the children's perspective, their learning, development and well-being (Heiskanen, 2019). Organizing the environment and incentives should be based on the children's observed interests and (self)evaluation of the practice. Pedagogical documentation should be one of the (self) evaluation tools.

Wood and Hedges (2016) point to three framework curricular approaches to determining expected educational outcomes. The first curricular approach advocates normatively defined measurable outcomes, mainly according to school requirements. The second curricular approach is focused on outcomes that expect the creation of socially and economically responsible citizens, while the third approach is based on a work-practical concept that maintains openness to the previous two approaches. The third approach at the same time advocates learning as a research process adapted to children's interests, but also focusing on content that has social importance, while not expecting a linear educational process or rigid normative outcomes. The same authors while exploring the association of educational quality and practice dynamic that respects children's interests and encourages social interactions, actually emphasize the role of practitioners - preschool teachers who encourage different learning strategies appropriate to children's interests and abilities. Such educational process is based on play and social interactions, but also on prescribed, partially (relatively) mandatory contents.

Authors like Al-Mogbel (2014), Bergen (2002), Rauf and Bakar (2019), San et al. (2021) emphasize how children in institutional ECEC can be victims of teaching that is not adapted to their age, interests and potential of preschool level. They indicate the importance of learning through play as an incentive for the complete development of children. Analyzing the ECEC practice, Puaad and Yunus (2021) problematize the representation of free, self-organized children's play, devoid of (excessive) didacticism. Karlsen and Lekhal (2019), based on the conducted study, state that preschool teachers intervene in children's activities almost a third of the time during children's daily stay in kindergarten. Teaching and/or helping limits children's free play and learning time. At the same time, Funke et al. (2018) investigated the extent to which structured play activities can support children's cognitive development. The study suggests that the integration of activities in the structure of the process, with mathematical and language concepts positively affects the overall development of children. The same authors believe how children's involvement in structured activities can facilitate initial school achievements. At the same time, children's statements confirm that understanding is better if the integration of means and activities is enabled. Also, it was observed that open access activities have a positive effect on group dynamics. The connection between cognitively oriented preschool curricula and initial educational achievements has also been observed by

other researches (Barnett & Ackerman, 2020). However, Goswami (2015) indicates that partially focused activities result in partial outcomes. Zambrana et al. (2020) believe that the effect of targeted structured activities is (relatively) weak and is limited to primary education.

Nevertheless, standardized normative assessments of children's cognitive status indicate that children who were involved in preschool institutions achieve better results than those who were cared for only by parents/guardians (Vandell et al., 2010). Rosicka and O'Connor (2020) link the monitoring of children's achievements to learning outcomes to ensure the accuracy of achievements. They emphasize the importance of "checklists" for monitoring learning outcomes, and believe that "checklists" provide an accurate image of children's achievements - what children can and do know, but also signal a "gap". Thus, the preschool teacher can use them as an aid in designing learning and teaching activities and provide evidence of children's achievements. These findings are also confirmed by research of Rahman et al. (2020), who favor formative assessments as a useful practice. They believe that this enables early recognition of difficulties and provides the foundations for future learning. Formative assessment is also promoted through the MELQO instrument (UNESCO, 2017), which assesses social skills and two components of executive function (memory and (self)regulation), as well as motor skills and pre-academic skills of children. Ćwikla (2021) shows formative assessments as an important element in the development of children's (self)regulation, and believes that formative assessment, as feedback, directs children's actions. Contrary to these attitudes, the approaches of social pedagogy interpret learning and documentation as a social construction of all stakeholders in the process. Expressing the personal perception of each stakeholder in the process (experts-practitioners, children, parents/guardians) enables a comprehensive understanding of child development and the triangulation of perspectives as a starting point for development (Feraris, 2013).

The aforementioned research questions children's achievements and ways of monitoring and documenting outcomes. Slunjski (2020) believes that the process of documenting children's development is, as a rule, an extensive research and reflexive process for which there is no single recipe. It changes and develops together with the curriculum, the stakeholders of the educational process and their relationship. In accordance with the curriculum and personal pedagogical paradigms and professional competencies, preschool teachers use different strategies for collecting, documenting, organizing, synthesizing and interpreting information that serves to assess children's development and achievements. They are looking for appropriate ways of gathering information, identifying potential and encouraging the development of children in the context of the environment they belong to (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Council of Ministers, Agency for Preschool, Primary school and Secondary Education, 2021). In addition to prescribed methods of monitoring and documentation, preschool teachers sometimes try to initiate and/or accelerate children's development. They are focused on the observed interests and potentials of children, on developmental areas and/or on (normative) outcomes. This is how they develop a personal reflective practice. However, Biffi (2019) warns that reflective practice is not enough by itself, because reflection does not necessarily encourage action and development, and (most often) assumes only one perspective – the one of preschool teacher.

Merewether and Fleet (2021) believe that children's achievements cannot be assessed through "moments of appearance" but only through systematic monitoring of development, including the visibility of children's perspectives. That is why preschool teachers should move away from repetitive practice and open a dialogue with each child. The involvement of children in the analysis and construction of personal development is advocated by authors who recognize participatory pedagogical documentation as a social construct of all stakeholders in the process, including all children equally (Biff et al., 2021). Thus, in addition to the analysis and construction of incentives for the play environment and learning, children's (self)awareness is also developed along with the complete construction of an affirmative identity.

Following the above, it is justified to adhere to the position of Lindh and Mansikka (2022), who consider that four types of documentation are recognizable in ECEC practice:

- Reproductive documentation that makes the practice visible, but does not develop it or have a

clear pedagogical purpose.

- Indicative documentation as a developmental pedagogical process includes the reflection of professional employees in relation to the defined goals. However, the goals are focused on contents and activities, so reflection is only an assessment of what has been done.
- Developmental pedagogical documentation is focused on areas of learning and/or competence development. Reflection is the basis for planning future, pedagogically purposeful preschool teacher activities. The problem is the inactive role of children in the process.
- Participatory pedagogical documentation is part of participatory pedagogical practice, which implies the active participation of all stakeholders in the process. Reflection contributes to the process, and the expected outcomes are not narrowly determined. The pedagogical process is developmental, focused on the well-being of each individual within the community culture.

### **Institutional ECEC in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Institutional ECEC in Croatia is regulated by the *Preschool Education Act* (Ministry of Science and Education of Republic of Croatia, 2023) and *ECEC State Pedagogical Standard* (Croatian Parliament, 2008). While the *Preschool Education Act* (Ministry of Science and Education of Republic of Croatia, 2023) provides general guidelines (method of establishing, functioning and managing ECEC institutions), the *State Pedagogical Standard* (Croatian Parliament, 2008) defines the technical working conditions (spatial, material and structural conditions). The *ECEC National Curriculum* (Ministry of Science and Education of Republic of Croatia, 2015) provides framework guidelines for implementing, monitoring and documenting the educational process and development, as well as children's achievement. Play is recognized as a high-quality way of learning, and the development of an individual's basic competencies is the expected outcome of the educational process. Documenting is interpreted as a research process that enables understanding as a starting point for pedagogical support for child development. A culture of inclusion is fully advocated. It is important to note that, unfortunately, the *Regulation on Forms and Content of Pedagogical Documentation and Records of Children in Kindergarten* (Ministry of Education and Sports of Republic of Croatia, 2001) remained unchanged.

In educational practice, the process is documented factually, following the given forms. Thus, preschool teachers resort to normative teaching (Puaad & Yunus, 2021) and intervening in children's activities (Karlsen & Lekhal, 2019). Participatory documentation is most often absent, and only the preschool teacher's perspective is visible, which, according to modern paradigms, is not sufficient for reflective development (Biffi, 2019; Merewether & Fleet, 2021). Individual monitoring of children's development and achievements is a personal choice of preschool teacher. Although during their stay in kindergarten, there is no formative assessment of development, before starting primary school, the psycho-physical status of an individual child is assessed normatively.

Education policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the responsibility of the counties, and each county has its own specificities. In the Herzegovina-Neretva County (where the research was conducted), it is mandatory to monitor the achievements of every child according to *Preschool Education Act* (Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Herzegovina-Neretva County, 2000). The ECEC curriculum directs pedagogical practice to follow five developmental areas, each of which follows three components. Each is determined by outcomes and associated indicators. The indicators direct educators to the didactic means that will be offered to children so that, through directed and playful activities, they adopt the prescribed outcomes (Ćwikla, 2021). Each child's achievements are assessed every three months according to indicators corresponding to the concept of "checklists" (Rahman et al., 2020; Rosicka & O'Connor, 2020). Accuracy is ensured by keeping development maps (children's work, photos of activities and achievements, transcripts of conversations).

An insight into the educational policy through which it is possible to determine pedagogical practice in the ECEC institutions of these two neighboring countries - Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina - reveals differences in the curricular approach. The ECEC curriculum in Croatia is based on a competence framework, and before entering primary school, the psycho-physical status of children is normatively

assessed. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the curriculum defines areas and learning outcomes while formative assessment is carried out regularly. Consequently, differences are also recognizable in the documentation of children's development.

The belief that quality documentation of children's development and achievements is one of several dimensions of the quality of pedagogical practice, points to the need to research preschool teachers' opinions about existing documentation practices (Visković, 2021). This problem is recognized in the relationship between educational policy and practice, this problem is recognized, but there is a lack of research. Therefore, this paper investigates the perspective of preschool teachers on the ways and the very purpose of documenting the development and achievements of preschool children and their (dis)agreement with public education policy. The research includes preschool teachers from two neighboring counties, located right next to the border of these two countries, and preschool teachers occasionally collaborate.

The aim of this empirical non-experimental research was to determine whether there are differences in assessment according to subsamples. It is questionable whether the assessments of the participants in this study are related to demographic variables, public education policy, and/or personal experiences.

It is assumed that there is no statistically significant connection between the demographic characteristics of the participants (age, level of education, number of children in the group, length of work experience) and their assessment of the importance, methods of monitoring and documenting children's achievements.

It is assumed that there are statistically significant differences in the ways of monitoring and documenting children's achievements between preschool teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina (who work according to a curriculum based on defined outcomes) and preschool teachers in the Republic of Croatia (whose curriculum is based on a competency framework).

## Method

The research was conducted during the Spring of 2022. The *Questionnaire* was offered to preschool teachers during organized vocational training (form of legally mandatory lifelong learning in both countries), so it is possible to assume that those preschool teachers who are interested in personal professional development participated. The purpose of the research was explained to the potential participants and, in accordance with the ethics code, informed consent was provided and participants were free to withdraw from the research.

The collected data were processed using the statistical program *Statistical Program for Social Scientists 20* (SPSS 20). For the purposes of general description, central tendency measures (arithmetic mean, mode) and dispersion measures (standard deviation, frequencies) were calculated. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the *Cronbach alpha coefficient*. The normality of the distribution was determined using the *Kolmogorov-Smirnov test*. Using the *t-test*, the existence of a statistically significant difference in assessment between subsamples was investigated. Effect size was investigated using *Cohen's d coefficient*. Correlation was considered using *Pearson's correlation coefficient*. One-way analysis of variance ANOVA was used to examine the possible difference in assessment in relation to the level of education, founders and place of work (employer's center).

## Sample

The sample (N=198) included 127 preschool teachers (64.1% of the sample) from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Herzegovina-Neretva County), and 71 (35.9% of the sample) preschool teachers from Croatia (Split-Dalmatia County). The research participants have an average of 40.3 years of life (SD=10.33), ranging from 23 to 64 years, and 12.96 years (SD=10.14) work experience in ECEC institution.

The public education policy in both countries identically determines the founders of ECEC institutions. This sample includes 141 preschool teachers (71.2%) who work in kindergartens founded by a

local self-government unit, while 36 preschool teachers (18.2%) work in kindergartens founded by a physical or legal entity. The religious community employs 21 (10.6%) preschool teachers (Table 1).

Statistically significant difference between the samples in relation to the State (local self-government unit) as the founder of the kindergarten ( $\chi^2 = 129.54$ ;  $p \leq .000$ ) and the center of the employer ( $\chi^2 = 123.08$ ;  $p \leq .000$ ). The sample is representative in relation to the structure of the participants, but not the size of the population of preschool teachers from both countries (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Federal Bureau of Statistics FB & H, 2021).

**Table 1.** Structure of the sample according to the country, the founder of the institution and the employers' stationary

	Founder of the ECEC institution			Employers' Stationary		
	Local Self-government Unit	Natural or Legal Person	Religious Community	City (more than 5000 citizens)	Town (2000-5000 citizens)	Small town (less than 2000 citizens)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	77	29	21	86	29	12
Croatia	62	7	2	51	16	4

## Instrument

The measuring instrument, the *Questionnaire on Preschool Teachers' Opinion on Documenting the Psychophysical Status of Children* (Q-PTODPSC), was constructed for the purposes of this research. It is based on a theoretical analysis of relevant literature and insights into existing practice. The structure obtains two parts: *Independent Socio-demographic Variables*, and *A Scale for Assessing the Way and Purpose of Documenting Children's Development and Achievements*. The *Scale* has 38 items. Assessment was possible on a dichotomously structured 4-point scale without a zero point. Internal consistency reliability was satisfied (Cronbach  $\alpha = .847$ ).

## Results and Analysis

The majority of preschool teachers in both countries assess the optimal working conditions with regard to spatial and material conditions and the number of children in the group, which are in accordance with valid state pedagogical standards (Table 2). Using  $\chi^2$ , a statistically significant difference in assessment frequencies between subsamples was determined ( $\chi^2 = 12.918$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p = .002$ ).

**Table 2.** Assessment of working conditions according to the *standard*, according to the countries

	Worse	Appropriate	Better
Bosnia and Herzegovina	29	87	11
Croatia	33	31	7
Total	62 31.3%	118 59.6%	18 9.1%

Evaluating the usefulness of documentation, the preschool teachers in the sample attach the greatest importance to documentation as a starting point for planning development incentives ( $M=3.63$ ;  $SD=0.50$ ), especially for individualized plans for children with developmental difficulties ( $M=3.53$ ;  $SD=0.602$ ). They think that monitoring children's development should be continuous ( $M=3.53$ ;  $SD=0.666$ ). The data collected in the documentation process are important for individual conversations with parents ( $M=3.51$ ;  $SD=0.585$ ). Participants believe that monitoring children's development is one of the indicators of the quality of the educational process ( $M=3.52$ ;  $SD=0.602$ ).

Preschool teachers in the sample are not prone to one-time normative assessments of children's psycho-physical status ( $M=1.88$ ;  $SD=0.797$ ). They doubt whether only the strengths of the child should be documented ( $M=2.15$ ;  $SD=0.827$ ), and they are inclined to the opinion that areas where the child is developmentally delayed should be encouraged ( $M=3.43$ ;  $SD=0.527$ ). They do not agree with the claim that the preschool teacher cannot monitor and document children's development during the educational process ( $M=2.02$ ;  $SD=0.846$ ) as well as with the claim that the preschool teacher cannot independently notice the strengths of each child ( $M=2.12$ ;  $SD=0.838$ ).

The estimated values between the subsamples were compared using the *t-test* of independent samples. For the majority of assessment items (N=24), a statistically significant difference in assessment was determined (Table 3). The effect of influence is greatest for assessing the importance of continuous monitoring of children's development ( $t=-6.14$ ;  $p\leq .000$ ;  $d= .907$ ), which is necessary for planning development incentives ( $t=-6.41$ ;  $p\leq .000$ ;  $d= .905$ ). Also, the impact effect is large for the assessment of the importance of the preschool teacher's role for the development of (self)assessment skills ( $t=-5.71$ ;  $p\leq .000$ ;  $d= .856$ ) and for the assessment of the development map as an appropriate way of monitoring children's development ( $t= -5.08$ ;  $p\leq .000$ ;  $d= .774$ ). A statistically significant difference was also observed for the assessment of the monitoring of children's development as an indicator of the quality of the educational process ( $t=-4.39$ ;  $p\leq .000$ ;  $d= .657$ ). The smallest effect of influence, but statistically significant, was determined for the role of the preschool teacher in determining the lowest expected achievements of the child ( $t=2.37$ ;  $p= .019$ ;  $d= .336$ ).

**Table 3.** The difference in the assessment of the importance of ways of monitoring and documenting children's development according to subsamples (Bosnia and Herzegovina - Republic of Croatia) and subsamples according to both countries

Items	State	M	SD	<i>t-test</i>	p	d
Monitoring children's development is important for planning development incentives.	BA*	3.47	.517	-6.41	.000	0.905
	HR**	3.90	.300			
Monitoring children's development is important as an indicator of the quality of the educational process.	BA	3.39	.605	-4.39	.000	0.657
	HR	3.76	.520			
Monitoring of children's development should be continuous, throughout the entire pedagogical year.	BA	3.33	.724	-6.14	.000	0.907
	HR	3.89	.318			
Instead of continuous monitoring, one-time assessments are sufficient (at the beginning and end of the pedagogical year).	BA	2.18	.971	-3.94	.000	0.601
	HR	1.65	.795			
Monitoring children's development is important for individual conversations with parents about their children's achievements.	BA	3.39	.605	-4.15	.000	0.628
	HR	3.73	.477			
By monitoring children's development, we encourage parents to develop their children's abilities and opportunities.	BA	3.25	.654	-4.73	.000	0.744
	HR	3.68	.501			
A preschool teacher cannot monitor and document children's development during the educational process.	BA	2.13	.777	-2.49	.013	0.362
	HR	1.82	.931			
The development map is an appropriate way of monitoring children's development.	BA	3.17	.618	-5.08	.000	0.774
	HR	3.62	.544			
Checklists make it easier to monitor children's development.	BA	3.03	.701	-2.48	.014	0.373
	HR	3.30	.744			
The preschool teacher should record in the checklist when he sees a particular achievement (do not record what the child does not know or cannot do).	BA	2.92	.922	-2.73	.007	0.410
	HR	3.28	.831			
An individual development plan is the optimal way to encourage the development of each child.	BA	3.07	.632	-4.51	.000	0.665
	HR	3.49	.630			
An individual development plan for children with developmental disabilities is made by professional associates in cooperation with the preschool teacher.	BA	3.40	.621	-4.47	.000	0.646
	HR	3.76	.492			
Preschool teacher helps children build (self)assessment skills of personal achievements.	BA	3.24	.499	-5.71	.000	0.856
	HR	3.68	.528			
The preschool teacher should notice the child's lack of achievement.	BA	3.06	.614	-3.37	.001	0.514
	HR	3.37	.591			
The preschool teacher should encourage the development of the areas where the child is lagging behind.	BA	3.32	.518	-4.14	.000	0.618
	HR	3.63	.485			
The preschool teacher sets a characteristic for each child that it is desirable for him to adopt.	BA	3.06	.664	-2.37	.019	0.336
	HR	2.82	.762			
Development incentives are planned for the areas of the child's existing achievements.	BA	2.79	.650	-2.51	.013	0.358
	HR	3.04	.745			
For one child, it is possible, in a shorter period of time (up to 1 month), to set several developmental incentives.	BA	2.61	.736	-4.05	.000	0.596
	HR	3.06	.773			
In a shorter period of time, it is possible to set several challenges related to one development area.	BA	2.73	.695	-4.45	.000	0.663
	HR	3.18	.661			
In a shorter period of time, it is possible to set several challenges related to different development areas.	BA	2.56	.720	-4.69	.000	0.688
	HR	3.07	.762			
Monitoring of children's development is carried out during children's activities.	BA	3.06	.658	-3.51	.001	0.507
	HR	3.39	.643			
	BA	2.36	.842	2.72	.007	0.401

Monitoring of children's development, through individual assessments, should be carried out by professional associates, not preschool teachers.	HR	2,01	.902			
Development incentives are planned for areas in which the child shows above-average achievements.	BA	2.94	.694	-1.18	.240	-
	HR	3.07	.762			
Children's development proceeds in a unified way, so it is not appropriate to assess individual areas of development.	BA	2.65	.791	-0.71	.482	-
	HR	2.56	.982			
It is not justified to compare children's development with the assumed / average status.	BA	2.90	.711	-0.41	.689	-
	HR	2.94	.876			
It is justified to demand certain achievements according to age (especially before starting school).	BA	3.02	.701	-0.29	.770	-
	HR	2.99	.665			
Child development is a natural process that happens even without the encouragement of the preschool teacher.	BA	2.60	.789	-1.22	.223	-
	HR	2.45	.858			
A preschool teacher cannot independently see the strengths of each child.	BA	2.19	.852	-1.64	.102	-
	HR	1.99	.802			
The preschool teacher should document only the strengths of each child.	BA	2.21	.793	-1.51	.133	-
	HR	2.03	.878			
Development incentives are planned for areas where the child does not have adequate achievements?	BA	3.06	.582	-1.04	.297	-
	HR	2.96	.706			
A one-time assessment of the child's psychophysical status ("testing") provides a realistic picture of the child's development.	BA	1.95	.775	-1.75	.081	-
	HR	1.75	.823			
The comparison of the initial and final assessment of the child's psychophysical status is the result of the preschool teacher's work.	BA	2.50	.786	-0.25	.798	-
	HR	2.46	.892			
A comparison of the initial and final assessment of the child's psychophysical status indicates the quality of the educational process.	BA	2.70	.705	-0.15	.877	-
	HR	2.72	.865			
A comparison of the initial and final assessment of the child's psychophysical status indicates the child's engagement during the educational process.	BA	2.89	.669	-0.59	.556	-
	HR	2.83	.676			
Monitoring of children's development is possible only through the individual work of a preschool teacher with an individual child.	BA	2.22	.654	-0.99	.321	-
	HR	2.11	.854			
Children's development is monitored throughout the child's stay in kindergarten.	BA	3.32	.547	-0.65	.513	-
	HR	3.38	.663			
Monitoring of children's development should be carried out according to planned periods (several times a year).	BA	2.46	.664	-0.58	.559	-
	HR	2.39	1.021			

\* BA = Bosnia and Hercegovina; \*\* HR= Republic of Croatia

In conclusion, there is a statistically significant difference in the assessment of preschool teachers according to sub-samples - different countries ( $t = -3.340$ ;  $p = .001$ ). A statistically significant weak negative correlation between preschool teachers' assessment and their age was determined ( $r = -.085$ ;  $p < .005$ ). A single-factor analysis of variance did not establish a statistically significant difference in the assessment of preschool teachers in relation to the level of education ( $F_{(44,153)} = 1.3$ ;  $p = .14$ ).

It is possible to conclude that the assessment of preschool teachers is not determined by the age or level of education of the participants of this research. The observed differences between the subsamples can be attributed to the educational policy that determines the (professional) behavior of preschool teachers. An insight into the practice of creating educational policies in both countries indicates the exclusion of preschool teachers - practitioners from the decision-making process. Although an open public consultation is mandatory in Croatia before the adoption of legal regulations, preschool teachers are only sporadically involved (visible on the web). It is possible to assume that this is related to the personal paradigms of preschool teachers, but it is also questionable whether the same can be attributed to a feeling of personal powerlessness and/or lack of interest, or to a culturally conditioned occupational status. Consequently, it is difficult to state whether the differences in the way of documenting children's development are the result of conviction and (un)justification of certain pedagogical approaches or just ambivalence in adhering to imposed educational policy. This is visible, for example, in the evaluation of the role of the preschool teacher in determining the lowest expected achievements of the child, where the lowest influence among the subsamples was observed.

## Discussion

Monitoring and documenting the development of children is one of the tasks of preschool teachers,



recognizable in all curricular approaches. The methods of monitoring and documentation and the expected educational outcomes are determined by individual public educational policies. However, it is questionable how preschool teachers in the immediate pedagogical process interpret, accept and implement the curricular guidelines of the public education policy.

The findings of this research indicate that preschool teachers, regardless of the curricular approach of a particular public education policy, recognize the importance of documenting children's development. They use the collected data about children as a starting point for planning development incentives and individualized plans. This points to the developmental significance of documentation. These assessments are in line with the findings of other research that indicate the importance of documenting children's development as a starting point for planning pedagogical incentives (Bećirović-Karabegović, 2014; Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2018; Rosicka & O'Connor, 2020; Vujičić, 2021).

Feraris (2013) emphasizes the importance of documentation as a starting point for developmental changes. The distinction between "weak" and "strong" documentation is interpreted precisely by the potential for changes. At the same time, "weak" documentation (most often descriptive) only records what was observed. Documentation becomes "powerful" only when it initiates a discussion about the possibilities of development, paradigm change and pedagogical approaches. Strong documentation is also the result of participatory documentation when all process stakeholders are equally involved in the process (Biffi, 2019; Biffi et al., 2021; Lindh & Mansikka, 2022; Visković, 2021). This can be partially seen in the findings of this research, in which participants believe that documentation about children can be a starting point for collaborative conversations between preschool teachers and parents. At the same time, it points to the need to develop self-assessment skills and self-regulated behavior in children and parents/caregivers (Black & Wiliam, 2009).

The research participants reject the assumption of insufficient competence of preschool teachers in recognizing the individual potential of each child. This is in agreement with the research of Vukosav and Sindik (2021), which confirms with 94% accuracy preschool teachers' assessments of children's potential giftedness. At the same time, it contradicts the research of Lindh and Mansikka (2022), who consider that teachers tend to have a high (self)assessment of their personal competences for managing pedagogical documentation and monitoring children's achievements, although this is not recognized in practice.

The assessments of preschool teachers from the sample are in agreement with research that suggests the need for continuous monitoring and documentation of children's achievements throughout the entire pedagogical year (Bećirović-Karabegović, 2014; Tankersley & Saifer, 2020). The distaste for one-off assessments is also confirmed by individual studies in Croatia (Bučević & Somolanji Tokić 2021; Visković, 2018). Black and Wiliam (2009) state that when documenting, the focus should be on the "unforeseen moment". This interpretation of the importance of documentation confirms the need for participatory pedagogy in which pedagogical documentation can be one of the quality communication channels of preschool teachers, children and their parents (Oliveira-Formosinho & de Sousa, 2019).

Unfortunately, the findings of this research are consistent with the findings of Lindh and Mansikka (2022), who state that most preschool teachers use documentation as a visualization of pedagogical practice and children's achievements. Unfortunately, the documentation conducted in this way is not developmentally oriented, but is only an illustration of achievements and a way of "keeping memories". Preschool teachers in Croatia are more inclined to the assumption that the method of monitoring and documenting children's development is one of the indicators of the quality of the educational process and cooperation with parents/guardians. This can be attributed to the influence of the Croatian national curriculum but also to the personal paradigms of preschool teachers. Vujičić (2021) believes that the effectiveness of each curriculum depends more on the preschool teacher and local conditions than on the theoretical curriculum model.

## Conclusion

The *Global Agenda 2030* places learning outcomes at the center of the international framework for

monitoring education. Due to different contemporary pedagogical concepts or their different interpretation at the level of individual public educational policy, there is a need for curricular determination of children's educational achievements.

The aim of this research was to examine in what way preschool teachers in institutional ECEC in the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina monitor children's development, considering different curricular approaches. Part of the findings points to differences that can be attributed to public educational policies and valid curricular guidelines. Unfortunately, part of the findings indicates that there is no difference in practice i.e., the practice of "reproductive" documentation of achievements is observed, which is not developmental, does not enable the equal inclusion of children or their active participation in the construction of new contents and activities.

Acknowledging the fact that well-managed documentation, regardless of the type and methods of data collection, can contribute to the development process and outcomes of children and the quality of the educational process (Visković, 2021) points to (re)defining outcomes. It is possible that the expected outcome should not be normative "goal" but the starting point for new learning and development processes. Such insights directs researchers to research on the personal professional paradigms of preschool teachers and their relationship to public education policy.

This research, although not representative of the population of preschool teachers in the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, points to the need of preschool teachers for professional support in monitoring and documenting children's achievements. At the same time, it is necessary to demand new curricular approaches aligned with contemporary research and, consequently, the redefinition of formal education and professional development of preschool teachers in both countries.

## Declarations

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