

Karijerni putevi studenata diplomskog studija RPOO



Odgoj danas za sutra:

Premošćivanje jaza između učionice i realnosti

3. međunarodna znanstvena i umjetnička konferencija
Učiteljskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu Suvremene
teme u odgoju i obrazovanju – STOO4 u suradnji s
Hrvatskom akademijom znanosti i umjetnosti

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**Sekcija - Odgoj i obrazovanje za
osobni i profesionalni razvoj**

Broj rada: 2

**Kategorija članka: Izvorni
znanstveni članak**

Sažetak

U ozračju sve većeg nedostatka učitelja, istraživačka je pozornost posvećena učiteljskoj motivaciji za zapošljavanjem i težnjama za razvoj karijere (Watt i Richardson, 2008, Hong i sur. 2017). Identifikacija profesionalnih planova ključna je za pružanje mogućnosti diferenciranog inicijalnog obrazovanja učitelja kojim se podržava njihov profesionalni razvoj (Reeves i Lowenhaupt, 2016.).

U istraživanju je korištena kombinacija kvantitativne i kvalitativne metodologije. Istraživanje je provedeno putem on-line upitnika na uzorku od 100 studenata na završnoj godini diplomskog studija ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja (DRPOO) na Učiteljskom fakultetu Sveučilišta u Zagrebu.

Rezultati pokazuju da su tri najvažnija razloga za odabir odgojiteljske profesije intrinzična motivacija, doprinos razvoju djece i društva i percepcija razvijenosti osobnih kvaliteta i kompetencijama koje su usklađene s karakteristikama posla odgojitelja. Dominantni razlog za upis diplomskog studija RPOO je potreba za dodatnim razvojem odgojiteljskih kompetencija. Čak 25% studentica DRPOO nije sigurno ili ne želi ostati raditi u profesiji nakon stjecanja diplome magistra RPOO. Kao razlozi koji bi mogli utjecati na napuštanje profesije navode se prvenstveno loši međuljudski odnosi ali i sustavske specifičnosti poput nemogućnosti zasnivanja radnog odnosa na neodređeno vrijeme. Gotovo polovica studentica DRPOO željela bi u budućnosti osnovati vlastiti vrtić, a jedna trećina se u budućnosti vidi na ravnateljskoj poziciji u ustanovi RPOO.

Ključne riječi

inicijalno obrazovanje odgojitelja, karijerni putevi odgojitelja, motivacija, poslovne aspiracije, rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje (RPOO)

Uvod

Povećavanje stope sudjelovanja djece u ranom i predškolskom odgoju i obrazovanju (RPOO) jedan je od nacionalnih prioriteta Republike Hrvatske (Vlada RH, 2021.). Nacionalni dokumenti usklađeni su sa dokumentima na razini Europske unije u kojima je naveden cilj da bi obuhvat djece u dobi od tri godine do polaska u školu u institucijama za rani i predškolski odgoj do 2030. godine trebao

iznositi 96% (Europska unija, 2021). Podaci iz 2022. godine pokazuju da na hrvatskom tržištu rada nedostaje 6025 odgojitelja (Domović i Drvodelić, 2024), a najnovije projekcije navode da će biti potrebno zaposliti 7.002 odgojitelja kako bi se postigao cilj obuhvata djece od 96% do 2030 godine (Europska komisija, 2024). Nedostatak odgojitelja problem je s kojim se susreću mnoge zemlje (Craig i sur., 2023) ne samo Hrvatska i moguće ga je promatrati kao fenomen svjetskih razmjera (UNESCO, 2017). U kontekstu sve većeg nedostatka odgojitelja i učitelja, istraživači provode se istraživanja motivacije za ulazak u učiteljsku profesiju te njihovih karijernih aspiracija (Ashiedu i Scott-Ladd, 2012; Hong i sur., 2017; Sinclair, 2008; Watt i Richardson, 2008).

Odabir odgojiteljske profesije višeslojni je konstrukt koji je uglavnom vođen intrinzičnim i altruističkim motivacijama (Alvariñas-Villaverde i sur., 2022; Celik, 2020; Hmelak i Lepičnik-Vodopivec, 2012; Žveglič Mihelić i sur., 2022) osobnim karakteristikama (Jugović i sur., 2012; Pavin Ivanec i Defar, 2023), podržan je snažnim profesionalnim identitetom (Qiao i sur., 2022) i pozitivnim percepcijama uspjeha u karijeri (Smidt i sur., 2018). Ovi čimbenici zajednički doprinose visokoj razini zadovoljstva karijerom i predanosti poslu među odgojiteljima u predškolskom odgoju (Celik, 2020; Shen i Luen, 2021). Razumijevanje motivacije za odabir odgojiteljske profesije može pomoći u razvoju kvalitete sustava inicijalnog obrazovanja i trajnog profesionalnog razvoja odgojitelja i poslužiti kao podrška za privlačenje budućih kvalitetnih odgojitelja, njihovo zadržavanje u profesiji, odnosno sprečavanje izlaska iz odgojiteljske profesije.

Odgojiteljska profesija ključna je za razvoj djece u njihovim najosjetljivijim godinama te ima snažan utjecaj na društvo u cjelini. Istraživanja pokazuju da je kvaliteta rada odgojitelja povezana s boljim ishodima za djecu u područjima poput akademskog postignuća (Ulferts i sur., 2019; Von Suchodoletz i sur., 2023) socijalnih vještina i kognitivnog razvoja (Camilli i sur., 2010, Peisner-Feinberg i sur., 2001) te školskog uspjeha (Burchinal i sur., 2021). Glavni preduvjet za osiguranje kvalitete pedagoške prakse je kvaliteta inicijalnog obrazovanja odgojitelja (EK, 2014; OECD, 2012). Istraživanja pokazuju da su više razine inicijalnoga obrazovanja odgojitelja pozitivno povezane s većom kvalitetom ranoga i predškolskoga odgoja i obrazovanja te posljedično boljim ishodima u odnosu na razvoj djece (Darling-Hammond i sur., 2005; Manning i sur., 2019) zbog čega brojni eksperti zagovaraju obrazovanje odgojitelja na sveučilišnim studijima, uključujući diplomsku razinu kao i mogućnost nastavka obrazovanja na poslijediplomskim studijima (Urban i sur., 2011). U Republici Hrvatskoj inicijalno obrazovanje odgojitelja do 2008. godine odvijalo se na dvogodišnjem stručnom studiju, a nakon reforme visokog obrazovanja studij za odgojitelje podignut je na razinu sveučilišnog studija. Time je studentima omogućeno stjecanje diplome prvostupnika RPOO i magistara RPOO, ali i osigurana vertikalna prohodnost koja otvara mogućnost nastavka školovanja na specijalističkim, poslijediplomskim i doktorskim studijima (Domović i sur., 2022.). Iako je diploma na prvostupničkoj razini dovoljna za zasnivanje radnoga odnosa u institucijama RPOO, studenti mogu upisati diplomski kao redoviti ili izvanredni studij. Prvi diplomski studij ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja (DRPOO) u Hrvatskoj uveden je akademske godine 2010./2011. na Učiteljskom fakultetu Sveučilišta u Rijeci (Vujičić, 2012.), a danas se programi diplomskog studija RPOO izvode na sedam hrvatskih sveučilišta. U Hrvatskoj je, od uvođenja diplomskog studija RPOO, primjetno godišnje povećanje broj zaposlenih magistara RPOO. U pedagoškoj godini 2023./2024. bilo je zaposleno 2758 magistara RPOO što predstavlja udio od 17,6% od ukupnog broja svih zaposlenih odgojitelja (DZS, 2024). Premda je od samog početka izvedbe studijskih programa DRPOO popunjenost upisnih kvota ukazivala na iznimno visok interes, u posljednje tri godine zabilježeno je smanjenje interesa studenata za upis DRPOO te upisne kvote nisu u cijelosti

popunjene (Domović i Drvodelić, 2024). Promatra li se interes studenata za upis na diplomski studij u kontekstu nedostatka broja odgojitelja, jasno je da produljenje inicijalnog obrazovanja na diplomskoj razini usporava izlazak odgojitelja na tržište rada što ne pridonosi kratkoročnom, odnosno brzom rješavanju problema nedostatka odgojitelja na tržištu rada. Međutim, dugoročni doprinosi kvaliteti koji su povezani s produljenim inicijalnog obrazovanja odgojitelja područje je koje u Hrvatskoj nije dovoljno istraženo. Brojna svjetska istraživanja navode da viša razina kvalifikacije odgojitelja doprinosi provedbi kvalitetnije pedagoške prakse (Dalli i Urban, 2010; Manning i sur., 2019; Melhuish i sur., 2015; Urban i sur., 2011.). Iako se očekuje da su odgojitelji čije obrazovanje traje dulje, uspješniji u radu od onih s nižim i po trajanju kraćim obrazovanjem (Lino, 2016), istraživanja ne daju jednoznačne rezultate koji to potvrđuju. Tako postoji niz istraživanja koja potvrđuju da postoji razlika u korist kvalitete pedagoške prakse onih odgojitelja koji imaju stečenu kvalifikaciju prvostupnika u odnosu na one s nižom kvalifikacijom (Kelly i Camilli, 2007; Nair i sur., 2017; Whitebook, 2003), ali i ona u kojima se ne može nedvojbeno potvrditi postoje li razlike između kvalitete rada odgojitelja sa diplomom magistra i prvostupnika RPOO (Cameron i Morrison, 2011; Falenchuk i sur. 2017; Lillvist i sur., 2014; Whitebook, 2003).

Preostaje upitati se zašto odgojitelji, koji su stekli akademski stupanj prvostupnika i ostvaruju uvjete za rad u ustanovi RPOO, biraju upisati diplomski studij RPOO i nastaviti svoje obrazovanje. Ranije u tekstu je navedeno kako postoje brojna istraživanja koja propituju studentsku motivaciju za odabir odgojiteljskog studija, ali nedostaje onih istraživanja koja se bave specifičnim razlozima odgojitelja sa stečenom diplomom prvostupnika RPOO za odabir upisa diplomskog studija. Dodatno, nedovoljno su istražene karijerne aspiracije odgojitelja. Dio istraživanja karijernih puteva odgojitelja uključuje i razloge za izlazak iz odgojiteljske profesije koji mogu doprinijeti razumijevanju odgojiteljskih potreba na temelju kojih se mogu razvijati strategije za privlačenje i zadržavanje odgojitelja na postojećim radnim mjestima u ustanovama RPOO. Poznato je da je izlazak iz odgojiteljske profesije potaknut faktorima kao što su zahtjevnost posla (Schaack i sur., 2021), nedostatak resursa (Zhao i sur., 2023), organizacijska kultura (Wells, 2015), nedostatak prilika za profesionalni razvoj (Phillips i sur., 2016), stres (Kim i sur., 2020; Yeh, i Lo, 2024), sagorijevanje na poslu (Yeh i Lo, 2024) i osobni razlozi (Schaack i sur., 2021), ali u Hrvatskoj nemamo podataka koji bi omogućili razumijevanje razloga za izlazak iz odgojiteljske profesije. Identifikacija očekivanih profesionalnih planova ključna je za pružanje diferenciranih mogućnosti inicijalnog obrazovanja odgojitelja kako bi se podržao razvoj budućih odgojitelja (Reeves i Lowenhaupt, 2016.). Ovo je posebno važno i ako se promatra u svijetlu novih prilika koje se za odgojitelje, koji su završili magistarski studij, otvaraju na rukovodećim pozicijama. Neka istraživanja sugeriraju da se kod učitelja/odgojitelja povećava želja za rukovodećim ulogama te napredovanjem i većim utjecajem izvan razreda/odgojno-obrazovne skupine (Donaldson i sur., 2008; Johnson i sur., 2005), ali do sad u Hrvatskoj nije istraživano imaju li odgojitelji koji upisuju diplomski studij RPOO aspiracije za preuzimanje rukovodećih pozicija. Istraživanjem koje je provedeno u Sloveniji i Srbiji (Žveglič Mihelič i sur., 2022) ispitana su karijerna očekivanja odgojitelja što je rezultiralo distinkcijom smjerova u odgojiteljskim karijernim planovima, odnosno razdvajanjem općih karijernih očekivanja na dvije subskale. Jedna se odnosila na trajni profesionalni razvoj odgojitelja, a druga na odgojiteljske planove usmjerene na preuzimanje rukovoditeljskih pozicija.

Ovim istraživanjem nastojalo se prikupiti i analizirati podatke koji doprinose razumijevanju kompleksnosti karijernog puta odgojitelja od motivacije za odabir odgojiteljske profesije, preko razloga za odabir diplomskog studija, razloga za ostanak u profesiji kao i razloga koji bi mogli

utjecati na izlazak iz profesije sve do odgojiteljskog pogleda u budućnost, odnosno njihovih poslovnih aspiracija.

Metodologija

Cilj

Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je istražiti karijerne puteve studenta diplomskog studija Ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja.

Na temelju ovoga cilja postavljena su sljedeća istraživačka pitanja :

1. Utvrditi razloge za odabir odgojiteljske profesije
2. Utvrditi razloge za upis diplomskog studija RPOO
3. Utvrditi razloge za ostanak u profesiji i razloge za napuštanjem odgojiteljske profesije
4. Utvrditi poslovne aspiracije studenata DRPOO
5. Utvrditi postoje li razlike između procjena poslovnih aspiracija izvanrednih i redovitih studenata.

Instrumenti

Za potrebe ovog istraživanja izrađen je online upitnik u formi Goole Forms ankete koji se sastojao od četiri dijela. Prvim dijelom upitnika ispitane su socio-demografske karakteristike studenata (spol, način studiranja, radni status, duljina staža, poslodavac, zaposlenje, položajna zvanja).

Drugi dio upitnika sadržavao je otvorena pitanja u kojima su studenti navodili razloge odabira odgojiteljske profesije i moguće razloge za napuštanje profesije.

U trećem dijelu upitnika studenti su procjenjivali važnost ponuđenih razloga za odabir diplomskog studija (9 tvrdnji) i razloga za ostanak u profesiji (12 tvrdnji) na skali Likertova tipa od 1 (u potpunosti nevažno) do 5 (u potpunosti važno). Razlozi iz ova dva seta tvrdnji dobiveni su kvalitativnom analizom provedenom u pilot istraživanju 2021. godine (Drvodelić, 2021).

U četvrtome dijelu upitnika nalazila su se pitanja koja se odnose na buduće poslovne aspiracije gdje su studenti nakon označavanja svog odabira u formi DA/NE pitanja, obrazlagali svoje odabire.

Uzorak i prikupljanje podataka

Istraživanje je provedeno u svibnju 2023. godine, na samom kraju završne godine diplomskog studija Ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja (DRPOO) na Učiteljskom fakultetu Sveučilišta u Zagrebu. U istraživanju je sudjelovalo 100 studentica; 50 studentica izvanrednog studija i 50 studentica redovitog studija. Od ukupnog broja ispitanih izvanrednih studentica (N=50), njih 48% zaposleno je na neodređeno radno vrijeme u ustanovi RPOO, 38% zaposleno je na određeno

vrijeme u ustanovi RPOO, 6% je nezaposlenih studentica, a 8% studentica je zaposleno, ali ne u vrtiću. Prosječna duljina radnog staža iznosi 3 godine i 6 mjeseci, a raspon staža kreće se od 0 mjeseci do 13 godina radnog iskustva. Sudjelovanje u istraživanju je bilo anonimno i uz dobrovoljan pristanak studenata.

Obrada podataka

U istraživanju su korištene kvantitativne i kvalitativne metode kako bi se osiguralo dobivanje sveobuhvatnijih podataka koji doprinose dubljem razumijevanju istraživane teme (Creswell i Creswell, 2017).

Za kvantitativni dio istraživanja korišten je softver IBM SPSS Statistics 25. Prikazani su podaci deskriptivne analize (hi kvadrat test - χ^2 ; Mann-Whitney U test - z uz veličinu efekta razlike - r).

Za kvalitativnu analizu odgovora prikupljenih kroz otvorena pitanja korištena je induktivna tematska analiza sadržaja. Proces analize podataka sastojao se od šest koraka koje su opisali Braun i Clarke (2006). U prva tri koraka istraživačice su individualno čitale podatke, generirale inicijalne kodove i kategorizirale kodove u teme. U slijedeća su tri koraka istraživačice zajedno revidirale teme, spajale teme u teorijske kategorije te u konačnici kvantificirale dobivene podatke.

Rezultati

Odabir odgojiteljske profesije

Studentice su u pitanju otvorenoga tipa samostalno navodile motive za odabir odgojiteljske profesije. Razlozi za odabir odgojiteljske profesije često su bili mnogostruki, stoga je u procesu analize identificirano 147 kodova koji su zatim razvrstani u 8 kategorija prikazanih u Tablici 1.

Studentice kao najučestaliji razlog odabira odgojiteljske profesije navode snažnu intrinzičnu motivaciju koja proizlazi iz ljubavi prema radu s djecom koju dio ispitanica ima od najranije dobi ili ju osjeća kao svoj poziv ($f = 57$). Zatim navode da osjećaju kako kroz rad s djecom mogu utjecati na njihov cjelokupni razvoj i tako doprinijeti razvoju društva ($f = 29$) te doprinijeti razvoju bolje budućnosti sve djece, a posebice one koja se nalaze u nepovoljnom položaju. Slijede razlozi koji se odnose na karakteristike posla koji studenti vide kao dinamičan i kreativan ($f = 15$) te razlozi koji ukazuju na razvijenost njihovih osobnih karakteristika i kompetencija koje prepoznaju kao poželjnu predispoziciju za ulazak u profesiju ($f = 15$). Dio studentica razmišlja pragmatično te prepoznaju da radni uvjeti u dječjim vrtićima omogućavaju dobru ravnotežu poslovnoga i privatnoga života i da se radi o traženom zanimanju koje pruža mogućnost brzog zaposlenja ($f=9$). Naposljetku, dio se studentica odlučilo za odabir odgojiteljske profesije zbog snažnog utiska kojega su na njih ostavile osobe iz obrazovnog sustava, bilo da je riječ o učiteljima ili odgojiteljima koje su upoznale tijekom svog obrazovanja ili osobama iz obiteljskog kruga koje dijele isto ili slično zanimanje.

Obje skupine studentica, studentice redovitog i studentice izvanrednog studija, navode razloge iz gotovo svih kategorija. Jedini izuzetak su razlozi koji spadaju pod „Ravnoteža poslovnog i privatnog života“ koju navode isključivo studentice izvanrednog studija.

Tablica 1

Razlozi za odabir odgojiteljske profesije

MOTIVACIJA ZA ODABIR ODGOJITELJSKE PROFESIJE		
KATEGORIJE	PRIMJER KODA	f
Intrinzična motivacija	Oduvijek sam osjećala poziv ka ovoj struci.	57
Doprinos razvoju društva	Želja za pozitivnim utjecajem na razvoj društva znajući da su to ključne godine za formiranje i učenje.	29
Osobne karakteristike i kompetencije	Zbog izražavanja vlastite kreativnosti kroz osmišljavanje i izradu poticajnih aktivnosti.	15
Karakteristike posla	Dinamičan posao.	15
Kontinuirani profesionalni razvoj	Potreba za profesionalnim usavršavanjem.	9
Ravnoteža poslovnog i privatnog života	Stignem se posvetiti svojoj obitelji.	9
Utjecaj okoline	Ženski dio obitelji je većinom zaposlen u odgoju i obrazovanju.	6
Sigurnost zaposlenja	Manjak odgojitelja na burzi, mogućnost brzog zaposlenja.	3

Upis na diplomski studij RPOO

Rezultati deskriptivne statistike i testova značajnosti razlika u motivaciji za upis diplomskog studija RPOO (Tablica 2) pokazuju da su dva najvažnija razloga za upis diplomskog studija želja za profesionalnim razvojem (MTOT = 4,65, SD = 0,64, C = 5,00) i povećanje plaće koje donosi diploma magistra RPOO (MTOT = 4,62, SD = 0,71, C = 5,00). Zatim slijedi motiv za razvojem novih kompetencija koje doprinose dječjem razvoju (MTOT = 4,47, SD = 0,87, C = 5,00) koji je kod redovitih studenata podjednako izražen kao i veća plaća. Sljedeći po važnosti je stjecanje više razine formalne edukacije (MTOT = 4,39, SD = 0,80, C = 5,00). Za ova četiri najviše rangirana razloga nisu utvrđene statistički značajne razlike između redovitih i izvanrednih studenata.

Međutim, razlike su utvrđene za sljedeća četiri motiva za upis diplomskog studija RPOO. Redoviti studenti značajno više cijene napredovanje u više zvanje ($MTOT = 4,10$, $SD = 1,03$, $C = 4,00$; $r = ,21$) te češće ističu želju za promjenom karijernog puta kako bi jednog dana postali ravnatelji vrtića, dok izvanredni studenti taj razlog i dalje smatraju važnim, ali ga procjenjuju nešto niže ($MTOT = 3,98$, $SD = 1,04$, $C = 4,00$; $r = ,20$). Također, redoviti studenti u većoj mjeri prepoznaju potrebu za osnaživanjem kako bi doprinijeli razvoju lokalne zajednice i društva u cjelini u odnosu na studente izvanrednog studija ($MTOT = 3,64$, $SD = 1,19$, $C = 4,00$; $r = ,26$).

Najniže rangirani razlozi su mogućnost daljnjeg nastavka studija ($MTOT = 3,27$, $SD = 1,17$, $C = 3,00$) i nedovoljno razvijene kompetencije za rad s djecom ($MTOT = 3,22$, $SD = 1,32$, $C = 3,00$). Podatak koji zabrinjava je da dio studenata upisuje DRPOO zbog osjećaja nedovoljno razvijenih kompetencija za rad s djecom nakon preddiplomskog studija. Taj je razlog izraženiji među redovitim studentima, koji su diplomski studij upisali odmah nakon preddiplomskog i nemaju radnog iskustva u vrtićima, nego među izvanrednim studentima ($r = ,28$).

Tablica 2

Razlozi za upis diplomskog studija

		N	M	SD	C	M rang	z
Želja za vlastitim profesionalnim razvojem	RED	50	4.72	0.54	5.00	52.92	-1.05
	IZV	50	4.58	0.73	5.00	48.08	
Veća plaća u odnosu na plaću prvostupnika	RED	50	4.64	0.56	5.00	49.42	-0.47
	IZV	50	4.60	0.83	5.00	51.58	
Razvoj novih kompetencija koje doprinose dječjem razvoju	RED	50	4.64	0.60	5.00	54.48	-1.61
	IZV	50	4.30	1.05	5.00	46.52	
Viša razina formalne kvalifikacije	RED	50	4.42	0.73	5.00	50.78	-0.11
	IZV	50	4.36	0.88	5.00	50.22	
Napredovanje u zvanju	RED	50	4.32	0.89	5.00	56.10	-2.07*

IZV	50	3.88	1.12	4.00	44.90		
Promjena karijernog puta (ravnatelj)	RED	50	4.20	0.95	5.00	56.09	-2.03*
	IZV	50	3.76	1.10	4.00	44.91	
Osnaživanje za doprinos razvoju lokalne zajednice i društva u cjelini	RED	50	3.98	1.02	4.00	58.22	-2.76**
	IZV	50	3.30	1.27	3.00	42.78	
Mogućnost nastavka studija (specijalistički, post. dipl.)	RED	50	3.14	1.28	3.00	47.73	-0.99
	IZV	50	3.40	1.05	3.00	53.27	
Nedovoljno razvijene kompetencije za rad nakon preddiplomskog studija	RED	50	3.54	1.34	4.00	57.74	-2.56*
	IZV	50	2,90	1,23	3,00	43,26	

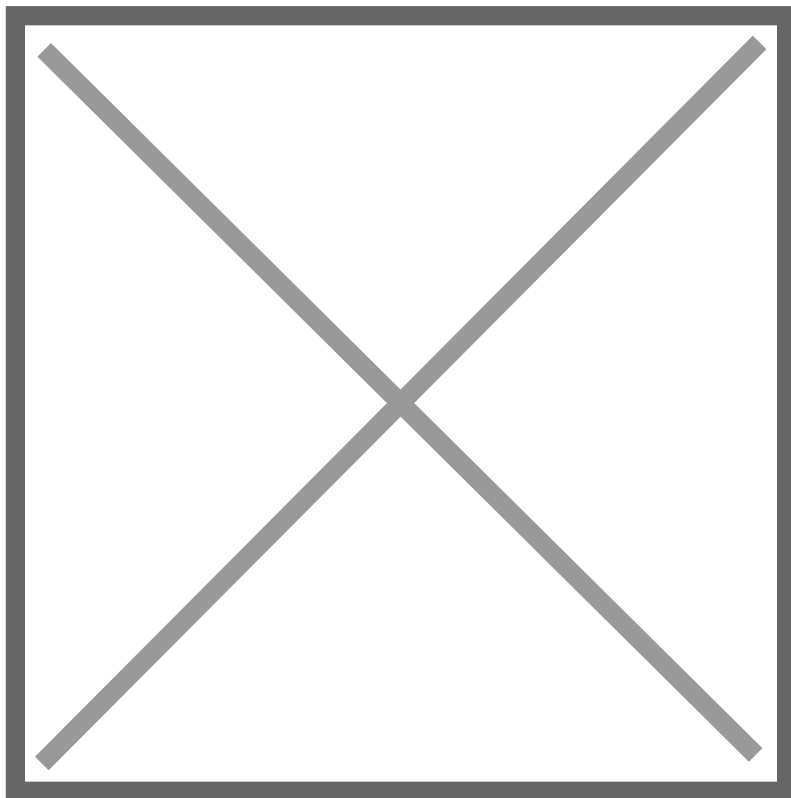
Napomena. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. RED - redoviti studenti, IZV - izvanredni studenti, N - broj ispitanika, M - aritmetička sredina, SD - standardna devijacija; C - medijan, M rang - prosječan rang, Mann-Whitney U test z.

Poslovne aspiracije studenata

Radi boljeg razumijevanja poslovnih aspiracija studenta DROO, postavljena su tri pitanja s ponuđenim odgovorima da ili ne kojima se ispituje želja sudionica istraživanja da u budućnosti postanu ravnateljice, vlasnice vrtića ili vlasnice obrta za čuvanja djece.

Od ukupno 94 studentice, njih 40% je odgovorilo da bi jednog dana željele postati ravnateljice vrtića (Slika 1). Rezultati hi-kvadrat testa pokazuju kako ne postoji Nisu utvrđene statistički značajne razlike između odgovora redovitih i izvanrednih studenata ($\chi^2 = 0,52$; $p > .05$).

Slika 1



U sljedećem su koraku studentice navodile razloge zbog kojih jednoga dana žele ili ne žele postati ravnateljice dječjeg vrtića. Odgovori su često bili složeni i sadržavali veći broj razloga. Zbog toga je prilikom analize svaki ponuđeni razlog kodiran a potom su kodovi svrstani u kategorije (Tablica 3).

Primjer odgovora: „Željela bih postati ravnateljica vrtića jednog dana jer smatram da bih bila dobar vođa i da bih se zaista trudila da vrtić bude ugodno mjesto odrastanja za djecu i ugodno radno okruženje odgojiteljima i drugim djelatnicima.“

Studentice najčešće navode kako bi željele postati ravnateljice jer bi tada mogle podići kvalitetu ustanove RPOO kroz uvođenje inovacija, novih odgojno obrazovnih programa i pristupa, unapređenje kvalitete odgojno obrazovne prakse te osiguravanje kvalitetnih uvjeta rada kako bi se zadovoljile potrebe i osiguralo zadovoljstvo djelatnika. Dio njih vidi posao ravnatelja kao profesionalni izazov u kojem bi se željele okušati ili pak smatraju da će im diploma magistarskog

studija poslužiti kao poticaj za prijavljivanje na radno mjesto, dok druge prepoznaju da imaju razvijene upravljačke kompetencije koje bi mogle iskoristiti na ovom radnom mjestu. Pragmatični razlozi za odabir ravnateljskog posla odnose se na financijsku korist i izostanak fizičke zahtjevnosti posla, posebice u zrelijim godinama života.

Tablica 3

Ravnateljski posao: motivacija i izazovi

KATEGORIJE	PRIMJER KODA	f
RAZLOZI ZA ODABIR POSLA RAVNATELJA		
Unaprjeđenje kvalitete ustanove RPOO	Da uvedem promjene i poboljšam kvalitetu rada vrtića.	16
Profesionalni izazov	Htjela bih se okušati u nečem novom jer volim izazove.	11
Kompetencije vođenja i upravljanja	Znam da znam više o menadžmentu od prosječnog odgojitelja i zanima me vođenje.	6
Pragmatični razlozi	Veća primanja.	4
RAZLOZI PROTIV ODABIRA POSLA RAVNATELJA		
Izostanak neposrednog rada s djecom	Ravnateljska pozicija isključuje izravan rad s djecom.	14
Visoka razina odgovornosti i stresa	To je vrlo odgovoran posao.	13
Nedovoljna razvijenost kompetencija vođenja i upravljanja	Ne osjećam se dovoljno sposobno za koordinaciju koju ta funkcija zahtijeva.	13
Nedostatak ambicije	Nemam ambicije za ravnateljski posao.	11
Administrativna i politička ograničenja	Ravnatelj ne može samostalno donositi odluke već je on produžena ruka lokalnog upravitelja i samim time onemogućen u provođenju promjena.	5

Studentice koje u budućnosti ne žele biti ravnateljice kao najčešći razlog navode izostanak direktnog kontakta s djecom ($f = 14$). Prema učestalosti navođenja zatim slijedi previsoka razina odgovornosti i stresa i nedovoljno razvijene upravljačke kompetencije. Dio studentica navode manjak ili potpuni izostanak ravnateljskih ambicija, dok manji dio njih prepoznaje administrativne obveze te politiku kao otegotnu okolnost koja onemogućava ravnateljima donošenje autonomnih odluka vezanih uz rad vrtića. U nastavku su prikazani neki od odgovora koji ilustriraju razloge zbog koji se ispitanice ne vide u ulozi ravnatelja.

„Mislim da u Hrvatskoj ravnateljima nemaju dovoljno slobode da rade onako kako misle da treba, već se trebaju prilagođavati osnivaču i vladajućoj političkoj stranci.“

„Mislim da nemam te vještine koje se zahtijevaju od jednog ravnatelja i ne želim toliku odgovornost. Smatram da mogu više pridonijeti zajednici kao odgojitelj.“

Slika 2

Aspiracije studenata prema otvaranju vlastitog vrtića

A green and red pie chartDescription automatically generated

Gotovo polovina (47%) studentica jednoga dana želi osnovati vlastiti vrtić (Slika 2). Nisu utvrđene statistički značajne razlike između odgovora studentica izvanrednog i redovitog studija ($\chi^2 = 0,518$; $p > .05$).

Studentice koje iskazuju aspiraciju da u budućnosti otvore vlastiti vrtić (Tablica 4) najčešće navode da je to zato što bi željele postaviti i održati vlastiti standard kvalitete. Preostali razlozi odnose se na zadovoljavanje potrebe za osiguranjem većeg broja upisnih mjesta kojih trenutačno nasušno nedostaje, ostvarivanje značajnije autonomije u radu i prepoznavanje dobre poslovne prilike koja bi jamčila napredak u karijeri, financijsku korist i povoljniji status.

„Želim stvoriti vrtić u kojemu će dijete biti na prvom mjestu, u kojemu će raditi obrazovani kadar spreman na profesionalni razvoj i konstantno usavršavanje. Želim stvoriti mjesto u kojemu bih se ja ugodno osjećala, a samim time i ugodnu atmosferu za druge suradnike, djecu i roditelje“

Tablica 4

Razlozi za (ne)otvaranje vlastitog vrtića

KATEGORIJE	PRIMJER KODA	f
RAZLOZI ZA OTVARANJE VLASTITOG VRTIĆA		

Visoki standardi kvalitete vrtića	U njemu bi mogla učiniti sve boljim nego su trenutne situacije u vrtićima.	22
Povećanje upisnih kapaciteta	Zbog neupisane djece.	8
Autonomija u radu	Veća autonomija u radu.	5
Dobra poslovna prilika	Otvaranje vrtića može biti profitabilno poslovanje, ako se dobro upravlja i vode kvalitetni programi.	5
RAZLOZI PROTIV OTVARANJA VLASTITOG VRTIĆA		
Prevelika odgovornost i zahtjevnost posla	Mislim da je to jako zahtjevan i mukotrpan proces i ne vidim se u tome.	20
Nedostatak ambicije	Nemam ambicije za velikim sustavom koji treba voditi, više me privlače manje i osobnije priče.	8
Financijske prepreke	Financijska nemogućnost.	7
Administrativna i birokratska opterećenja	Previše administrativnih poslova.	6
Nedostatak poduzetničkih kompetencija	Nemam kompetencije koje su potrebne za vođenje vrtića.	3

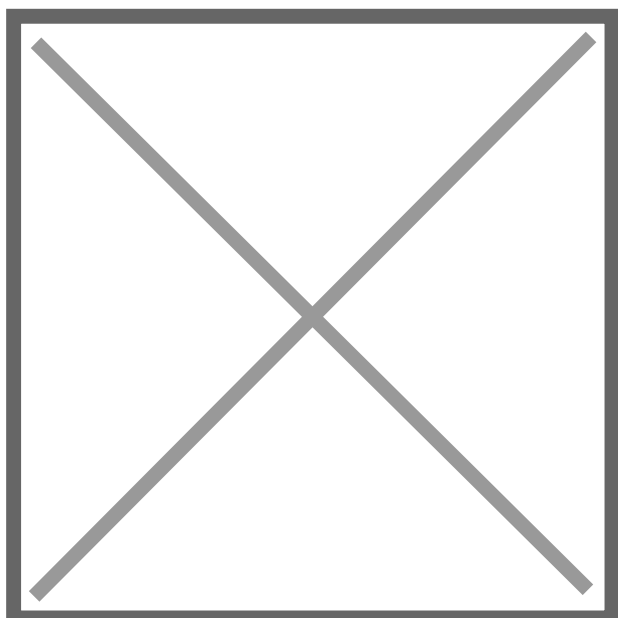
Kao razloge zbog kojih ne bi željele otvoriti vlastiti vrtić (Tablica 4) studentice navode da je to prezahtjevan i preodgovoran posao te posao u kojem ima previše administrativnih i birokratskih postupaka. Ostali razlozi odnose se na nedostatak ambicija, financija i nedostatak poduzetničkih kompetencija.

„Nemam dovoljno financijskih sredstava za vrtić kakav smatram da bi trebao biti.”

„Zato jer živimo u Hrvatskoj. Birokracija, veliki porezi i ostale prepreke za male poduzetnike ne dozvoljavaju opstanak na tržištu rada.”

Slika 3

Aspiracije studenata prema otvaranju vlastitog obrta za čuvanje



O tome žele li u budućnosti otvoriti vlastiti obrt za čuvanje djece izjasnile su se ukupno 93 studentice (Slika 3). Oko dvije trećine studentica (63%) nema želju jednoga dana otvoriti vlastiti obrt za čuvanje djece. Nije utvrđena značajna razlika između odgovora redovitih i izvanrednih studenata ($\chi^2 = 0,006$; $p > ,05$).

Najčešća prednost koju studentice navode kao razlog zbog kojega bi jednoga dana željele otvoriti vlastiti obrt za čuvanje djece (Tablica 5) je ta da je jednostavnije otvoriti obrt nego vrtić ($f = 10$). Dodatno, navedeno je da rad u obrtu omogućava kreativnu slobodu, autonomiju u radu i osigurava financijsku korist. Primjerice navode:

„Ukoliko bih otvarala nešto svoje onda bi to bio obrt za čuvanje djece. To bi mi omogućilo dovoljno slobode u odabiru načina rada i broja djece ali ne bi odgovarala za veliki broj zaposlenika.”

Tablica 5

Razlozi za (ne)otvaranje obrta za čuvanje djece

KATEGORIJE	PRIMJER KODA	f
RAZLOZI ZA OTVARANJE OBRTA ZA ČUVANJE DJECE		
Jednostavan postupak osnivanja	Otvaranje obrta mnogo je jednostavniji proces od otvaranja vrtića.	10
Kreativna sloboda	Više slobode, više kreativnosti.	6
Financijska korist	Otvorila bi ga kao paušalni obrt, radi dodatnog izvora prihoda.	4
Autonomija u radu	To bi mi omogućilo dovoljno slobode u odabiru načina rada i broja djece.	4

RAZLOZI ZA NEOTVARANJE OBRTA ZA ČUVANJE DJECE		
Urušavanje profesije	Smatram da se takav rad ne cijeni dovoljno te da nema težinu godina studiranja i obrazovanja koje smo uložili da bi stekli diplomu magistre.	20
Nedostatak ambicija	Čini mi se i da je to prevelik korak za koji ja nemam ambicije.	5
Visoka razina odgovornosti	Ne osjećam se sigurno u preuzimanju odgovornosti na razini čitave ustanove.	4
Financijske prepreke	Nedostatka novca.	2

Kao glavni razlog zbog kojih ne bi htjele otvoriti obrt za čuvanje navode da takav oblik brige o djeci vide kao degradaciju profesije i nepoželjan oblik odgoja i obrazovanja u kojem ne bi htjele imati aktivnu ulogu. Zatim navode nedostatak ambicija i financijskih sredstava te zahtjevnost i visoku odgovornost posla. U nastavku su prikazani neki od njihovih odgovora.

„Kod obrta se sve svodi na čuvanje i paženje na djecu dok se u vrtiću uči i razvija”,

„Ne gledam na svoju profesiju kao čuvalište za djecu. Želim raditi u vrtiću kao odgojitelj, a ne kao teta čuvalica.“

Ostanak u odgojiteljskoj profesiji

Ukupno je 100 studentica odgovorilo na pitanje žele li nakon stjecanja diplome magistra RPOO ostati raditi u odgojiteljskoj profesiji (Slika 4). Tri četvrtine studentica (75%) sigurno je da žele ostati u odgojiteljskoj profesiji. Međutim, u svijetlu aktualnog problema nedostatka odgojitelja u cijeloj državi, zabrinjava podatak da 25% studentica diplomskog studija RPOO nije sigurno želi li ostati raditi u profesiji. Nisu utvrđene statistički značajna razlika između odgovora redovitih i izvanrednih studenata ($\chi^2 = 2,543$; $p > ,05$).

Slika 4

Iskaz želje za radom u odgojiteljskoj profesiji nakon stjecanja diplome magistra RPOO

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Kako bi se ispitali motivi za ostanak u odgojiteljskoj profesiji, ponuđeno je dvanaest razloga uz skalu procjene važnosti svake tvrdnje od 1 (uopće nije važno) do 5 (u potpunosti je važno). U Tablici 6 prikazani su rezultati Mann Whitney U testa razlike između studentica redovnog i izvanrednog studija.

Razlozi za ostanak u odgojiteljskoj profesiji (Tablica 6) slični su za redovite i izvanredne studente, uz jednu iznimku. Redoviti studenti DRPOO više cijene podršku stručnih suradnika kao ključan faktor ostanka u profesiji u usporedbi s izvanrednim studentima ($MTOT = 4,76$, $SD = 0,63$, $C = 5,00$, $r = ,22$). Na vrhu ljestvice najvažnijih razloga za ostanak ističu se čimbenici povezani s organizacijskom kulturom. Studenti iznimno važnima smatraju suradnju s kolegama ($MTOT = 4,83$, $SD = 0,54$, $C = 5,00$) i pozitivno radno ozračje ($MTOT = 4,83$, $SD = 0,53$, $C = 5,00$). Također, naglašavaju važnost kvalitetnog rukovodstva ustanove ($MTOT = 4,72$, $SD = 0,60$, $C = 5,00$), dobru suradnju s roditeljima ($MTOT = 4,83$, $SD = 0,54$, $C = 5,00$), te podršku ustanove u unaprjeđenju pedagoške prakse ($MTOT = 4,56$, $SD = 0,71$, $C = 5,00$). Mogućnost napredovanja ($MTOT = 4,66$, $SD = 0,63$, $C = 5,00$) i uključivanje u projekte ($MTOT = 4,51$, $SD = 0,77$, $C = 5,00$) također su visoko ocijenjeni razlozi. Iako je adekvatna visina plaće važna za ostanak u profesiji, studentice je ne percipiraju kao iznimno važan faktor ($MTOT = 4,49$, $SD = 0,80$, $C = 5,00$). Uglavnom važnim smatraju mogućnost sudjelovanja u procese donošenja odluka na razini vrtića ($MTOT = 4,37$, $SD = 0,75$, $C = 4,00$) i suradnju s institucijama izvan vrtića ($MTOT = 4,35$, $SD = 0,76$, $C = 4,00$). Iako i dalje važna, udaljenost radnog mjesta od mjesta stanovanja najniže je procijenjeni razlog ($MTOT = 3,98$, $SD = 0,88$, $C = 4,00$), što sugerira da ima najmanji utjecaj na odluku o ostanku u profesiji.

Tablica 6

Razlozi za ostanak u profesiji

		N	M	SD	C	M Rang	Z
Podrška stručnih suradnika	RED	46	4.89	0.38	5.00	50.93	-2.12*
	IZV	47	4.64	0.79	5.00	43.15	
Suradnja s kolegama	RED	46	4.89	0.38	5.00	48.92	-1.17
	IZV	47	4.77	0.67	5.00	45.12	
Pozitivno radno ozračje	RED	46	4.87	0.34	5.00	47.07	-0.34
	IZV	46	4.78	0.66	5.00	45.93	
Dobro upravljanje vrtićem	RED	46	4.78	0.42	5.00	48.11	-0.53
	IZV	47	4.66	0.73	5.00	45.91	
Suradnja s roditeljima	RED	46	4.74	0.57	5.00	47.77	-0.38
	IZV	47	4.68	0.73	5.00	46.24	

Institucijska podrška unapređenj u kvalitete pedagoške prakse	RED	46	4.67	0.63	5.00	51.30	-1.81
	IZV	47	4.45	0.77	5.00	42.79	
Mogućnost napredovanja	RED	46	4.65	0.57	5.00	46.24	-0.34
	IZV	47	4.66	0.70	5.00	47.74	
Mogućnost sudjelovanja u projektima	RED	46	4.61	0.65	5.00	49.72	-1.12
	IZV	47	4.40	0.88	5.00	44.34	
Adekvatna visina mjesečnih primanja	RED	46	4.50	0.72	5.00	46.50	-0.21
	IZV	47	4.49	0.88	5.00	47.49	
Mogućnost sudjelovanja u donošenju odluka na razini vrtića	RED	46	4.46	0.62	5.00	49.15	-0.84
	IZV	47	4.28	0.85	4.00	44.89	
Suradnja s institucijama izvan vrtića	RED	46	4.37	0.64	4.00	45.99	-0.20
	IZV	46	4.33	0.87	5.00	47.01	
Mjesto rada u blizini mjesta stanovanja	RED	46	3.96	0.87	4.00	46.28	-0.27
	IZV	47	4.00	0.91	4.00	47.70	

Napomena. * $p < ,05$, ** $p < ,01$. RED - redoviti studenti, IZV - izvanredni studenti, N - broj ispitanika, M - aritmetička sredina, SD - standardna devijacija; C - medijan, M rang - prosječan rang, Mann-Whitney U test z.

Napuštanje odgojiteljske profesije

Studentice su ponudile opširne odgovore o mogućim razlozima za izlazak iz profesije na temelju kojih su identificirana 163 koda razvrstana u 9 kategorija (Tablica 7). Kao najučestaliji razlog koji bi mogao pridonijeti izlasku iz profesije izdvojena je narušenost međuljudskih odnosa u kolektivu ($f = 41$) koja se odnosi na loše odnose i komunikacijske poteškoće između odgojiteljica, izostanak podrške i nerazumijevanje od strane stručnih suradnika te mobing na radom mjestu. U kategoriji

loših radnih uvjeta najčešće se ističe preveliki broj djece u odgojnim skupinama, nepoštivanje Državnog pedagoškog standarda, loši prostorni uvjeti rada i obveza trošenja vlastitog novca za nabavku materijala za rad. Kao treći po učestalosti navođenja, izdvajaju se premale plaće koje nisu dostatne za pokrivanje troškova života. Slijedi nizak status profesije u društvu, ali i na radnom mjestu gdje odgojitelji izjednačavaju sa nestručnim zamjenama. Mogući organizacijski aspekti razloga za izlazak iz profesije odnose se na lošu radnu organizaciju, nefleksibilnost u kreiranju radnog rasporeda, rad u skupinama dulje od propisanog, smjene koje traju do večernjih sati i nepodržavajuće vodstvo vrtića te nemogućnost zasnivanja radnog odnosa na neodređeno vrijeme. Teškoće u partnerstvu s roditeljima prepoznate su kao dodatan vanjski faktor koji bi mogao utjecati napuštanje profesije dok se narušeno fizičko i psihičko zdravlje te sumnja u kvalitetu vlastitoga rada zbog prezasićenosti, ogorčenosti i gubitka interesa navode kao unutarnji, odnosno osobni faktori koji bi mogli utjecati na izlazak iz profesije. Primjerice navode:

„Narušeni međuljudski odnosi, preopterećenost zbog stresa na poslu uzrokovana lošom suradnjom s roditeljima ili kolegama, mala plaća, loši radni uvjeti, nepoštivanje profesije“

„Mobing, previše djece u skupini... ako se ponavlja godinama. Svi možemo izdržati tešku godinu, ali ako je to praksa...“

Tablica 7

Razlozi za izlazak iz odgojiteljske profesije

KATEGORIJE	PRIMJER KODA	f
Narušeni međuljudski odnosi	Loši međuljudski odnosi.	41
Loši radni uvjeti	Prenatranost ustanova i skupina.	34
Niska primanja	Mala plaća.	29
Nizak status profesije u društvu	Podcjenjivanje struke od strane javnosti.	16
Neučinkovito vođenje vrtića	Ravnatelji često ne znaju kako upravljati vrtićem.	19
Profesionalna iscrpljenost	Gubitak interesa za rad.	10
Teškoće u partnerstvu s roditeljima	Loša suradnja s roditeljima.	9
Narušeno zdravlje	Narušavanje mog mentalnog ili općeg zdravlja.	6
Zasnivanje stalnog radnog odnosa	Dugo čekanje na dobivanje ugovora na neodređeno radno vrijeme.	5

Diskusija i zaključak

Ovim istraživanjem pružen je uvid u karijerni put odgojitelja od motivacije za odabir odgojiteljske profesije, preko razloga za odabir diplomskog studija, razloga za ostanak u profesiji kao i razloga koji bi mogli utjecati na izlazak iz profesije sve do odgojiteljskog pogleda u budućnost, odnosno njihovih poslovnih aspiracija.

Rezultati pokazuju da su studenti diplomskog studija RPOO višestruko motivirani, odnosno da navode više od jednog razloga za odabir odgojiteljske profesije te su njihovi motivi u skladu s nalazima prethodnih istraživanja (Alvariñas-Villaverde i sur., 2022; Elkhaira i sur., 2020; Hmelak i Lepicnik Vodopivec, 2012; Jugović i sur. 2012; Pavin Ivanec i Defar, 2023). Tri najvažnija razloga za odabir odgojiteljske profesije su intrinzična motivacija, doprinos razvoju djece i društva i percepcija razvijenosti osobnih kvaliteta i kompetencija koje su usklađene s karakteristikama posla odgojitelja. Navedeni razlozi podudaraju se sa rezultatima istraživanja odgojiteljske motivacije za odabir profesije mjerene FIT-Choice skalom (Pavin Ivanec, 2022). Motiv koji navode samo zaposleni odgojitelji, odnosno studenti izvanrednog studija RPOO je dobar balans poslovnoga i privatnoga života. Slično su utvrdile Marks i Houston (2002) koje zaključuju da je jedan od razloga zašto žene biraju učiteljsku profesiju mogućnost dobrog balansa između majčinstva i karijere. Činjenica da ovaj razlog navode samo zaposlene odgojiteljice sugerira da je ovo prednost koja se navodi kada se retrogradno razmišlja o razlozima odabira odgojiteljske profesije, ali i da nije nužan motiv kojeg su studentice bile svjesne u trenutku odabira profesije.

Istraživači su se do sada pretežno fokusirali na istraživanje motivacije za odabir odgojiteljske profesije, dok je ispitivanje razloga za produljenje inicijalnog obrazovanja odgojitelja na magistarskoj razini ostalo neistraženo područje. Rezultati ovoga istraživanja pokazuju da postoje tri dominantna razloga za upis diplomskog studija. Prvi je razlog potreba za dodatnim razvojem odgojiteljskih kompetencija. Osim što studenti generalno iskazuju želju za profesionalnim razvojem, važno im je da razviju kompetencije koje će pridonijeti dječjem razvoju i da se osnaže za doprinos razvoju društva. Jedan od relevantnih razloga za upis diplomskog studija je i osjećaj nedovoljno razvijenih kompetencija za rad po završetku preddiplomskog studija, posebice kod redovitih studenata. Ovaj podatak sugerira potrebu da se ovakva istraživanja provedu u svim institucijama koje provode programe inicijalnog obrazovanja odgojitelja jer bi se na taj način stekao uvid koji bi mogao poslužiti u reviziji i unapređivanju studijskih programa i pristupa poučavanja kako bi se u većoj mjeri doprinijelo profesionalnom osnaživanju budućih odgojitelja i pripremlilo za preuzimanje autonomne uloge voditelja odgojno-obrazovnih procesa u vrtićima. Pragmatični razlozi predstavljaju drugu skupinu razloga za upis diplomskog studija te studenti tako vide da će im diploma magistarskog studija osim više razine formalne kvalifikacije osigurati i veću plaću. Pritom valja napomenuti da uvećanje osnovne plaće odgojitelja na temelju magistarske kvalifikacije nije regulirano na državnoj razini već ovisi o odlukama i propisima koji se donose na razini lokalne samouprave. Treća skupina razloga za upis na diplomski studij odnosi se na mogućnost napredovanja, bilo da se radi o napredovanju u struci, nastavku studija na specijalističkoj ili doktorskoj razini ili preuzimanju rukovoditeljskih pozicija u ustanovama RPOO.

S obzirom na rezultate analize razloga upisa na diplomski studij i činjenicu da je za radno mjesto odgojitelja u ustanovama RPOO dovoljno završiti preddiplomski studij, može se pretpostaviti da diplomski studenti predstavljaju skupinu odgojitelja koji su visoko motivirani za vlastiti profesionalni razvoj. Zabrinjava, stoga, podatak da njih čak 25% ne želi ili nije u potpunosti sigurno želi li nakon diplome ostati raditi u sustavu RPOO.

Analiza razloga za odlazak iz profesije rezultirala je identificiranjem problema specifičnih za kontekst rada u hrvatskim ustanovama RPOO koje bi mogle doprinijeti izlasku iz profesije. Radi se o nemogućnosti zasnivanja radnog odnosa na neodređeno vrijeme zbog prakse višestrukog obnavljanja ugovora o radu na određeno vrijeme u istoj instituciji RPOO ili sklapanja ugovora na određeno u svrhu zamjena za bolovanja ili porodiljne dopuste. Drugi razlog koji bi mogao pridonijeti izlasku odgojitelja iz profesije su narušeni partnerski odnosi s roditeljima.

Ostali razlozi za izlazak iz profesije nisu karakteristični samo za hrvatski odgojno-obrazovni kontekst već su prepoznati i u istraživanjima u drugim kontekstima. Ovo istraživanje potvrđuje nalaze ranijih istraživanja koja su pokazala da izlasku iz profesije pridonose loši međuljudski odnosi unutar obrazovne institucije (Wells, 2015; Kraft i sur., 2016), loši radni uvjeti (Buchanan i sur., 2013; Grant i sur., 2019; Ingersoll, 2001), nezadovoljstvo visinom primanja (Jacobson, 1988; Loeb i sur., 2005), degradacija profesije (Heffernan i sur., 2022; Troman i Woods, 2000) nezadovoljavajuća kvaliteta rukovođenja (Kraft i sur., 2016; Shell i sur., 2023), prezasićenost poslom i frustracija (Grant i sur., 2019; Zellars, 2002) te narušeno zdravlje (Heffernan i sur., 2022; Zellars, 2002).

Razlozi koje studenti DRPOO navode kao značajne za ostanak u profesiji mogu se podijeliti u tri cjeline: institucijsku podršku, suradnju i vrednovanje profesionalnog razvoja. I institucijska podrška i suradnja elementi su koji ovise pretežno o unutarnjim karakteristikama vrtića i ovi rezultati sugeriraju da ustanove RPOO razvijanjem kulture ustanove mogu doprinijeti zadržavanju odgojitelja u profesiji. Vrednovanje profesionalnog razvoja ne ovisi samo o instituciji i uključuje i faktore na razini sustava koji trebaju biti zadovoljeni kako bi se odgojiteljima osigurala adekvatna visina mjesečnih primanja, omogućilo sudjelovanje u projektima i podržalo napredovanje u struci.

Rezultati o poslovnim aspiracijama studenata DRPOO ukazuju na visoki interes odgojitelja za preuzimanje rukovodećih uloga u institucijama RPOO. Gotovo polovica svih sudionika istraživanja (47%) u budućnosti želi otvoriti vlastiti vrtić, a njih 40% željelo bi jednoga dana preuzeti ravnateljsku ulogu. Temeljni motiv za ostvarivanje ovih karijernih koraka je mogućnost unapređenja kvalitete rada u institucionaliziranom RPOO. Više od jedne trećine ispitanica vodi se praktičnim razlozima te prepoznaju da je jednostavnije otvoriti obrt za čuvanje djece što predstavlja glavni motiv za iskorak prema ostvarivanju ovog karijernog plana. Otvaranje obrta u suprotnosti je sa karijernim željama dvije trećine ispitanica koje takvu vrstu brige o djeci dominantno vide kao urušavanje odgojiteljske profesije. Ovime je potvrđeno da se u i Hrvatskoj vodstvo/poduzetništvo među odgojiteljima pojavilo kao alternativni karijerni put koji zahtijeva specifičnu pripremu za nove uloge i odgovornosti (Balci, 2019). S obzirom na visoki postotak studentica diplomskog studija RPOO zainteresiranih za razvoj karijere u smjeru vođenja ustanove RPOO, važno je da ustanove koje provode inicijalno obrazovanje odgojitelja kao i ustanove koje razvijaju programe trajnog profesionalnog razvoja odgojitelja ponude odgovarajuće obrazovne programe za cjeloviti razvoj kompetencija za vođenje ustanova RPOO.

Glavno ograničenje ovog istraživanja jest to što su u njemu sudjelovali isključivo studenti jednog fakulteta koji izvodi diplomski studij RPOO te u jednoj karijernoj točki (na kraju diplomskog studija jedne generacije) što onemogućava generalizacije na više generacija studenata ili na populaciju studenata koji su uključeni u diplomski studij u jednoj akademskoj godini u Republici Hrvatskoj. Stoga, nalaze ovog istraživanja treba smatrati polazištem za buduća transverzalna i longitudinalna istraživanja karijernih odabira i aspiracija.

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**Teaching (Today for) Tomorrow:
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**Career Pathways of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Postgraduate
Students**

Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the professional aspirations of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) students at the end of their postgraduate studies. More specifically, the study sought to explore students' reasons for choosing the preschool teaching profession, their motivations for enrolling in postgraduate ECEC studies, their career aspirations with a particular focus on their future career paths, and, ultimately, the potential reasons for leaving the profession.

Amidst a growing shortage of teachers, research attention has been directed towards teacher motivation for employment and career development aspirations (Watt & Richardson, 2008; Hong et al., 2017). Identifying professional plans is crucial for providing opportunities for differentiated initial teacher education that supports their professional growth (Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016).

A mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, was employed in this study. Data were collected via an online questionnaire administered to a sample of 100 final-year postgraduate students in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb.

The findings indicate that the three most significant reasons for choosing the preschool teaching profession are intrinsic motivation, the desire to contribute to children's development and society, and the perception of possessing personal qualities and competencies aligned with the demands of the profession. The primary motivation for enrolling in postgraduate ECEC studies is the need for further development of professional competencies. Notably, 25% of postgraduate ECEC students are either uncertain about or unwilling to remain in the profession after obtaining their master's degree. The key factors influencing potential attrition from the profession include poor interpersonal relationships and systemic challenges, such as the difficulty in securing permanent employment.

Almost half of the postgraduate ECEC students expressed a desire to establish their own kindergarten in the future, while one-third envisage themselves in a managerial role within an ECEC institution.

Key words

initial teacher education (ITE), career pathways of preschool teachers, motivation, professional aspirations, early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Introduction

Increasing the participation rate of children in institutionalised early childhood education and care (ECEC) programmes is a key national priority for the Republic of Croatia (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2021). National policy documents are aligned with European Union policies, which set the objective that by 2030, 96% of children aged three to six should be enrolled in ECEC institutions (European Union, 2021). Data from 2022 indicate a shortfall of 6,025 preschool teachers in the Croatian labour market (Domović & Drvodelić, 2024), while the latest projections suggest that 7,002 additional preschool teachers will need to be employed to achieve the 96% coverage target by 2030 (European Commission, 2024). The shortage of preschool teachers is a widespread issue affecting many countries (Craig et al., 2023), not only Croatia, and can be regarded as a global phenomenon (UNESCO, 2017). Given the increasing teacher shortage, researchers have focused on investigating the motivations for entering the teaching profession and teachers' career aspirations (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012; Hong et al., 2017; Sinclair, 2008; Watt & Richardson, 2008).

Motivation for choosing the preschool teaching profession is a multifaceted construct, predominantly driven by intrinsic and altruistic motivations (Alvariñas-Villaverde et al., 2022; Celik, 2020; Hmelak & Lepičnik-Vodopivec, 2012; Žveglič Mihelič et al., 2022), personal characteristics (Jugović et al., 2012; Pavin Ivanec & Defar, 2023), and reinforced by a strong professional identity (Qiao et al., 2022) and positive perceptions of career success (Smidt et al., 2018). Collectively,

these factors contribute to high levels of career satisfaction and job commitment among preschool teachers (Celik, 2020; Shen & Luen, 2021). Understanding the motivations behind choosing the teaching profession can support the development of high-quality initial teacher education and continuous professional development systems, thereby fostering the attraction and retention of qualified educators while mitigating attrition from the profession.

The teaching profession is crucial for children's development during their most formative years and has a profound impact on society. Research indicates that the quality of preschool teachers' work is associated with better child outcomes in areas such as academic achievement (Ulferts et al., 2019; Von Suchodoletz et al., 2023), social skills and cognitive development (Camilli et al., 2010; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001), and overall school success (Burchinal et al., 2021). A primary prerequisite for ensuring high-quality pedagogical practice is the quality of initial teacher education (European Commission, 2014; OECD, 2012). Studies demonstrate that higher levels of initial teacher education are positively correlated with higher-quality early childhood education and care, ultimately leading to improved child development outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Manning et al., 2019). Consequently, many experts advocate for university-level education for preschool teachers, including opportunities for postgraduate studies (Urban et al., 2011).

In the Republic of Croatia, initial preschool teacher education was conducted through a two-year professional programme until 2008, after which, following higher education reforms, the programme was elevated to a university-level degree. This reform enabled students to obtain bachelor's and master's degrees in ECEC, ensuring vertical mobility and providing opportunities for further education at the specialist, postgraduate, and doctoral levels (Domović et al., 2022). Although a bachelor's degree is sufficient for employment in ECEC institutions, students may enrol in a master's programme either as full-time or part-time students. The first master's programme in early childhood education in Croatia was introduced in the 2010/2011 academic year at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka (Vujičić, 2012), and today, master's programmes in ECEC are offered at seven Croatian universities. Since the introduction of these programmes, there has been a steady annual increase in the number of employed ECEC master's graduates. In the 2023/2024 academic year, 2,758 ECEC master's graduates were employed, accounting for 17.6% of all preschool teachers (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2024). However, despite the initially high demand for master's programmes, the past three years have seen a decline in student interest, leading to unfilled enrolment quotas (Domović & Drvodelić, 2024). When considering student interest in master's studies within the context of the teacher shortage, it becomes evident that extending initial education at the graduate level delays entry into the labour market and thus does not provide an immediate solution to the teacher shortage. However, the long-term benefits associated with extended initial education, particularly regarding improvements in educational quality, remain an underexplored area in Croatia.

Numerous international studies suggest that higher qualification levels among preschool teachers contribute to the implementation of higher-quality pedagogical practices (Dalli & Urban, 2010; Manning et al., 2019; Melhuish et al., 2015; Urban et al., 2011). While it is generally expected that preschool teachers with more extensive education perform better than those with shorter educational periods or lower qualifications (Lino, 2016), research findings on this issue remain inconclusive. Some studies confirm a quality advantage for preschool teachers with a bachelor's degree over those with lower qualifications (Kelly & Camilli, 2007; Nair et al., 2017; Whitebook,

2003), while others find no definitive evidence of differences in work quality between preschool teachers holding a master's and those with a bachelor's degree in ECEC (Cameron & Morrison, 2011; Falenchuk et al., 2017; Lillvist et al., 2014; Whitebook, 2003).

This raises the question of why preschool teachers who have obtained a bachelor's degree and meet the employment criteria in ECEC institutions choose to pursue a master's degree. While numerous studies have explored students' motivations for choosing a teaching career, research specifically examining why preschool teachers with a bachelor's degree opt for graduate studies remains scarce. Additionally, the career aspirations of preschool teachers are underexplored. Some studies on career pathways also examine reasons for teacher attrition, which could inform strategies for attracting and retaining educators. Factors influencing teacher attrition include high job demands (Schaack et al., 2021), lack of resources (Zhao et al., 2023), organisational culture (Wells, 2015), insufficient professional development opportunities (Phillips et al., 2016), stress (Kim et al., 2020; Yeh & Lo, 2024), burnout (Yeh & Lo, 2024), and personal reasons (Schaack et al., 2021). However, in Croatia, there is no available data that fully explains the reasons for preschool teacher attrition. Identifying career expectations is crucial for providing differentiated initial education opportunities to support future teachers' professional development (Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016). This is particularly relevant given the emerging leadership opportunities for master's degree holders in ECEC institutions. Some research suggests that teachers increasingly seek leadership roles, career advancement, and greater influence beyond the classroom (Donaldson et al., 2008; Johnson et al., 2005), yet no studies in Croatia have examined whether preschool teachers enrolling in master's programmes aspire to leadership positions.

This study aims to collect and analyse data to enhance understanding of the complexities of preschool teachers' career trajectories, encompassing their motivations for choosing the profession, reasons for pursuing a master's degree, factors influencing retention or exit from the profession, and their long-term career aspirations.

Methodology

Aim

The aim of this study was to examine the career trajectories of students enrolled in the master's programme of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Based on this objective, the following research questions were formulated:

1. To identify the reasons for choosing the preschool teaching profession.
2. To determine the motivations for enrolling in the ECEC master's programme.
3. To identify the reasons for retention in the profession and the factors contributing to the attrition from the profession.
4. To examine the career aspirations of ECEC master's students.
5. To determine whether there are differences in career aspirations between full-time and part-time students.

Instruments

For the purpose of this study, an online questionnaire was developed using Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised four sections.

The first section gathered socio-demographic data on students (gender, study mode, employment status, length of service, employer, job position, and professional titles).

The second section contained open-ended questions in which students provided their reasons for choosing the teaching profession and potential reasons for leaving the profession.

The third section required students to rate the importance of predefined reasons for enrolling in the master's programme (9 statements) and for remaining in the profession (12 statements) using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely unimportant) to 5 (completely important).

The reasons listed in these two sets of statements were derived from a qualitative analysis conducted in a pilot study in 2021 (Drvodelić, 2021). The fourth section focused on future career aspirations, where students, after selecting their response in a Yes/No format, provided justifications for their choices.

Sample and Data Collection

The study was conducted in May 2023, at the end of the final year of the master's programme in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb. The sample comprised 100 female students, with equal representation from the full-time (N = 50) and part-time (N = 50) study programmes. Among the part-time students (N = 50), 48% were employed on permanent contracts in ECEC institutions, 38% were employed on fixed-term contracts in ECEC institutions, 6% were unemployed, and 8% were employed in fields outside early childhood education. The average length of professional experience was 3 years and 6 months, with a range from 0 months to 13 years. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, with informed consent obtained from all respondents.

Data Analysis

A mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analyses, was employed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

For the quantitative analysis, IBM SPSS Statistics 25 was used. Descriptive statistical analyses were performed, including the chi-square test (χ^2) and the Mann-Whitney U test (z), with effect size (r) calculations.

Qualitative data obtained from open-ended responses were analysed using an inductive thematic content analysis. The data analysis process followed the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). In the first three phases, researchers independently read through the data,

generated initial codes, and categorised them into themes. In the subsequent three phases, themes were reviewed collaboratively, consolidated into theoretical categories, and quantified where applicable.

Results

Choosing the Early Childhood Teaching Profession

In response to an open-ended question, students independently provided their motivations for choosing the teaching profession. Given the multifaceted nature of their reasoning, the analysis identified 147 codes, which were subsequently classified into eight categories, as presented in Table 1. The most frequently cited motivation was strong intrinsic motivation, rooted in a passion for working with children, which some students had developed from an early age or perceived as their calling (f = 57). This was followed by the belief that working with children enables them to contribute to their holistic development and, in turn, to societal progress (f = 29), as well as to the creation of a better future for all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Other key motivations included the dynamic and creative nature of the profession (f = 15) and the recognition of their personal characteristics and competencies as well-suited to the profession (f = 15). A subset of students approached their decision pragmatically, acknowledging that working conditions in early childhood institutions provide a good work-life balance and that the profession offers high employability and quick job placement opportunities (f = 9). Lastly, some students cited the influence of role models from the education system—teachers they had encountered during their studies, or family members engaged in similar professions—as a key factor in their career choice.

Both full-time and part-time students reported motivations spanning almost all categories. The only exception was the „work-life balance“ category, which was exclusively mentioned by part-time students.

Table 1

Reasons for choosing the teaching profession

MOTIVATION FOR CHOOSING PRESCHOOL TEACHING PROFESSION		
CATEGORY	CODE EXAMPLE	f
Intrinsic motivation	"I have always felt a calling for this profession."	57
Social utility	"The desire to make a positive impact on societal development, knowing that these are the crucial years for learning and formation."	29

Personal characteristics and competencies	"The opportunity to express my creativity through designing and implementing stimulating activities."	15
Job characteristics	"A dynamic job."	15
Continuous professional development	"The need for professional advancement."	9
Work-life balance	"I have enough time to dedicate to my family."	9
Influence of environment	"Most of the women in my family work in education."	6
Job security	"The shortage of preschool teachers in the labor market and the possibility of quick employment."	3

Enrolment in the master's programme in early childhood education and care (ECEC)

The results of the descriptive statistics and significance tests on motivation for enrolling in the ECEC master's programme (Table 2) indicate that the two most important reasons for enrolment are the desire for professional development (MTOT = 4,65, SD = 0,64, C = 5,00) and the salary increase associated with obtaining a master's degree in ECEC (MTOT = 4.62, SD = 0,71, C = 5,00). These are followed by the motivation to develop new competencies that contribute to children's development (MTOT = 4,47, SD = 0,87, C = 5,00) which is equally significant among full-time students as the prospect of a higher salary. Next in importance is the attainment of a higher level of formal education (MTOT = 4,39, SD = 0,80, C = 5,00). No statistically significant differences were identified between full-time and part-time students for these four highest-ranked reasons.

However, significant differences were found concerning four other motivations for enrolling in the ECEC master's programme. Full-time students place significantly greater value on career advancement into higher professional ranks (MTOT = 4,10, SD = 1,03, C = 4,00; $r = .21$) and are more likely to express a desire to transition into leadership roles, such as becoming principals in the ECEC institutions, whereas part-time students also consider this reason important but rate it slightly lower (MTOT = 3,98, SD = 1,04, C = 4,00; $r = .20$). Furthermore, full-time students are more likely than part-time students to recognise the need to strengthen their skills to contribute to the development of their local community and society (MTOT = 3,64, SD = 1,19, C = 4,00; $r = .26$).

The lowest-ranked reasons for enrolment were the opportunity to continue studying at a higher level (MTOT = 3,27, SD = 1,17, C = 3,00) and insufficiently developed competencies for working with children (MTOT = 3,22, SD = 1,32, C = 3,00). A concerning finding is that some students enrol in the master's programme due to a perceived lack of competencies for working with children following their undergraduate studies. This reason is more pronounced among full-time students, who enrol immediately after completing their undergraduate studies and lack professional experience, compared to part-time students ($r = .28$).

Table 2

Reasons for enrolment in ECEC master study

		N	M	SD	C	M rang	z
Desire for professional development	FUL	50	4.72	0.54	5.00	52.92	-1.05
	PART	50	4.58	0.73	5.00	48.08	
Higher salary compared to a bachelor's degree	FUL	50	4.64	0.56	5.00	49.42	-0.47
	PART	50	4.60	0.83	5.00	51.58	
Development of new competencies that contribute to children's development □	FUL	50	4.64	0.60	5.00	54.48	-1.61
	PART	50	4.30	1.05	5.00	46.52	
Higher level of formal qualification	FUL	50	4.42	0.73	5.00	50.78	-0.11
	PART	50	4.36	0.88	5.00	50.22	
Career advancement (mentor, advisor)	FUL	50	4.32	0.89	5.00	56.10	-2.07*
	PART	50	3.88	1.12	4.00	44.90	
Career path change (becoming a principal)	FUL	50	4.20	0.95	5.00	56.09	-2.03*
	PART	50	3.76	1.10	4.00	44.91	
Empowerment for contribution to the development of the society	FUL	50	3.98	1.02	4.00	58.22	-2.76**
	PART	50	3.30	1.27	3.00	42.78	

Opportunity for further studies (specialist, postgraduate degrees)	FUL	50	3.14	1.28	3.00	47.73	-0.99
	PART	50	3.40	1.05	3.00	53.27	
Insufficiently acquired competencies after completing a bachelor's study	FUL	50	3.54	1.34	4.00	57.74	-2.56*
	PART	50	2.90	1.23	3.00	43.26	

*Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. FULL - full-time students, PART - part-time students, N - number of respondents, M - arithmetic mean, SD - standard deviation, C - median, M rank - mean rank, Mann-Whitney U test z.

Students' Career Aspirations

To gain a deeper understanding of ECEC master's students' career aspirations, three closed-ended questions were posed, allowing participants to indicate "Yes" or "No" regarding their future aspirations to become ECEC institutions principal, ECEC institution owners, or childcare centre owners.

Of the 94 participating students, 40% expressed a desire to become ECEC institutions principals in the future (Figure 1). The results of the chi-square test indicate no statistically significant differences between full-time and part-time students in their responses ($\chi^2 = 0.52$; $p > .05$).

Figure 1

Students' aspirations towards leadership roles in ECEC institutions

Slika na kojoj se prikazuje tekst, snimka zaslona, grafika, krugSadržaj generiran umjetno

In the next phase, students elaborated on their reasons for either aspiring to or rejecting the prospect of becoming a principal. Their responses were often complex and included multiple reasons. Therefore, during the analysis, each stated reason was coded and subsequently categorised (Table 3).

Example response: "I would like to become a principal one day because I believe I would be a good leader and would genuinely strive to make the kindergarten a nurturing place for children's

development and a supportive working environment for teachers and other staff members."

Students most frequently cited the opportunity to enhance the quality of ECEC institutions through the introduction of innovations, new educational programmes and approaches, improvements in pedagogical practice, and the provision of high-quality working conditions to meet staff needs and ensure their job satisfaction. Some students perceive the principal position as a professional challenge they would like to undertake, while others view their master's degree as an incentive to apply for such a role. Additionally, some students believe they possess well-developed managerial competencies that would be advantageous in such a role. Pragmatic reasons for aspiring to a principal position include financial benefits and reduced physical demands of the role, particularly in later career stages.

Table 3

Motivations and challenges for leadership roles in ECEC institutions

CATEGORY	CODE EXAMPLE	f
REASONS FOR CHOOSING A PRINCIPALS' POSITION		
Improving the quality of the ECEC institution	To implement changes and improve the quality of kindergarten practice.	16
Professional challenge	I would like to try something new because I enjoy challenges.	11
Leadership and management competencies	I know more about management than the average teacher, and I am interested in leadership.	6
Pragmatic reasons	Higher earnings.	4
REASONS AGAINST CHOOSING A PRINCIPALS' POSITION		
Lack of direct work with children	The principal's position excludes direct interaction with children.	14
High level of responsibility and stress	It is a very responsible job.	13
Insufficiently developed leadership and management competencies	I don't feel competent enough for the coordination required by this function.	13
Lack of ambition	I have no ambition to become a principal.	11
Administrative and political constraints	A principal cannot make independent decisions but is merely an extension of local governance, which prevents them from implementing changes.	5

Students who do not wish to become principals most frequently stated the lack of direct contact with children ($f = 14$) as the primary reason. Other frequently mentioned concerns include the high level of responsibility and stress associated with the role and a perceived lack of managerial competencies. Some students reported a general lack of ambition for principal positions, while a smaller number expressed concerns about administrative burdens and political influences that restrict principals' autonomy in making decisions. Below are examples of responses illustrating why students do not see themselves in principal roles:

"I believe that in Croatia, principals do not have enough autonomy to work as they see fit but must conform to the expectations of founders and the ruling political party."

"I do not think I have the necessary skills for a principal role, nor do I want that level of responsibility. I feel I can contribute more to the community as a preschool teacher."

Figure 2

Students' aspirations towards ownership of ECEC institutions (kindergartens) ownership

Slika na kojoj se prikazuje snimka zaslona, tekst, grafika, krugSadržaj generiran umjetnom inteligencijom

Nearly half (47%) of the students expressed a desire to establish their own ECEC institution (kindergarten) in the future (Figure 2). No statistically significant differences were found between full-time and part-time students' responses ($\chi^2 = 0,518$; $p > .05$).

Students who aspire to establish their own ECEC institution (Table 4) most frequently cited the ability to establish and maintain their own quality standards as their primary motivation. Other reasons included the need to create additional enrolment opportunities to address the current shortage of participation rate of children in the ECEC institutions, the desire for greater professional autonomy, and the recognition of ECEC institution ownership as a promising business venture that ensures career progression, financial security, and a higher social status.

Example response: "I want to create a kindergarten where the child's needs come first, where qualified staff are committed to professional development and continuous learning. I want to establish a place where I would feel comfortable, thereby fostering a positive atmosphere for colleagues, children, and parents alike."

Table 4

Reasons for ownership of ECEC institutions (kindergartens)

CATEGORY	CODE EXAMPLE	f
REASONS FOR OPENING A PRIVATE KINDERGARTEN		
High standards of kindergarten quality	I could improve everything compared to the current conditions in kindergartens.	22
Increasing enrollment capacity	Because of children who are not enrolled.	8
Work autonomy	Greater autonomy in work.	5
Smart business opportunity	Opening a kindergarten can be a profitable business if managed well and quality programs are implemented.	5
REASONS AGAINST OPENING A PRIVATE KINDERGARTEN		
Excessive responsibility and job demands	I think it is a very demanding and exhausting process, and I don't see myself in it.	20
Lack of ambition	I am not interested in managing a large system; I prefer smaller, more personal projects.	8
Financial barriers	Financial impossibility.	7
Administrative and bureaucratic burdens	Too much administrative work.	6
Lack of entrepreneurial competencies	I do not have the necessary competencies to run a kindergarten.	3

As reasons for not wanting to establish their own ECEC institution (Table 4), students state the excessive demands and responsibilities of the job, as well as the numerous administrative and bureaucratic procedures involved. Other reasons include a lack of ambition, financial constraints, and insufficient entrepreneurial competencies.

"I do not have enough financial resources to establish a kindergarten that I believe should meet certain standards."

"Because we live in Croatia. Bureaucracy, high taxes, and other obstacles for small entrepreneurs make it impossible to survive in the labour market."

Figure 3

Student aspirations towards childcare business ownership

A total of 93 students expressed their opinions on whether they would like to open their own childcare business in the future (Figure 3). About two-thirds of students (63%) do not wish to establish their own childcare centre. No significant difference was found between the responses of full-time and part-time students ($\chi^2 = 0,006$; $p > ,05$).

The most frequently cited advantage of opening a childcare centre instead of a kindergarten (Table 5) is that it is simpler to establish ($f = 10$). Additionally, students note that working in a childcare centre allows for creative freedom, autonomy, and financial benefits. For example, they state:

“If I were to start my own business, it would be a childcare centre. This would provide me with enough freedom in choosing my working methods and the number of children, without having to be responsible for a large number of employees.”

Table 5

Reasons for childcare business ownership

CATEGORY	CODE EXAMPLE	f
REASONS FOR OPENING A CHILDCARE BUSINESS		
Simple establishment process	Starting a childcare business is a much simpler process than opening a kindergarten.	10
Creative freedom	More freedom, more creativity.	6
Financial benefit	I would open it as a flat-rate business for an additional source of income.	4
Work autonomy	This would give me enough freedom in choosing the working style and number of children.	4
REASONS AGAINST OPENING A CHILDCARE BUSINESS		
Devaluation of the profession	I believe that such work is not valued enough and does not reflect the years of study and education we invested to earn a master's degree.	20
Lack of ambition	It seems like too big of a step, and I don't have the ambition for it.	5
High level of responsibility	I don't feel confident in taking responsibility at the level of an entire institution.	4
Financial barriers	Lack of money.	2

The primary reason for not wanting to establish a childcare centre is that students perceive this form of childcare as a degradation of the profession and an undesirable form of education in which they do not wish to actively participate. Other reasons include a lack of ambition and financial resources, as well as the demanding and highly responsible nature of the job. Below are some of their responses:

“In a childcare centre, everything is reduced to supervision and babysitting, whereas in a kindergarten, children learn and develop.”

“I do not view my profession as babysitting. I want to work in a kindergarten as an educator, not as a babysitter.”

Retention in the preschool teaching profession

A total of 100 students responded to the question of whether they intend to remain in the teaching profession after obtaining a master's degree in preschool education (Figure 4). Three-quarters of students (75%) are certain they want to stay in the profession. However, given the current shortage of preschool teachers nationwide, it is concerning that 25% of students in the graduate programme are uncertain about continuing in the profession. No statistically significant difference was found between the responses of full-time and part-time students ($\chi^2 = 2,543$; $p > ,05$).

Figure 4

Desire to work in the preschool teaching profession after obtaining a master's degree

Slika na kojoj se prikazuje tekst, snimka zaslona, krug, grafika Sadržaj generiran umjetnom inteligencijom

To examine the motives for remaining in the profession, twelve reasons were provided, with a rating scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (completely important). Table 6 presents the results of the Mann-Whitney U test comparing full-time and part-time students.

The reasons for staying in the profession (Table 6) are similar for both full-time and part-time students, with one exception. Full-time students place greater value on support from professional associates as a key factor in remaining in the profession compared to part-time students (MTOT = 4,76, SD = 0,63, C = 5,00, $r = ,22$). The most important factors for staying in the profession relate to organisational culture. Students consider collaboration with colleagues (MTOT = 4,83, SD = 0,53, C = 5,00) and a positive work environment (MTOT = 4,83, SD = 0,53, C = 5,00) as extremely important. They also highlight the importance of quality leadership within the institution (MTOT =

4,72, SD = 0,60, C = 5,00), good cooperation with parents (MTOT = 4,83, SD = 0,54, C = 5,00), and institutional support for improving pedagogical practices (MTOT = 4,56, SD = 0,71, C = 5,00). Opportunities for professional advancement (MTOT = 4,66, SD = 0,63, C = 5,00) and participation in projects (MTOT = 4,51, SD = 0,77, C = 5,00) are also highly rated factors. Although an adequate salary is an important factor in remaining in the profession, students do not perceive it as the most critical factor (MTOT = 4,49, SD = 0,80, C = 5,00). Students generally consider participation in decision-making processes at the kindergarten level (MTOT = 4,37, SD = 0,75, C = 4,00) and collaboration with institutions outside the kindergarten (MTOT = 4,35, SD = 0,76, C = 4,00) as important. While still relevant, the distance between the workplace and place of residence was rated the lowest (MTOT = 3,98, SD = 0,88, C = 4,00), suggesting that it has the least impact on the decision to stay in the profession.

Table 6

Reasons for remaining in the teaching profession

		N	M	SD	C	M Rang	Z
Support from professional associates	FUL	46	4.89	0.38	5.00	50.93	-2.12*
	PART	47	4.64	0.79	5.00	43.15	
Collaboration with colleagues	FUL	46	4.89	0.38	5.00	48.92	-1.17
	PART	47	4.77	0.67	5.00	45.12	
A positive working environment	FUL	46	4.87	0.34	5.00	47.07	-0.34
	PART	46	4.78	0.66	5.00	45.93	
Effective ECEC institution management	FUL	46	4.78	0.42	5.00	48.11	-0.53
	PART	47	4.66	0.73	5.00	45.91	
Cooperation with parents	FUL	46	4.74	0.57	5.00	47.77	-0.38
	PART	47	4.68	0.73	5.00	46.24	

Institutional support for enhancing the quality of pedagogical practice	FUL	46	4.67	0.63	5.00	51.30	-1.81
	PART	47	4.45	0.77	5.00	42.79	
Opportunities for professional advancement	FUL	46	4.65	0.57	5.00	46.24	-0.34
	PART	47	4.66	0.70	5.00	47.74	
Opportunities to participate in projects	FUL	46	4.61	0.65	5.00	49.72	-1.12
	PART	47	4.40	0.88	5.00	44.34	
Adequate salary	FUL	46	4.50	0.72	5.00	46.50	-0.21
	PART	47	4.49	0.88	5.00	47.49	
Opportunities to engage in decision-making processes at the ECEC institution	FUL	46	4.46	0.62	5.00	49.15	-0.84
	PART	47	4.28	0.85	4.00	44.89	
Collaboration with institutions outside the ECEC institution	FUL	46	4.37	0.64	4.00	45.99	-0.20
	PART	46	4.33	0.87	5.00	47.01	
Workplace proximity to place of residence	FUL	46	3.96	0.87	4.00	46.28	-0.27
	PART	47	4.00	0.91	4.00	47.70	

*Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. FULL - full-time students, PART - part-time students, N - number of respondents, M - arithmetic mean, SD - standard deviation, C - median, M rank - mean rank, Mann-Whitney U test z.

Preschool teacher attrition

Students provided extensive responses regarding possible reasons for leaving the profession, leading to the identification of 163 codes grouped into nine categories (Table 7). The most frequently cited reason for potentially leaving the profession is deteriorating interpersonal relationships within the workplace ($f = 41$), which includes poor relationships and communication difficulties among teachers, lack of support and understanding from professional associates, and workplace bullying. The category of poor working conditions is most commonly associated with excessive numbers of children in educational groups, non-compliance with the National pedagogical standard, inadequate spatial conditions, and the obligation to purchase teaching materials with personal funds. The third most frequently mentioned reason are low salaries, which are insufficient to cover the cost of living. This is followed by the low status of the profession in society, as well as in the workplace, where early preschool teachers are often equated with unqualified substitutes. Possible organisational aspects influencing the decision to leave the profession include poor work organisation, inflexible scheduling, working longer than permitted, evening shifts, unsupportive kindergarten leadership, and the inability to secure permanent employment. Difficulties in partnerships with parents are recognised as an additional external factor that could contribute to leaving the profession. Finally, deteriorating physical and mental health, as well as self-doubt about the quality of their work due to exhaustion, frustration, and loss of interest, are identified as internal, personal factors that could influence the decision to exit the profession. Examples include:

“Deteriorating interpersonal relationships, excessive workload due to stress caused by poor cooperation with parents or colleagues, low salary, poor working conditions, and lack of respect for the profession.”

“Bullying, too many children in the group... if this continues for years. We can all endure a difficult year, but if it becomes the norm...”

Table 7

Reasons for attrition from the teaching profession

CATEGORY	CODE EXAMPLE	f
Disrupted interpersonal relationship	Poor interpersonal relationships.	41
Poor working conditions	Overcrowding of ECEC institutions and groups.	34
Low earnings	Insufficient salary	29
Low professional status in society	Public undervaluation of the profession.	16
Ineffective management	Directors often lack the necessary management skills.	19

Professional exhaustion	Loss of interest in work.	10
Difficulties in partnership with parents	Poor collaboration with parents.	9
Deteriorated health	Adverse effects on my mental or overall health.	6
Permanent employment	Long waiting period for obtaining a permanent contract.	5

Discussion and Conclusion

This study provides insight into the career path of preschool teachers, from their motivation for choosing the profession, reasons for enrolling in a graduate study program, and factors influencing their retention or potential departure from the profession to their future career aspirations.

The results show that ECEC graduate students are driven by multiple motivations, often citing more than one reason for choosing this profession. Their motivations align with previous research findings (Alvariñas-Villaverde et al., 2022; Elkhaira et al., 2020; Hmelak & Lepicnik Vodopivec, 2012; Jugović et al., 2012; Pavin Ivanec & Defar, 2023). The three most significant reasons for choosing the profession are intrinsic motivation, the desire to contribute to children's and societal development, and the perception that their personal qualities and competencies align with the demands of the profession. These reasons correspond with previous studies on preschool teachers' motivation using the FIT-Choice scale (Pavin Ivanec, 2022). A motivation mentioned exclusively by employed preschool teachers—i.e., students in the part-time study program—is the good balance between work and personal life. This aligns with the findings of Marks and Houston (2002), who concluded that one reason women choose teaching is the possibility of balancing motherhood and career. The fact that only employed educators mention this reason suggests that it is a retrospective realization rather than an initial motivator when choosing the profession.

Previous research has primarily focused on motivation for entering the teaching profession, while reasons for extending initial education to the master's level remain an underexplored area. The findings of this study indicate three main reasons for enrolling in a graduate study program. The first is the need for further development of professional competencies. In addition to a general desire for professional growth, students emphasize the importance of acquiring competencies that will enhance children's development and their own ability to contribute to society. A related reason is the feeling of insufficient preparedness for professional practice upon completing an undergraduate study, particularly among full-time students. This finding underscores the need for similar research across all institutions providing initial teacher training, as it could inform curriculum revisions and teaching approaches to better equip future teachers for their roles in ECEC institutions. The second group of reasons for pursuing a graduate degree is pragmatic: students perceive that earning a master's degree not only enhances their formal qualifications but also leads to higher salaries. However, it is important to note that salary increases for educators with a master's degree are not regulated at the national level in Croatia but depend on decisions made at the local government level. The third group of reasons relates to career advancement opportunities, whether through professional progression, further specialization or doctoral studies,

or assuming leadership roles in ECEC institutions. Given that an undergraduate degree is sufficient for employment as a preschool teacher, graduate students likely represent a highly motivated group committed to their professional development. Therefore, it is concerning that 25% of participants are unsure or do not wish to remain in the ECEC system after graduation.

The analysis of reasons for leaving the profession identified several challenges specific to the Croatian ECEC context that could contribute to teachers' attrition. One major issue is the difficulty of securing permanent employment due to repeated short-term contracts, which are frequently renewed within the same institution or issued as temporary replacements for educators on leave. Another significant factor is strained relationships with parents.

Other reasons for leaving the profession are not unique to Croatia but have been identified in international research also. This study confirms previous findings indicating that attrition is influenced by poor interpersonal relationships within institutions (Wells, 2015; Kraft et al., 2016), unsatisfactory working conditions (Buchanan et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2019; Ingersoll, 2001), dissatisfaction with salaries (Jacobson, 1988; Loeb et al., 2005), the devaluation of the profession (Heffernan et al., 2022; Troman & Woods, 2000), inadequate leadership quality (Kraft et al., 2016; Shell et al., 2023), work overload and frustration (Grant et al., 2019; Zellars, 2002), and deteriorating health (Heffernan et al., 2022; Zellars, 2002).

The factors that graduate students identify as key to remaining in the profession fall into three categories: institutional support, collaboration, and professional recognition. Institutional support and collaboration largely depend on internal organizational factors, suggesting that ECE institutions can enhance retention by fostering a supportive workplace culture. Meanwhile, professional recognition involves broader systemic factors, such as ensuring fair salaries, enabling participation in professional projects, and supporting career advancement.

The findings on graduate students' career aspirations reveal a strong interest in leadership roles within ECEC institutions. Nearly half (47%) of the participants aspire to open their own ECEC institution, while 40% aim to become preschool headteacher in the future. The primary motivation for these career paths is the opportunity to improve the quality of institutionalized early childhood education. Additionally, more than a third of respondents cite practical reasons, recognizing that it is easier to establish a private childcare business, which is their main incentive for pursuing this career direction. However, this path conflicts with the career goals of two-thirds of respondents, who view childcare centers as undermining the ECE profession. These findings confirm that leadership and entrepreneurship are emerging as alternative career paths for educators, requiring specific preparation for new responsibilities (Balci, 2019). Given the high percentage of graduate students interested in leadership roles, it is crucial for institutions providing initial educator training and continuing professional development programs to offer courses that comprehensively prepare educators for management positions in ECE institutions.

The main limitation of this study is that it includes only students from one faculty offering a graduate ECEC program, and data collection was conducted at a single career stage (at the end of one cohort's graduate studies). This limits the generalizability of findings across multiple cohorts or to the entire population of graduate students in Croatia. Therefore, these findings should be viewed as a foundation for future cross-sectional and longitudinal studies on career choices and aspirations

in early childhood education.

Revizija #3

Stvoreno 2 svibnja 2025 10:04:09 od Martina Gajšek

Ažurirano 3 svibnja 2025 10:16:11 od Martina Gajšek