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## What are the key roles of education?

### SUMMARY

The position of education in society depends to a certain degree on the public opinion about what education should provide to an individual and the social community.<sup>1</sup> In fact, in addition to the humanistic aim of education implying a versatile (complete, harmonious) or self-actualising development of an individual,<sup>2</sup> the scientists often emphasise the social, political, and economic purpose of education. Thus, education, for example, has a very important role in ensuring economic and social progress and improving the distribution of income.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the educational system is also viewed as a social agent that transfers the norms and values important for the preservation of a stable political system.<sup>4</sup> Although there is abundant theoretical literature exploring these approaches and analysing them in detail, there is a lack of empirical research on how individuals perceive the importance of certain educational roles and what factors determine their points of view. It is particularly important to examine the opinion of teachers on educational roles because they have an impact on the shaping of educational policies and pedagogical practices. Therefore, quantitative research was conducted on a sample of preschool teachers in the City of Zagreb (N = 481). The aim of this research is to examine which educational goals are prioritised by preschool teachers in terms of the main purpose of education and to provide empirical insights into the correlation of certain characteristics of the respondents (socio-demographic characteristics and religious affiliation) and their perception of the purpose of education. The findings show that the

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1 Spajić Vrkaš, Vedrana and Potočnik, Dunja (2017), Mladi i obrazovanje pred izazovima globalne konkurentnosti, in: Ilišin, Vlasta and Spajić Vrkaš, Vedrana, eds. *Generacija osujećenih. Mladi u Hrvatskoj na početku 21. stoljeća* Zagreb, Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, 2017, 75–141.

2 Pastuović, Nikola (2016), Ciljevi i svrha obrazovanja odraslih u suvremenom društvu, *Andragoški glasnik*, 20(1-2), 9.

3 Ozturk, Ilhan (2001), The Role of Education in Economic Development: A theoretical perspective, *Journal of Rural Development and Administration*, 28(1), 39–47.

4 Zeigler, Harmon L. and Peak, Wayne G. (1970), Political functions of the educational system, *Sociology of Education*, 43(2), 115.

majority of respondents agree that education should primarily serve the development of a free and independent individual. Apart from the mentioned purpose of education, the respondents believe that the achievement of other goals through education (e.g., ensuring a healthy and stable family) is also important, while the meeting of economic and political interests (e.g. interests pertaining to capital and the European Union) is a less important educational goal. The results of the ANOVA test show that the respondents from smaller towns believe to a greater extent that education should serve the development of human resources of the local community and labour market interests, whereas the non-religious and religiously unaffiliated respondents emphasise the role of education in the development of a free and independent individual and the emancipation of individuals from discriminated social groups slightly more than the religious respondents. Older respondents believe, to a greater extent than the younger ones, that education should primarily serve the interests of capital.

**Keywords:** key roles of education, preschool teachers, socio-demographic characteristics, religious (non)affiliation.

## Introduction

Many research papers in the field of social sciences and humanities discuss the key roles of education,<sup>5</sup> i.e. they tackle the issue of whom education should primarily serve. Various definitions focus on the role of education in the development of the individual. According to said, in many definitions, a versatile development of an individual and his/her personality aimed at developing their full potential is emphasised as the main goal of education.<sup>6</sup> Hentig stated that the role of education is to employ all internal strengths of an individual, while they mutually intertwine and limit each other in the process of acquisition of world knowledge, to ensure that they uniformly and harmoniously develop and lead the individual into the state of self-determined individuality or personality which enriches humankind with its ideal nature and uniqueness.<sup>7</sup> According to Pastuović, education refers to the formation of personality that encompasses the cognitive, affective, and motivational aspects of personality.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the definition of education in the Dictionary of Philosophy (1965) focusses on the individual and perceives education as a transformation of human individualism towards the development of one's psycho-physical strengths and the acquisition of experiential knowledge in the continuous contact with the natural, social, and cultural reality.

5 Term *education* used in the research presented in this article refers to a *formal education*. Also, we followed Pastuović's definition of education (2012) which implies nurture as component of education.

6 Jurčević, Ružica (2019), *Suvremeno sveučilište između humanističkih ideala i tržišnih interesa* (unpublished doctoral thesis), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, 14.

7 Hentig, Von Harmut, (2008), *Što je obrazovanje*, Zagreb: Educa, 30.

8 Pastuović, Nikola (2012), *Obrazovanje i razvoj: kako obrazovanje razvija ljude i mijenja društvo, a kako društvo djeluje na obrazovanje*, Zagreb: Institute for Social Research and the Faculty of Teacher Education of the University of Zagreb, 25.

The relevant literature contains various examples of social goals attainable through education, e.g. its contribution to political, cultural, economic, and environmental development. The theoreticians of the functionalist perspective in sociology (e.g. E. Durkheim, T. Parsons, K. Daves and W. Moore) believe that education's primary purpose is its social role; in their analyses, they focussed on the positive contributions of education to the sustenance of the social system.<sup>9</sup> Many social analysts viewed the educational system as a social agent whose primary role is to transfer the norms and values important for the preservation of a stable political system.<sup>10</sup> However, the educational system also has a less traditional role because it can be observed as an important factor in social changes.<sup>11</sup> The cultural development of a society depends on the extent to which its values, attitudes, and habits, which are transferred onto younger generations through the educational system, are perceived as either progressive or conservative. Economic and political progress may be hindered or stimulated depending on the values (conservative or modern) which guide the political, economic, and social activities of individuals.<sup>12</sup> Certain values facilitate the satisfaction of needs of the majority of people (e.g. equality), while others are not designated for such purpose (e.g. racism, xenophobia), which shows that the cultural development (dependent also upon the educational system) affects the quality of life.<sup>13</sup> In the analyses of economic goals of education, it is often emphasised that the level of education is one of the standard measures of human capital including knowledge, skills, competences, and other characteristics of an individual relevant to his/her economic activities.<sup>14</sup> These characteristics affect the economic behaviour of the individual and stimulate his/her increased productivity and earnings, which consequently benefits the productivity and wealth of society as a whole.<sup>15</sup> However, the expansion of education does not always lead to economic development.<sup>16</sup> For instance, the ratio of education-related economic benefits and educational costs may become negative due to an irrational use of human resources, i.e. if educated

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9 Haralambos, Michael. and Holborn, Martin. (2002), *Sociologija: Teme i perspektive*, Zagreb: Golden marketing-tehnička knjiga, 781.

10 Zeigler, P. and Peak, W. (1970), 115.

11 Coleman, James S. (1965), *Education and Political Development*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 541-565.

12 Fagerlind Ingemar and Saha, Lawrence J. (1989), *Education and national development*, Oxford: Bergamon Press, 16.

13 Pastuović, N. (2012), 15.

14 OECD (2001). *The wellbeing of nations. The role of human and social capital*, Paris: OECD, <http://www.oecd.org/site/worldforum/33703702.pdf> (accessed 16 June 2019)

15 Schuller, Tom, Baron, Stephen, & Field, John (2000). Social capital: A review and critique, in: Baron, Stephen, Field, John and Schuller, Tom eds., *Social capital: Critical perspectives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2000, 1-38.

16 Pastuović, N. (2012), 170.

people are not adequately utilised by certain subsystems within their environment.<sup>17</sup> In addition to said tasks, education has a prominent role in raising environmental awareness in individuals<sup>18</sup>, which is a basis for the protection and improvement of the natural environment and a prerequisite for other types of development.

The National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education, General Compulsory and Secondary School Education<sup>19</sup> lists educational goals related to the personal development of an individual, including those contributing to social development:

- To ensure a systematic way of teaching the students, to encourage and improve their intellectual, physical, aesthetic, social, moral, and spiritual development in accordance with their competences and tendencies.
- To develop the students' awareness about the preservation of the material and spiritual historical and cultural heritage of the Republic of Croatia and the national identity.
- To promote and raise awareness about the Croatian language as an important factor of Croatian identity, to systematically nurture the Croatian standard language in all areas, cycles and levels of the educational system.
- To educate the students in line with the general cultural and civilisation values, human rights and children's rights, to prepare them for a life in a multicultural environment and for respecting differences and practising tolerance, for active and responsible participation in the democratic development of the society.
- To ensure that the students acquire fundamental (general education) and professional competences, to train them for life and work in a changeable socio-cultural context according to the requirements of the market economy, modern information and communication technologies, scientific findings, and achievements.
- To encourage and develop independence, self-esteem, responsibility, and creativity in students.
- To train the students for life-long learning.

The key documents regulating educational policies and practices and the scientific and professional literature emphasise the tendency to harmonise educational goals, at least to some extent, and the tendency to ensure that education simultaneously serves the development of an individual, specific social subsystems and the society as a whole. However, it has been noted that certain educational tasks are mutually conflicted, which has been subject to debate in scientific and public discourse. In

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>18</sup> Šimleša, Dražen (2010). *Ekološki otisak - kako je razvoj zgazio održivost*. Zagreb: TIM press and the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, 111.

<sup>19</sup> National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education, General Compulsory and Secondary School Education (2011). Zagreb, RC: Ministry of Science, Education and Sport, 2011, 23.

fact, a substantial problem of contemporary education is the incongruence between two major roles of education: the supply of the labour market with the necessary workforce and the development of individual potentials.<sup>20</sup> Despite the fact that contemporary research papers have mostly advocated the humanistic ideal of education focussed on the individual development, in reality, education diverges from it, as evident from the increase in the demands for specific professions and the competitive positioning of faculties based on their utility on the labour market.<sup>21</sup> In addition, all major strategic documents of the European Union<sup>22</sup> emphasise the role of education in the enhancement of competitiveness and economic progress of the EU, which implies that the education has become increasingly subordinated to economic principles. According to the European Commission (2011)<sup>23</sup>:

The Europe 2020 strategy, its Flagship Initiatives and the new Integrated Guidelines put knowledge at the heart of the Union's efforts for achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

In the Commission of the European Communities document *Towards a Europe of Knowledge* from 1997<sup>24</sup>, the following is stated:

Real wealth creation will henceforth be linked to the production and dissemination of knowledge and will depend first and foremost on our efforts in the field of research, education and training and on our capacity to promote innovation.

Even though said strategic documents indicate, *inter alia*, that education is the main mechanism for personal development, the studies conducted in Europe and around the world have found that educational contents and teaching practice have become less harmonised with that goal.<sup>25</sup> Since the 1990s, the notion of competence has been particularly significant in the field of education for defining quantitatively measurable educational goals (through PISA research). Their task was to shape the individual into becoming fully compatible and functional within the market economy, which prioritises efficiency and competitiveness as opposed to the holistic development of an individual.<sup>26</sup> Despite the fact that the fundamental documents

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20 Jurčević, R. (2019), 13.

21 Ibid., 15.

22 E. g. European Commission (2011), *Supporting Growth and Jobs – An Agenda for the Modernisation of Europe's Higher Education Systems*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the EU, 10-12.

23 Ibid., 2.

24 Commission of the European Communities (1997), *Towards a Europe of knowledge*, 1. <http://aei.pitt.edu/5546/1/5546.pdf> (accessed 29 January 2019)

25 Noula, Ionna and Govaris, Chistos (2017), Neoliberalism and pedagogical practices of alienation: a case study research on the integrated curriculum in Greek primary education, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 66(2), 1-22.

26 Ibid., 4.

on educational policies still emphasise the role of education in the development of individual potentials, this mostly refers to the development of entrepreneurial competencies, i.e. the person who acquires profitable competences becomes the educational ideal. The Croatian National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education, General Compulsory and Secondary School Education provides a formal framework for kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools to incorporate entrepreneurship as an inter-subject topic in their existing curricula.<sup>27</sup> In Croatia, the introduction of neoliberal doctrines into higher education domain is predominantly reflected in establishing an increased number of private colleges and eliminating the “economically non-profitable” subjects.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the concept of education is becoming reduced to the concept of mere training which is necessary for achieving success according to the neoliberal capitalist principles. According to Lyotard “It is not hard to visualize learning circulating along the same lines as money, instead of for its educational value or political importance”.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the primary goal of education is no longer to prepare individuals for an active life in a world where freedom, tolerance, healthy discussion, and social equity are valued, instead it is implied that knowledge is valuable only if it generates a financial benefit. P. Liessman, one of the most renowned critics of contemporary education, described the present-day universities as institutions whose activities have become more based on entrepreneurial principles, where education and knowledge are no longer perceived as goals but as a means to an end that does not need new knowledge as long as it meets market requirements.<sup>30</sup> Freire stated that the greatest peril is reflected in the excessive specialisation which shapes the way we perceive the world around us, i.e. specialisation reduces our critical thinking abilities, thus making us more passive and impressionable.<sup>31</sup> The idea of education as public property and the autonomy of educational institutions in the period of transformation of the public sector along the guidelines of neoliberal policies have been severely jeopardised, which is further intensified by the lack of awareness about these issues amongst people.<sup>32</sup>

Despite many theoretical papers which thoroughly analyse the problems of the conflicting roles of education, which serve as grounds for the criticism directed

27 National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education, General Compulsory and Secondary School Education (2011), 45.

28 Beroš, Ivan (2018), Neoliberalizam i obrazovanje: teorijska razmatranja i analiza reakcija obrazovne politike na dominantne društveno-političke trendove u Hrvatskoj promatrane kroz reformski diskurs, *Foo2rama* 1(1), 1.

29 Lyotard, Jean-François (1984), *Postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 6.

30 Liessmann, Paul C. (2000), *Teorija neobrazovanosti: Zablude društva znanja*, Zagreb: Jesenski i Turk, 135.

31 Freire, Paulo (2005), *Education for critical consciousness*. London: Continuum, 31.

32 Giroux, Henry (2012). Neoliberalism, corporate culture, and the promise of higher education: The university as a democratic public state, *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(4), 1-31.

towards the increasing divergence of contemporary educational goals from the humanistic ideals, there is an evident lack of empirical research which would provide a proper insight into the perception of a larger number of respondents about the key roles of education. One of the few studies discussing the subject of key roles of education was conducted in Croatia in 2017.<sup>33</sup> In said research, the younger respondents in the Republic of Croatia prioritised the role of education in *Ensuring a healthy and stable family*, *Development of a free and independent individual* and *Fulfilling the interests of the society as a whole* (more than 70% of respondents agreed that education should primarily serve the fulfilment of above-mentioned goals). However, the authors noted a concerning trend that as many as 40% of young respondents do not object to subjecting education, as an activity of public interest, in service of capital, which indicates the lack of awareness amongst the youth regarding education as the inalienable human right.<sup>34</sup> The research on the perception of key roles of education was conducted by D. Bouillet on a sample of 959 respondents in Croatia in 2005. Findings showed that the respondents underestimated the role of educational institutions in the process of social changes and in promoting an increased level of democratisation of the social environment.<sup>35</sup> The research conducted in the USA in 2019 found that parents and teachers prioritised the role of education in the development of personal potentials (especially in terms of academic formation and civic education, which is supported by 81% of parents and 82% of teachers). In contrast, a considerably lower percentage of respondents believed that the main goal of formal education in public schools should be to prepare the individual for the labour market (17% of teachers in public schools and 18% of parents).<sup>36</sup>

Under the influence of neoliberal ideas, there is an increasing tendency to focus on the shaping of childhood, early and preschool education according to the principles of the contemporary ideology of mere pragmatism from the adult perspective instead of the children's perspective.<sup>37</sup> In the developed Western countries (such as the USA), there is a growing concern regarding the neoliberal focus on the preschool children (and preparation for school and subsequent employment opportunities),

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33 Spajić Vrkaš, V. and Potočnik, D. (2017), 102.

34 Ibid., 102.

35 Bouillet, Dejana (2005), Poimanje uloge obrazovanja i obrazovnih institucija u osobnom i društvenom napretku, *Zbornik Učiteljske akademije u Zagrebu*, 7 (2), 195–213.

36 PDK Poll (2019), *Frustration in the schools. Teachers speak out on pay, funding, and feeling valued* (supplement to Kappan magazine), 51.

37 Tufekčić, Adnan (2012), Savremena znanost o odgoju i koncipiranje ranog odgoja, in Pehlić, Izet, Vejo, Edina and Hasanagić, Adela eds., *Suvremeni tokovi u ranom odgoju*. Islamic Faculty of Pedagogy, University of Zenica, Zenica 2012, 75–90.

whereby the children's interest and needs are considered to a lesser extent.<sup>38</sup> The focus is on standardisation as the school syllabi are largely becoming an integral part of preschool curricula. Thus, the preschool education has become perceived more and more as an investment in the labour market of the future<sup>39</sup>, which is something that the EU member states are also currently facing. Even in the context of Finnish educational system, which is often emphasised as an exemplary and efficient educational system, the former social-democratic ideals that shaped the early and preschool education practice are steadily being replaced by hegemonic neoliberalism.<sup>40</sup> Finnish schools have begun to profile and market themselves,<sup>41</sup> and the neoliberal approach of Finland's Ministry of Education manifests in the boosting of entrepreneurship education.<sup>42</sup> The findings of a study conducted in Slovakia indicated the consequences of a discursive transformation of preschool children's perception created by the EU policy which enabled the penetration of modern entrepreneurial culture and curricula into the preschool education system.<sup>43</sup> Said study emphasised that, within the child-related discourse, these trends encourage a perception of childhood and developmental theories which enables the application of entrepreneurial logic in the preschool education sector by using theoretical tools. As a result, children will be transformed into knowledge workers, i.e. "gold collar workers" as referred to in the current employment discourse (they are a subtype of white-collar workers trained for multitasking and a multidisciplinary approach that undergo continuous professional training, and are characterised by their innovative approach and their ability to capitalise on their knowledge and competences<sup>44</sup>). As an example of the creation of the super-entrepreneurial child in preschool programmes Kaščák and Pupala described Austrian programme "Minopolis – Die Stadt der Kinder", aimed at children aged 4<sup>45</sup>:

38 Brown, Christopher P. (2015), Conforming to reform: Teaching pre-kindergarten in a neoliberal early education system, *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 13(3), 236–251. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X14538602> (accessed 2 January 2019)

39 Sims, Margaret (2017), Neoliberalism and early childhood education, *Cogent Education*, 4 (1365411), 1–10.

40 Komulainen, Katri Johanna (2006), The enterprising self and difference in neoliberal educational policy. A case study of Finnish textbooks of entrepreneurial education. *Nordisk Pedagogik*, 26 (1), 212–228

41 Rätty, Hannu and Snellman, Leila (1998). Social Representations of Educability, *Social Psychology of Education*, 1(4), 359–373.

42 Opetushallitus (National Board of Education) (1993). Yrittäjäksi koulussa – kasvatus yrittäjyyteen, (The Enterprising School – Entrepreneurial Education). Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä.

43 Kaščák, Ondrej and Pupala, Branislav (2013), Buttoning up the gold collar – the child in neoliberal visions of early education and care, *Human affairs*, 23(1), 319–337.

44 Wonacott, Michael E. (2002), *ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Career and Vocational Education Columbus OH. Gold-Collar Workers*, ERIC Digest, 2. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED467237.pdf> (accessed 2 January 2019)

45 Kaščák, O. and Pupala, B. (2013), 326.



Austrian programme, “Minopolis – Die Stadt der Kinder”, aimed at children aged 4 and above introduces children to the business, consumer and financial sectors (money and making deposits in a bank) as a form of experiential learning. These are linked to specific brand names. Children are viewed as being little geniuses, competent entrepreneurs who can exceed their own current level of development. The programme documentation states, “the first path [the child takes] leads either to the bank in order to open an account or directly to the Job Centre [Arbeitsmarktservice – AMS] and the search for a job”. In Minopolis the children use Eurofino money, investing it, depositing it in a particular bank, for looking for a job, for shopping at a particular supermarket.

Simultaneously, preschool institutions are becoming subjected to the neoliberal trend of economising the social domain. According to the Croatian National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education, General Compulsory and Secondary School Education (2011)<sup>46</sup> the focus of preschool education should be placed on “stimulating comprehensive and healthy growth and development of a child and the development of all areas of child’s personality: physical, emotional, social, intellectual, moral, and spiritual in accordance with the child’s developmental capacities”. In addition, it has been emphasised in the Croatian National Curriculum for Preschool Education<sup>47</sup> that educational process planning is aimed at considering the overall benefit for the child and how it can be achieved instead of considering the partial goals, learning areas and subjects, regardless of individual characteristics of each child. However, the practice in kindergartens may become much more similar to the preschool practice in said countries with a special emphasis on particular developmental areas which is supported by the increasing integration of economic terms into the preschool education curricula. Thus, for example, the goal of the project conducted in 2008/2009 in the kindergartens of Croatia called “Children’s Entrepreneurship Week” was 1. raising awareness of society about the need for education for entrepreneurship from an early age of a child, and 2. creating an entrepreneurial environment that will enable children to acquire basic entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes through play and various activities appropriate to children’s age.<sup>48</sup>

In view of the above, it is of the utmost importance to examine the attitudes of preschool teachers about their perception of the key roles of education because they impact the shaping of educational policies and pedagogical practices. Hence the starting point for resisting neoliberal policies and laying the foundations for a

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46 National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education, General Compulsory and Secondary School Education (2011), 34.

47 National Curriculum for Preschool Education (2014), Zagreb, RC: Ministry of Science, Education and Sport, 24.

48 An example of developing entrepreneurial competences in preschool children is provided in the study of Peklić, Jasna and Vujatović, Dinka (2012), *Odgovori i obrazovanje u dječjim vrtićima, Učenje za poduzetništvo*, 2(2), 223.

more equitable education is to define the key roles of education within a democratic society.

Therefore, quantitative research has been conducted to identify the key roles of education based on the opinion of preschool teachers and to determine whether certain socio-demographic factors affect their attitudes.

### ***Research aims and hypotheses***

The aim is to establish (1) how the respondents perceive the importance of certain roles of education, i.e. which roles of education they prioritise (achievement of economic, political, individual, or social goals) and (2) whether there are differences in the way the respondents perceive the importance of certain roles of education with respect to their socio-demographic characteristics (age, place of upbringing) and religious (non)affiliation. The hypothesis is that the majority of preschool teachers believe that education should primarily serve the development of a free and independent individual (non-conformist, capable of critical thinking and social activism) and that there are differences in the perception of the role of education among the respondents with different socio-demographic characteristics (age and place of upbringing) and religious (non)affiliation. In fact, certain socio-demographic characteristics and religious (non)affiliation are correlated with certain value attitudes of the respondents.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, it is presumed that they will also be correlated with some of their attitudes on the roles of education.

## **Methodology**

### ***Data collection procedure***

Quantitative research was conducted in 2018 to provide answers to the research questions. The research was approved by the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb. Prospective respondents were asked to willingly participate in the research project by completing an anonymous survey, and they were informed that they might terminate their participation at any time. Upon the agreement with the respondents and their supervisors, the respondents completed a 20-minute survey.

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49 Nilsson, Artur., Montgomery, Henry., Dimdins, Girts, Sandgren, Maria, Erlandsson, Arvid and Taleny, Adrian (2020), Beyond 'liberals' and 'conservatives': Complexity in ideology, moral intuitions, and worldview among Swedish voters, *European Journal of Personality*, 34 (1), 448–469.

## **Sample**

The research included 481 preschool teachers in the City of Zagreb, which constitutes 12% of the total population of preschool teachers in the City of Zagreb according to the official data of the City Government for 2018. The minimum sample size was statistically determined using the Yamane model<sup>50</sup> for sample size assessment (confidence level of 95%, the margin of error 5%). The research was conducted in kindergartens in all 16 neighbourhoods of the City of Zagreb. The survey included a total of 16 kindergartens. This sample approximately replicates the population of preschool teachers in Zagreb according to their sex and years of service. The research included female respondents aged between 24 and 65, with an average age of 43.

## **Operationalisation of variables and research instruments**

In order to examine how preschool teachers perceive the roles and tasks of education, a questionnaire<sup>51</sup> containing ten statements was implemented, and the respondents were asked to express the extent to which they agree with said statements. A five-point Likert scale was used (*Strongly disagree; Mostly disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Mostly agree; Strongly agree*). This is an example of one of the said statements: *Education should primarily serve the interests of capital*. The respondents were asked to enter their year of birth on the blank line in the questionnaire. For the purpose of statistical analysis (ANOVA test), years of birth were divided into three categories: *born in 1965 and before, born between 1966 and 1980; born in 1981 and later*. In addition, the respondents were asked to declare as: *Catholic; religious but of different denomination; non-declared; agnostic or atheist*. For the purpose of further statistical analyses, religious affiliation was converted into a binary variable (1. *religious* and 2. *non-religious or non-declared*). The respondents were also asked to specify their place of upbringing before the age of 18. Possible replies included: *Village; Small town – up to 10 000 inhabitants; Small city – between 10 000 and 50 000 inhabitants; City – between 50 000 and 100 000 inhabitants; Large city – over 100 000 inhabitants*.

## **Data analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used for each segment of the questionnaire in order to identify the roles of education prioritised by the majority of respondents. Welch ANOVA and Welch t-test were used to test the second hypothesis (the differences in the perception of the roles of education among the respondents with different socio-demographic characteristics). Said tests are considered more appropriate than the

50 Yamane Taro (1967), *Statistics: An Introductory Analysis*, New York: Harper and Row, 886.

51 Ilišin, V. and Spajić-Vrkaš, V. (2017), 438.

conventional ANOVA or t-test in the event of differences in the size of the compared (sub)samples, and also because they are resilient to the violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variance.<sup>52</sup> The computer software SPSS 21 was used for statistical data analysis.

## Findings

Table 1 presents the descriptive indicators of variables which were used to analyse how the respondents perceived the roles of education, i.e. which roles of education they prioritised.

**Table 1:** Descriptive indicators of variables in the questionnaire

<b>Education should primarily serve:</b>	<i>Possible range</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Labour market interests	1 – 5	3.53	1.11
Interests of the society as a whole	1 – 5	4.08	.90
Ensuring a healthy and stable family	1 – 5	4.33	.84
Development of a free and independent individual	1 – 5	4.59	.64
Development of human resources of the local community	1 – 5	3.94	.95
Interests of the state	1 – 5	3.19	1.14
Interests of the capital	1 – 5	2.90	1.15
Emancipation of individuals from discriminated social groups	1 – 5	3.42	1.09
Interest of the integrated Europe	1 – 5	3.19	1.07
Ensuring sustainable development	1 – 5	3.99	.92

Table 1 presents the highest arithmetic mean ( $M=4.59$ ;  $SD=.64$ ) measured in the statement *Education should primarily serve the development of a free and independent individual*, which means that the respondents, on average, *strongly agree* with said statement. The next highest arithmetic mean ( $M=4.33$ ;  $SD=.84$ ) was measured in the statement *Education should primarily serve to ensure a healthy and stable family* (the

<sup>52</sup> Pallant, Julie (2011), *SPSS Priručnik za preživljavanje*, Beograd: Mikro knjiga, 253.

respondents, on average, *mostly agree* with the said statement). The respondents, on average, least agree with the statement *Education should primarily serve the interests of the capital* (M=2.90, SD=1.15).

Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 present the findings of Welch ANOVA and Welch t-tests which analysed the differences between different groups of respondents (considering their age, place of upbringing, and religious (non)affiliation) with respect to their perception of the roles of education, i.e. agreement with the specific statements in the questionnaire. Significant differences between specific groups (i.e. results of Games-Howel post hoc tests) are described below the respective ANOVA tables. Due to a large number of conducted Welch ANOVA tests and the pertaining Games-Howel post hoc tests, only the findings indicating significant differences between the (sub) samples are presented.

Table 2: Differences between the (sub)samples in the variable Education should serve the development of a free and independent individual

Variable	Sub-samples	Welch t-test					
		M	SD	df <sup>y</sup>	df <sup>w</sup>	F	p
<b>Religious affiliation</b>	Religious	4.55	.66				
	Non-religious or non-declared	4.79	.47	1	123.74	13.65	.000

Non-religious and non-declared respondents emphasised the role of education in the development of a free and independent individual to a greater extent than the religious respondents.  $F(1/123.74)=13.65$ ;  $p=.000$ . No significant differences in terms of age and the place of upbringing have been found with respect to the variable *Education should primarily serve the development of a free and independent individual*.

**Table 3:** Differences between the (sub)samples in the variable Education should primarily serve the interests of the capital

Variable	Sub-samples	Welch ANOVA					
		M	SD	df <sup>y</sup>	df <sup>w</sup>	F	p
Year of birth	1965 and before	2.86	1.25				
	Between 1966 and 1980	3.06	1.15	2	247.73	4.12	.017
	1981 and later	2.70	1.04				

Subsequent Games-Howel post hoc test revealed statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between the youngest group of respondents (born in 1981 and later) and the respondents born between 1966 and 1980 with respect to their (dis)agreement with the statement *Education should primarily serve the interests of capital*. The group of older respondents agrees with the said statement ( $M=3.06$ ;  $SD=1.15$ ) to a greater extent than the group of younger respondents ( $M=2.7$ ;  $SD=1.04$ ). No significant differences in terms of religious (non)affiliation and the place of upbringing have been found with respect to the variable *Education should primarily serve the interests of capital*.

**Table 4:** Differences between the (sub)samples in the variable Education should primarily serve the emancipation of individuals from discriminated social groups

Variable	Sub-samples	Welch t-test					
		M	SD	df <sup>y</sup>	df <sup>w</sup>	F	p
Religious (non) affiliation	Religious	3.36	1.08				
	Non-religious or non-declared	3.75	1.04	1	95.16	7.85	.006

Non-religious and non-declared respondents emphasise the importance of education for the emancipation of individuals from discriminated social groups to a significantly greater extent than the religious respondents.  $F(1/95.16)=7.85$ ;  $p < .01$ . No significant differences in terms of age and the place of upbringing have been found with respect

to the variable *Education should primarily serve the emancipation of individuals from discriminated social groups*.

**Table 5:** Differences between the (sub)samples in the variable Education should primarily serve labour market interests

Variable	Sub-samples	Welch ANOVA					
		M	SD	df <sup>y</sup>	df <sup>w</sup>	F	p
<b>Year of birth</b>	1965 and before	3.75	1.06				
	Between 1966 and 1980	3.39	1.16	2	262.53	3.64	.028
	1981 and later	3.50	1.06				
<b>Place of upbringing</b>	Village	3.64	1.14				
	Small town – up to 10 000 inhabitants	4.02	.75				
	Small city – between 10 000 and 50 000 inhabitants	3.20	1.20	4	112.33	4.39	.002
	City – between 50 000 and 100 000 inhabitants	3.48	1.15				
	Large city (over 100 000 inhabitants)	3.50	1.10				

Subsequent Games-Howel post hoc test revealed that there are statistically significant differences between the oldest respondents (M=3.75; SD=1.06) and the respondents born between 1966 and 1980 (M=3.39; SD=1.16) with respect to their (dis) agreement with the statement *Education should primarily serve labour market interests*. Older respondents agree with the said statement to a greater extent, and there is a significant difference between the (sub)samples at the level  $p < .05$ . In addition, Games-Howel post hoc test revealed that there are statistically significant differences

( $p < .01$ ) between the respondents who were raised in a small town (up to 10 000 inhabitants) and a small city (between 10 000 and 50 000 inhabitants). The findings reveal statistically significant differences ( $p < .01$ ) between the respondents who were raised in a large city (over 100 000 inhabitants) and the respondents who were raised in a small town (up to 10 000 inhabitants). The respondents who were raised in small towns agree to a greater extent with the statement *Education should serve labour market interest*. No significant differences in terms of religious (non)affiliation have been found with respect to the variable *Education should primarily serve labour market interests*.

**Table 6:** Differences between the (sub)samples in the variable Development of human resources of the local community

Variable	Sub-samples	Welch ANOVA					
		M	SD	df <sup>y</sup>	df <sup>w</sup>	F	p
<b>Place of upbringing</b>	Village	3.94	.97				
	Small town – up to 10 000 inhabitants	3.79	1.00				
	Small city – between 10 000 and 50 000 inhabitants	3.69	1.04	4	106.52	3.46	.011
	City – between 50 000 and 100 000 inhabitants	4.29	.78				
	Large city (over 100 000 inhabitants)	3.91	.93				

Games-Howel post hoc test revealed statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between the respondents who were raised in a small city (between 10 000 and 50 000 inhabitants) and a city between 50 000 and 100 000 inhabitants. The findings reveal statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between the respondents who were raised in a large city (over 100 000 inhabitants) and the respondents who were raised in a city (between 50 000 and 100 000 inhabitants). The respondents who were raised in



smaller cities agree with the statement that education should serve the development of human resources of the local community to a greater extent than those who were not. Significant differences in terms of age and the religious (non)affiliation with respect to the variable *Education should serve the development of human resources of the local community* have not been found.

Significant differences in terms of religious (non)affiliation, age and the place of upbringing with respect to the following variables: *Education should primarily serve* 1. *interests of the society as a whole*, 2. *ensuring a healthy and stable family*, 3. *interests of the state*, 4. *interests of the integrated Europe*, 5. *ensuring sustainable development* were not found.

## Discussion and conclusion

In terms of the roles of education, the majority (more than 85%) of preschool teachers believe that the key roles are the *development of a free and independent individual* and *the development of a healthy and stable family*. This finding emphasises the role of education in the fulfilment of individual or personal goals. However, *ensuring a healthy and stable family* does not merely refer to the fulfilment of personal or individual goals, here the entire family represents a social institution which enables the individual to get involved into a wider social community because it acts as a “historical, religious, cultural and generation transfer”.<sup>53</sup> Acknowledging the significance of this role of education is crucial because it contributes to the fulfilment of personal goals and social goals at the same time. After emphasising said roles of education, the majority of respondents agreed that education should serve the *interests of the society as a whole*, then *ensuring sustainable development* and *the development of human resources of the local community*. The respondents agreed to a lesser extent that education should be put in service of economic and political interests. Surprisingly, more than 30% of respondents (mostly or strongly) agreed that education should serve the interests of capital, which supports the agenda of the advocates of liberalisation and privatisation of education and challenges the right to education as a fundamental human right. This finding is in line with the results of the research conducted in Croatia using the same research instrument, where 40% of participants responded the same as in this study.<sup>54</sup> As a result, the subjects associated with liberalisation and privatisation of education should be more frequently represented in the curricula for teacher education, but also in the public

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53 Nimac, D. (2010) (Ne)mogućnosti tradicijske obitelji u suvremenom društvu. *Obnouljeni život*, 65(1), 23–35.

54 Spajić Vrkaš, V. and Potočnik D. (2017), 75–141.

discourse to gain a better perspective of the consequences these processes have on the individual and the community.

Despite the fact that neoliberal ideology continues to shape the wider educational policy, teachers can nonetheless decide whether they want to implement the neoliberal educational practices in their classrooms. The teachers are thus able to follow the usual curricular patterns however individual pedagogical choices and the overall environment in educational institutions do not have to comply with neoliberal ideology strictly.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, in order to take a stand from which they can protect the concept of education which is not exclusively susceptible to economic criteria, preschool teachers must take into account all aspects of neoliberal education, as well as their impact on the child's development.

Certain differences were found in the perception of the role of education between the respondents with respect to their socio-demographic characteristics and religious (non)affiliation. A somewhat more conservative understanding of the role of education was found in religious respondents. In fact, religious respondents believe that education should serve the development of a free and independent individual and the emancipation of individuals from discriminated social groups to a significantly lesser extent than the non-religious or non-declared respondents. Religious individuals advocate the traditional values to a much greater extent, which is likely the root of some preschool teachers' somewhat more conservative attitudes about the goals that education should fulfil. However, it should be noted that religious respondents also prioritise the role of education in the development of a free and independent individual. Similarly, the respondents who were raised in smaller towns believe to a greater extent that education should serve the labour market interests and the development of the local community resources. It is assumed that these respondents mostly came from smaller and economically underdeveloped cities, hence such attitudes may be associated with the fact that they are familiar with the economic situation in smaller towns, so they believe that education plays a significant role in ensuring the fundamental existential needs of the individual, which requires a thorough harmonisation of education and labour market demands. In terms of the perception of the role of education in service of the capital market, some difference was found between two groups of respondents: the youngest group (born in 1981 and later) and the respondents born between 1966 and 1980. It is possible that younger respondents were more frequently in contact with the issue of penetration of neoliberal ideas into the educational system during their education since this has become a common topic in the academic community over the past

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55 Sims, M. (2017), 1–10.

decade. According to this they were less likely to agree with the statement *Educaton should primarily serve interests of capital*.

Research limitations are reflected in the lack of elaborated responses in the questionnaire, which should be the focus of some future qualitative research. Qualitative research would broaden the insights into the understanding of different roles of education of its key actors (i.e. preschool teachers). This would consequently contribute to the improvement of pedagogical practices and educational policies.

It is a rather difficult task to provide a proper suggestion of how to regulate the educational system that would enable individual's holistic development and fulfil all other requirements at the same time. However, the pedagogical practices of teachers are undoubtedly one of the key factors for achieving a proper balance between the different roles of education. As a result, teachers should be further trained in that respect, as well, because the fact that they are aware of the impact of various ideologies on the educational system significantly affects their everyday work.

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## Koje su glavne zadaće obrazovanja?

### SAŽETAK

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Položaj obrazovanja u društvu nije neovisan o mišljenju javnosti o tome što obrazovanje treba pružiti pojedincu i društvenoj zajednici.<sup>1</sup> Naime, uz humanistički cilj obrazovanja koji podrazumijeva svestrani (cjeloviti, harmonijski) ili samoostvarujući razvoj osobe<sup>2</sup> često se naglašava društvena, politička i ekonomska svrha obrazovanja. Tako obrazovanje, primjerice, ima važnu ulogu u osiguravanju gospodarskog i društvenog napretka i poboljšanju raspodjele dohotka.<sup>3</sup> Osim toga, obrazovni se sustav promatra i kao agent društva kojemu je jedna od glavnih uloga prenošenje normi i vrijednosti koje pridonose očuvanju stabilnog političkog sustava.<sup>4</sup> Iako relevantna literatura obiluje teorijskim radovima u kojima se spomenuti pristupi detaljno analiziraju, uočava se nedostatak empirijskih istraživanja o tome kako pojedinci percipiraju važnost pojedinih zadaća obrazovanja te koji čimbenici određuju njihova stajališta. Posebno je važno ispitati mišljenje odgojitelja i nastavnika o glavnim zadaćama obrazovanja jer oni utječu i na oblikovanje obrazovnih politika i pedagoških praksi. Stoga je provedeno kvantitativno istraživanje na uzorku odgojiteljica u Gradu Zagrebu (N = 481). Cilj je ustanoviti čemu odgojiteljice daju prednost kada je riječ o interesima koje obrazovanje treba zadovoljiti te pružiti empirijske uvide o povezanosti određenih obilježja ispitanika (starost, mjesto odrastanja i religijska opredijeljenost) i njihove percepcije o svrsi obrazovanja. Nalazi pokazuju da se najveći dio ispitanica slaže da obrazovanje prvenstveno treba služiti razvoju neovisnog i slobodnog pojedinca. Osim spomenute svrhe obrazovanja, ispitanicama je važno i ostvarenje drugih ciljeva kroz obrazovanje (npr. osiguranje stabilne i zdrave obitelji), dok zadovoljenje ekonomskih i političkih interesa (kao što su interesi kapitala i interesi integrirane Europe) smatraju manje važnim zadaćama obrazovanja. Rezultati ANOVA testa pokazuju da ispitanice podrijetlom iz manjih sredina u većoj mjeri smatraju da bi obrazovanje trebalo služiti razvoju ljudskih resursa lokalne zajednice i interesima tržišta rada, nereligiozne i neopredijeljene ispitanice u odnosu na religiozne nešto više ističu ulogu obrazovanja u razvoju neovisnog i slobodnog pojedinca te u emancipaciji osoba koje pripadaju diskriminiranim društvenim skupinama, dok starije ispitanice u većoj mjeri od mlađih smatraju da bi obrazovanje trebalo prvenstveno služiti interesima kapitala.

**Ključne riječi:** glavne zadaće obrazovanja, odgojitelji/ice, socio-demografske karakteristike, religijska (ne)opredijeljenost.