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# Encouraging Self-Regulated Learning in Kindergarten

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**Abstract:** This paper presents a part of the research carried out among educators in Slovenian kindergartens on the self-regulated learning of children in kindergarten and the role of educators in this process. The aim of the research was to find out how educators self-assess their knowledge of self-regulated learning in relation to their level of education, workplace (educator and assistant educator), and work experience. The research was conducted in June and July 2021 via the 1Ka website for online surveys. The questionnaire was sent by e-mail to the kindergarten directors throughout Slovenia. One-way analysis of variance indicates that there are no significant differences on the scale of knowledge about self-regulation and self-regulated learning in relation to the level of education, F (4, 494) = 0.96, p> 0.05. One-way analysis of variance indicates that there are statistically significant differences on the scale of knowledge about self-regulation and self-regulated learning in relation to work experience, F (3, 495) = 3.20, p = 0.023. LSD post hoc test was applied to examine the differences between individual groups. Educators and assistants with more than 31 years of service (AS = 3.62) have significantly higher results on the scale compared to those with up to 10 years of service (AS = 3, 40). as well as in relation to those with work experience from 11 to 20 years (AS = 3.39). Educators and assistants with more than 31 years of service (AS = 3.62) have significantly higher results on the scale compared to those with up to 10 years of service (AS = 3,40). ) as well as in relation to those with work experience from 11 to 20 years (AS = 3.39).

*Keywords: child, educator, kindergarten, self-regulation, learning.*

## Introduction

In Slovenia, the topic of this research has not been investigated when talking about the self-regulated learning of children in kindergarten, but certainly, there is some research on the self-regulated learning of primary school pupils, high school students, and students at universities (Belfi et al., 2012; Boekaerts and Corno, 2005; Cleary and Zimmerman, 2004; Lončarić, 2014; Pintrich, 2004; Zimmerman, 2002, etc.). In this research, foreign investigations in the USA, Australia, and Europe are in focus of attention. Interest in self-regulated learning processes began in the mid-1980s, when researchers sought an answer to the quest of how children and students become masters or experts in their own learning process. Self-regulated learning is a cognitive-constructivist paradigm of learning and teaching activity that emphasizes the active role of the child or student in the learning process, in which he/she becomes a co-creator of his/her learning process with the professional and thoughtful support of a competent educator. The results of relevant research show that children from the age of four are capable of self-regulated learning with the appropriate support of adult. Children develop at the fastest rate in their lives from birth to the age of six. This is a period of vulnerability and great opportunity. In the second year of life, they show a desire for independence and decision-making. There is a well-known saying in the professional public: “Help me to do it alone”, written by Montessori (2003), and then the notion of self (I) appears. Early development takes place in stages, from complete dependence on others to acquiring the ability to adapt to the world to their needs. Important tasks of educators in the process of children’s education in kindergarten are creating conditions for their learning and providing indirect support in various activities in the learning process, whereby children are not deprived of authorship over this process (Slunjski, 2011, p. 225). In the field of early and preschool education, there is not much research on self-regulated learning of preschool

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children to find out about the role of educators in this process, although experts believe (Bodrova and Leong, 2008; Sezgin, 2016; Torres, 2011) that encouraging self-regulated learning in early childhood makes sense. The role of educators in the process of promoting learning at the preschool level is much greater than can be expressed by research figures. The cornerstone of teaching and learning is the relationships that emerge and are created between educators and children during teaching and learning. Mutual knowledge acquired during the implementation of activities is the key to success in teaching and learning (Postman and Weingartner, 1969). Ayers (1993) and Noddings (1997) emphasized the view that learning and teaching through interpersonal relationships promotes lifelong learning and productivity. Educators' responsibilities include preparing, organizing, and implementing educational activities, as well as working with parents and participating in the organization of kindergarten life. It is important that activities are planned based on a thorough knowledge and understanding of the child's development and needs. The educator chooses the appropriate content, forms, and methods of work. He/She also directs the educational process, organizes and leads children's activities and prepares didactic material. In doing so, educator encourages, guides, and plays with children. According to the Slovenian Qualifications Framework (graduate educator of preschool children, 2021), an educator has general and subject-specific competencies. General competencies include:

- analysis and synthesis and prediction of solutions and consequences,
- application of knowledge in practice,
- development of critical and self-critical judgment,
- communication and teamwork,
- initiative in the process of lifelong learning,
- sensitivity to the environment, cultural and national identity,
- planning and implementation of activities,
- understanding the individual, his values, and value systems.

In the process of teaching kindergarten children, the educator helps them become more conscious of their own thoughts and learning, as well as explore new ways to learn (Bruner, 2000). Awareness of the self-learning process enables children to take responsibility and control over the process (Kinsler and Gamble, 2001). Various forms of educator support for children in the research learning process are described by Barth (2004) as a process of information exchange and discourse based on open and stimulating inquiries relevant to the subject that the children are researching. Educators' intentional work in early childhood to promote self-regulation helps children acquire critical abilities such as control methods, problem-solving strategies, environmental responsibility, and emotional control.

The quality of the upbringing and education of preschool children largely depends on the effectiveness of the learning and teaching process (EACEA/Euridice/Eurostat, 2014). Social and emotional competence, together with self-regulation, intrinsic motivation to learn, and the ability to cooperate with other students, can help a child when the need arises for self-regulation of learning, problem solving, and independent and group work. Therefore, one of the main challenges of preschool education is the design and implementation of a curriculum that equally develops these skills and competencies (Lesman, 2009). Learning how to learn includes awareness of the learning process and the need to identify available opportunities, as well as the ability to overcome one obstacle after another towards successful learning. This ability means acquiring, processing, and adopting new knowledge and skills, and seeking and applying new guidelines. Learning to learn encourages children to build on previous learning and life experiences and apply knowledge in a variety of situations: at home, at work, in further education and training. They organize their own learning, including effective time and information management, individually and in groups (Ur. L. EU, 2006; Ažman, 2012). Learning how to learn includes awareness of the learning process and needs, recognition of available opportunities, and the ability to overcome obstacles to successful learning. This ability means acquiring, processing, and applying new knowledge and skills, as well as seeking and applying guidance. Learning how to learn encourages children to rely on previous learning and life experiences and apply them and upgrade their knowledge and skills in different situations: at home, at work, in further education and training.

Recent research in the field of preschool education highlights the professionalism, competencies, and new role of educators as reflective practitioners and researchers (Gomerčić, 2022; Ljubetić, 2012b; Persson, 2006; Schleicher, 2013, Šagud, 2006; Taylor and Nolen, 2005). Preschool education is the first and initial phase of the education system, which includes children from the age of 11 months until they start school. The educator's job is to prepare the child for life, and he or she must be professionally trained to do so.

In educational practice, a competent educator acts in accordance with his or her professional identity, works on oneself to gain the essential information and abilities, and integrates newly acquired

knowledge into existing and useful in immediate educational work (Glasser, 1994).

Professional development should not be an embarrassment for educators, especially if they regard it as an opportunity rather than a need for advancement in their field. By doing so, they will be able to improve their professional efficiency, skills, and performance. The aspiration of educators for excellence in kindergarten should be considered a common practice. The most effective educators are those who are always looking for new skills and want to take them one step higher.

### Self-Regulated Learning in Kindergarten

Play is the dominant practice of the child through which he/she builds relationships and through which the process of adoption and transformation of culture takes place (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000). The game is an "author's reworking of reality" and an act of imagining experience (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007). It is the same early expression of the deepest human quality - the capacity for flexibility, i.e., the form of expression of the most significant creative potential of the human being (National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education, 2014). These abilities, considered inherent only in human beings, are of key importance for the constant process of harmonization and transformation of pedagogical work with preschool children (Marjanović, 1987).

Zimmerman (1986) defines self-regulated learning as a process in which students are actively involved in meta-cognitive, motivational, and behavioral action. In addition, self-regulated learning is defined as a self-directed process during which students consciously plan and monitor their cognitive, behavioral, and affective processes (Zimmerman, 2002). Didactic components of independent learning are exhibited by one's own initiative in studying and accomplishing goals, or by displaying the desire to learn independently (Gojkov-Rajić et al., 2021). Such learning includes children's thoughts, feelings, situations, and behaviors designed to achieve their learning goals. Gojkov Rajić et al. (2021) states that self-regulation is not a simple and easy process, and that teaching staff has a major role in the transfer of control from teacher to student. Looking at all the above, we were interested in how educators perceive self-regulated learning in kindergarten, in preschool children.

## Materials and Methods

This paper presents a part of the quantitative research conducted among educators in Slovenian kindergartens.

### Goals and hypotheses

- to find out what the attitudes of educators are about their own role in encouraging children´s self-regulated learning in kindergarten.

H: Attitudes of educators about their own role in encouraging children´s self-regulatory learning in kindergarten differ in relation to the level of their education, length of service and position (educator-assistant educator).

### Survey sample

The study involved 500 respondents, graduate educators and assistant educators, of which 491 (98.6%) were female educators. Regarding age categories, 124 respondents belonged to the category up to 30 years of age, 253 belonged to the category from 31 to 45 years, and 123 respondents were older than 46 years. Forty-nine respondents completed secondary vocational education; 77 respondents graduated from grammar school or secondary vocational and technical school; 76 completed a higher education program; 255 (over 50%) had a higher professional or university degree; and 42 had a Master's or specialization degree.

There were 207 respondents who had 10 or fewer years of service, 154 respondents who had between 11 and 20 years of service, 84 respondents who had between 21 and 30 years of service, and 55 respondents with 31 or more years of service. There were 315 preschool teachers, while 185 were assistant educators. Over four-fifths (N = 411) of respondents worked in state public kindergartens, while the rest worked in private kindergartens.

### Instrument

Scales of self-regulation and self-regulated learning. Three scales were constructed in order to measure the familiarity of educators and assistant educators with the concepts of self-regulation and self-

regulated learning. In order to check the latent space of each scale, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out (further information can be found in the section Data Analysis and Results). All items are given on a five-point Likert scale (I do not agree at all / I completely agree).

1) Knowledge of Self-regulation and Self-regulated Learning (KSSL) consists of 10 items whose goal is to measure the knowledge of various aspects of self-regulated learning in educators.

2) Confidence in the Skills of Educators and Encouragement of Self-regulation (CSEES) consists of 15 items aimed at measuring the confidence of educators and assistant educators in their ability to adequately train children for further educational tasks, as well as increase their self-regulated abilities, and some items related to assessing the importance of self-regulated skills.

3) Attitudes towards Children's Independence (ACI) consists of 6 items whose content describes various claims related to children's independence and educators and assistants´ belief that children can independently perform certain tasks.

## Results and Discussion

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted using the principal axis factoring method in order to examine the latent space of the three scales on self-regulation and self-regulated learning. The assumption was that each of the three scales was one-dimensional, and the scales were divided into several subscales only when the Scree diagram indicated the multidimensionality of the scale. Items that did not have a saturation of at least 0.30 on any factor were excluded from further analysis. For all accepted scales, reliability was measured by Cronbach's alpha. For all further analyses, scales were reduced to a scale of 1 to 5 (average summary scores) for easier comparison and interpretation. In order to eliminate univariate outlayers in the data, all variables that had univariate outlayers ($z > | 3.29 |$) were winsorized.

In order to test the hypothesis, "Attitudes of educators about their own role in encouraging children´s self-regulatory learning in kindergarten differ in relation to the level of their education, length of service and position" one-way analysis of variance was applied to examine differences in education (1. Secondary vocational education, 2. Grammar school and secondary professional education, 3. Higher education program, 4. Higher professional or university program, 5. Master's degree or specialization) and work experience (1. 0–10 years, 2. 10–20 years, 3. 21–30 years, and 4. more than 31 years of service), and the t-test for independent samples was applied to examine differences in relation to the job (educator or assistant educator). The dependent variable was the score on the subscales of confidence in one's skills and encouragement of self-regulation.

**Educators' assessments of the relevance of skills and their perceptions of children's curiosity**

In the case of "Do you generally notice that children in your group have a natural curiosity and willingness to learn what you teach them?" as many as 477 educators and assistants answered in the affirmative, and only 21 answered in the negative (two did not answer this question) (Figure 1). When it comes to assessing the importance of different skills that children master (Figure 2), the most important is the assessed skill of participation and socializing with their peers, where as many as 66% of educators rate the importance of this skill as the highest. Perceptive skills like holding a pen and following instructions are also extremely important.

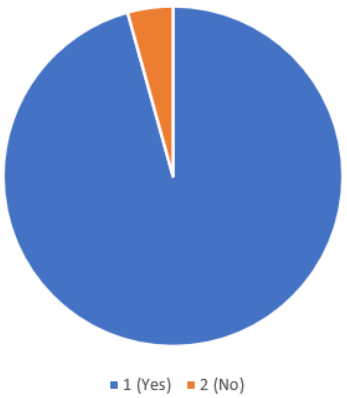


*Figure 1.* The answer to the question "Do you generally notice that the children in your group have a natural curiosity and willingness to learn what you teach them?"


*Figure 2.* Assessment of the importance of different children's skills by educators and assistant educators

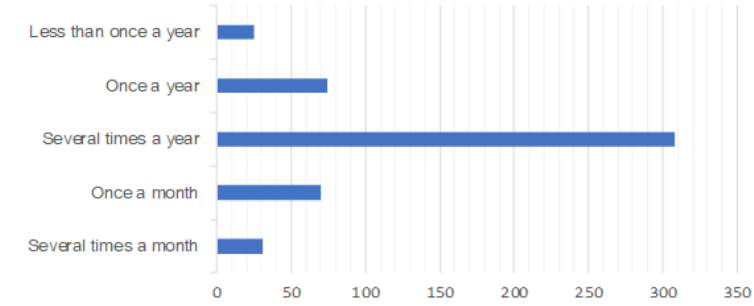


*Figure 3.* Participation in trainings related to professional development and knowledge of the concept of self-regulation

The answers related to the frequency of participation in training related to professional development are shown in Figure 3. Over half of the educators and assistant educators participate in additional training several times a year. Only slightly more than half of educators and assistant educators (N = 297) said they knew what self-regulation was.

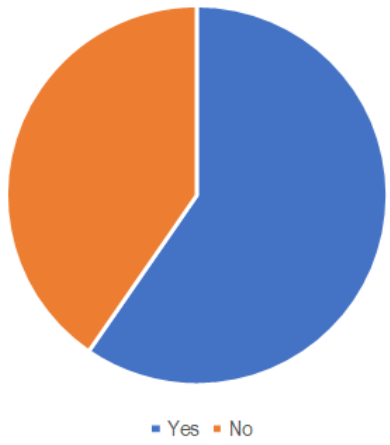


*Figure 4.* Are you familiar with the term "self-regulation"?

**Factor analysis of the Knowledge on Self-Regulation and Self-Regulated Learning Scale (KSSL)**

The factor structure is shown in Table 1. All items have a saturation factor of more than 0.30. The scale's reliability, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was = 0.90, indicating excellent reliability.

**Table 1**

*KSSL scale structure matrix*

| Item | Factor |
|---|---|
| Children with self-regulation challenges can be helped in various ways to establish self-regulation and self-regulated learning. | 0.83 |
| I know how to support children who have a good ability to self-regulate in various ways, so that their self-regulated learning continues to develop. | 0.82 |
| I know the types of factors that hinder a child's self-regulation and self-regulated learning. | 0.78 |
| I understand how self-regulation develops and how much self-regulation children should have at a specific age. | 0.74 |
| I know the difference between encouragement and praise and their impact on self-regulated learning. | 0.71 |
| I know how a child's self-regulation and self-regulated learning are related to other areas of development. | 0.71 |
| I know the factors that contribute to the development of self-regulation and self-regulated learning. | 0.69 |
| I think that a child's ability to self-regulate learning can vary depending on the days and the circumstances in the group. | 0.60 |
| I know that different social groups can influence children's self-regulated learning. | 0.58 |
| I think that self-regulated learning skills can change when children grow up. | 0.44 |

**Factor analysis of the scale Confidence in the Skills of Educators and Encouragement of Self-Regulation (CSEES)**

Factors were rotated by Promaks rotation, and the structure of factors is shown in Table 2. The first factor brought together items whose content indicates the belief of educators that he/she can support the development of self-regulation in children, but also the belief that self-regulation is important and therefore the factor is called Importance and Support for Self-Regulation (ISS). The second factor brought together items related to educators' belief that they can adequately lead a group and correct children's behavior and was called the Group Leadership Awareness (GLA). The reliability of the scales measured by the Cronbach's alpha was α = 0.85 for the first factor and α = 0.80 for the second factor, indicating excellent scale reliability.

**Table 2**

*ISS scale assembly matrix*

| Item | Factor 1 (ISS) | Factor 2 (GLA) |
|---|---|---|
| In ordinary activities, I am certain that I can challenge and improve children's self-regulated learning capacities. | 0.85 | |
| I am convinced that through children's play, I can support the development of children's self-regulated learning. | 0.76 | |
| I am convinced that I can do practices that have a positive impact on children's self-regulated learning. | 0.75 | |
| I am confident that I can collaborate with colleagues to help youngsters develop self-control in their learning. | 0.70 | |
| I think educators have an important role to play in promoting children's self-regulated learning. | 0.69 | |
| I think it is important for the future lives of children how they master self-regulated learning in kindergarten (before school). | 0.49 | |
| I think assessing children's self-regulated learning is important. | 0.47 | |
| I am confident that I can provide parents with important knowledge on how to help their children develop self-control and self-regulated learning at home. | 0.37 | |
| I think self-regulated learning skills change when children grow up. | 0.31 | |
| I am convinced that I can effectively resolve children's conflicts. | | 0.84 |
| I am convinced that I can consistently meet expectations in all environments. | | 0.70 |
| I am convinced that I can effectively manage my child's inappropriate behavior. | | 0.69 |
| I am convinced that I can teach youngsters self-direction, i.e., the ability to self-regulate, not be regulated by others, be independent and not rely on others. | | 0.56 |
| I am convinced that I can involve children in a structured problem-solving process. | | 0.49 |
| I am confident that I can work effectively with parents to ensure that kindergarten and home are consistent. | | 0.36 |

**Factor analysis of the Attitudes toward Children's Independence Scale**

In the case of the ACI scale, three items ("I encourage children to complete tasks on their own.", "I think most children in my group can be motivated even without my guidance.", and "Several children in the group find it difficult to calm down after anxiety.") had extremely low utilities of 0.13 and below, and they were excluded from the analysis. The structure of the factors is shown in Table 3 and indicates that this factor is related to the attitude that children need guidance and help from educators. The reliability of the scale measured by Cronbach's alpha was acceptable (α = 0.65).

**Table 3**

*ACI scale structure matrix (Attitudes towards Children's Independence)*

| Item | Factor |
|---|---|
| I spend much of my time in the playroom, where I teach and model proper behavior for youngsters. | 0.87 |
| I think children in the playroom should be supervised by an adult. | 0.52 |
| I often notice that some children have difficulty completing tasks on their own and need my guidance. | 0.50 |

**Descriptive statistics scale**

Table 4 shows the basic descriptive indicators for the KSSL, ISS, and ACI scales. All variables had skewness and kurtosis values in the recommended range of ± 2 (George and Mallery, 2010), indicating that the variables did not deviate significantly from the univariate nominal distribution.

**Table 4.**

*Descriptive scale indicators*

| | minimum | maximum | AS | SD | skewness | kurtosis |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **KSSL** | 1.60 | 4.60 | 3.45 | 0.56 | -0.64 | 0.61 |
| **ISS** | 2.67 | 4.89 | 3.90 | 0.46 | -0.30 | 0.17 |
| **GLA** | 2.33 | 4.84 | 3.64 | 0.47 | -0.16 | 0.12 |
| **ACI** | 1.33 | 5 | 3.56 | 0.70 | -0.10 | -0.18 |

**Differences on the KSSL scale in relation to the level of education, length of service, and position**

One-way analysis of variance indicates that there are no significant differences on the KSSL scale in relation to the level of education, F (4, 494) = 0.96, p> 0.05. One-way analysis of variance indicates that there are statistically significant differences on the KSSL scale in relation to length of service, F (3, 495) = 3.20, p = 0.023. LSD post hoc test was applied to examine the differences between individual groups. Significantly more scores on the KSSL scale were obtained by educators and their assistants with more than 31 years of service (AS = 3.62) compared to those with up to 10 years of service (AS) = 3.40) and in relation to those with work experience of 11 to 20 years (AS = 3.39). The T-test for independent samples indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the educator and the assistant educator in relation to the KSSL scale, t (497) = -0.47, p> 0.05.

**Differences on the ISS scale in relation to the level of education, length of service, and job**

One-way analysis of variance indicates that there are no significant differences on the ISS scale in relation to the level of education, F (4, 494) = 0.26, p> 0.05, as well as in relation to the length of service, F (3, 495) = 2.04, p > 0.05. The T-test for independent samples indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between educators and assistant educators in relation to the ISS scale, t (497) = 0.67, p> 0.05.

**Differences on the GLA scale (in relation to the level of education, length of service and position)**

One-way analysis of variance indicates that there are no significant differences on the GLA scale in relation to the level of education, F (4, 494) = 0.72, p> 0.05. One-way analysis of variance indicates that there are statistically significant differences on the GLA scale in relation to length of service, F (3, 495) = 4.42, p = 0.04. LSD post hoc test indicates that educators and assistants who belong to the group of those with the longest work experience, more than 31 years (AS = 3.84, SD = 0.43), have significantly higher scores on this scale compared to other groups, up to 10 years of service (AS = 3.62, SD = 0.47), between

11 and 20 years of service (AS = 3.60, SD = 0.47) and between 21 and 30 years of service (AS = 3.56, SD = 0.49). There were no significant differences between those with shorter work experience. The T-test for independent samples indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between educators and assistant educators in relation to the GLA scale, t (497) = 0.97, p> 0.05.

**Examining the relationship between the KSSL, ISS and ACI scales**

Pearson's correlation coefficient examined the relationship between the KSSL, ISS, GLA, and ACI scales. Correlation coefficients are shown in Table 5. All correlations were positive and significant at the level of p <0.01, and their intensity was interpreted in relation to the Cohen guidelines (Cohen, 1988). The connection between the KSSL and ISS scales was of strong intensity. The association of the GLA scale with the KSSL and ISS scales was of medium to high intensity, while the association of the ACI scale with other scales was of weak to moderate intensity.

**Table 5**

*Correlations between scales in research*

| | KSSL | ISS | GLA | ACI |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **KSSL** | 1 | | | |
| **ISS** | 0.58 | 1 | | |
| **GLA** | 0.37 | 0.47 | 1 | |
| **ACI** | 0.19 | 0.19 | 0.18 | 1 |

## Conclusions

Considering that we have dealt with the topic of self-regulatory learning in kindergarten, which has never been researched in Slovenia (or neighboring countries), and that the role of educators and their impact on children's skills in implementing activities that promote self-regulation learning is great, we think they should offer more content to help them strengthen their role. All participants in the education of educators should regularly update the curriculum and syllabus in accordance with the needs of modern change, so that educators, in addition to formal education and professional practice in kindergartens, get the best opportunity for continuing education.

According to the obtained research data, a review of professional and scientific literature, and world-class research, we can conclude that self-regulatory learning in kindergarten is a topic that needs more attention and extra effort. We provide opportunities for additional professional development and educators´ training, especially with examples from practice or programs and activities that directly affect the self-regulatory learning of children. Educators are already carrying out activities that affect children's self-regulation and consequent self-regulatory learning. To cite the most common examples, these are following group rules, waiting in line, and cooperating with peers, where children acquire self-regulation skills, albeit unknowingly and not intentionally. Self-regulatory learning should be promoted in early educator training, starting in high school, so that educators are aware of their role in supporting self-regulatory learning in kindergarten. If pupils and students of educational school and faculty have had self-regulatory learning experience, that experience will have a significant impact on the transfer of self-regulatory learning into practice and direct work in kindergarten.

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**Conflict of interests**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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