

PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' COMPETENCE FIELDS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS, TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS, AND UNIVERSITY LECTURERS

Introduction

The presented research highlights the main professional fields of preschool teacher competence, a central feature of their university preparation at the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts (FESA). These fields were developed by a team of academic staff from Sofia University's "Preschool and Media Pedagogy" department and were evaluated by students, teachers, principals, and university lecturers. The analysis of the results provides the reason for defining five fields of competence as contemporary projections of preschool teachers' professional realization, which should be laid down and developed in university training. These fields of competence are: 1. Pedagogical interaction with children; 2. Teamwork and interaction with children's families; 3. Educational environment; 4. Pedagogical interaction in a multicultural and inclusive environment, and 5. Leadership.

The main professional fields of preschool teacher competence, as proposed and examined in the project

FIELDS OF COMPETENCE	DIMENSIONS
1. Pedagogical interaction with children	1.1. Pedagogical interaction based on cooperation and partnership with children. 1.2. Pedagogical situations and additional forms of pedagogical interaction realized through play. 1.3. Using a variety of methods and forms of pedagogical interaction that correspond to the age and individual characteristics of children. 1.4. Establishing integrative connections between educational fields. 1.5. Development of children's social, cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and motor culture. 1.6. Recognizing the strengths of each child and stimulating their performances according to the individual characteristics of their development.
2. Teamwork and interaction with children's families	2.1. Interaction with the family to enrich the pedagogical culture of parents. 2.2. Using conventional and unconventional forms of interaction with the family that have informational and constructive functions. 2.3. Participation in professional communities within the kindergarten and team interaction. 2.4. Team preparation of mandatory documentation and other documents related to the activities of the educational institution. 2.5. Participation in professional team activities and kindergarten projects. 2.6. Participation in activities informing the broader community about the results of the educational process.
3. Educational environment	3.1. Organization of the educational environment, based on the age and individual characteristics of the children in the group. 3.2. Transformation of the educational environment to create conditions for activity for every child. 3.3. Developing and adapting educational resources depending on the expected educational outcomes. 3.4. Organization of an appropriate digital environment and creation of media resources related to the educational content.
4. Pedagogical interaction in a multicultural and inclusive environment	4.1. Getting to know the lifestyle, traditions, customs, language, history and culture of each cultural or ethnic group whose representatives the teacher will be working with. 4.2. Ensuring the well-being of each child and building motivation and confidence in their own abilities, according to their educational needs. 4.3. Creating an inclusive environment in kindergarten by implementing good practices. 4.4. Ensuring equal opportunities for development and affirmation in an inclusive, multicultural environment.
5. Leadership	5.1. Management of the children's group, taking into account group dynamics and conflict prevention. 5.2. Developing innovative ideas and implementing creative practices. 5.3. Management of the educational environment taking into account its specificities. 5.4. Project management in kindergarten. 5.5. Management of pedagogical activities outside of kindergarten. 5.6. Foreign language competence.

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Methodology

The main methods used in the study are theoretical analysis of literature, a questionnaire, and statistical methods for processing the results.

The questionnaire was conducted with 271 kindergarten teachers and 105 principals of preschool educational institutions from across the country, as well as 219 students and 23 university professors from FESA.

The first part of the questionnaire aims to collect general demographic data specific to the different groups of respondents. The second part presents a competency framework of the main aspects of the modern university training of preschool teachers in FESA, developed specifically for this study, in which respondents assess the importance of the dimensions of the fields of competence. For this purpose, a five-point rating scale was used. In the third part, respondents add fields of competence that they consider to be of high and very high importance.

Conclusion

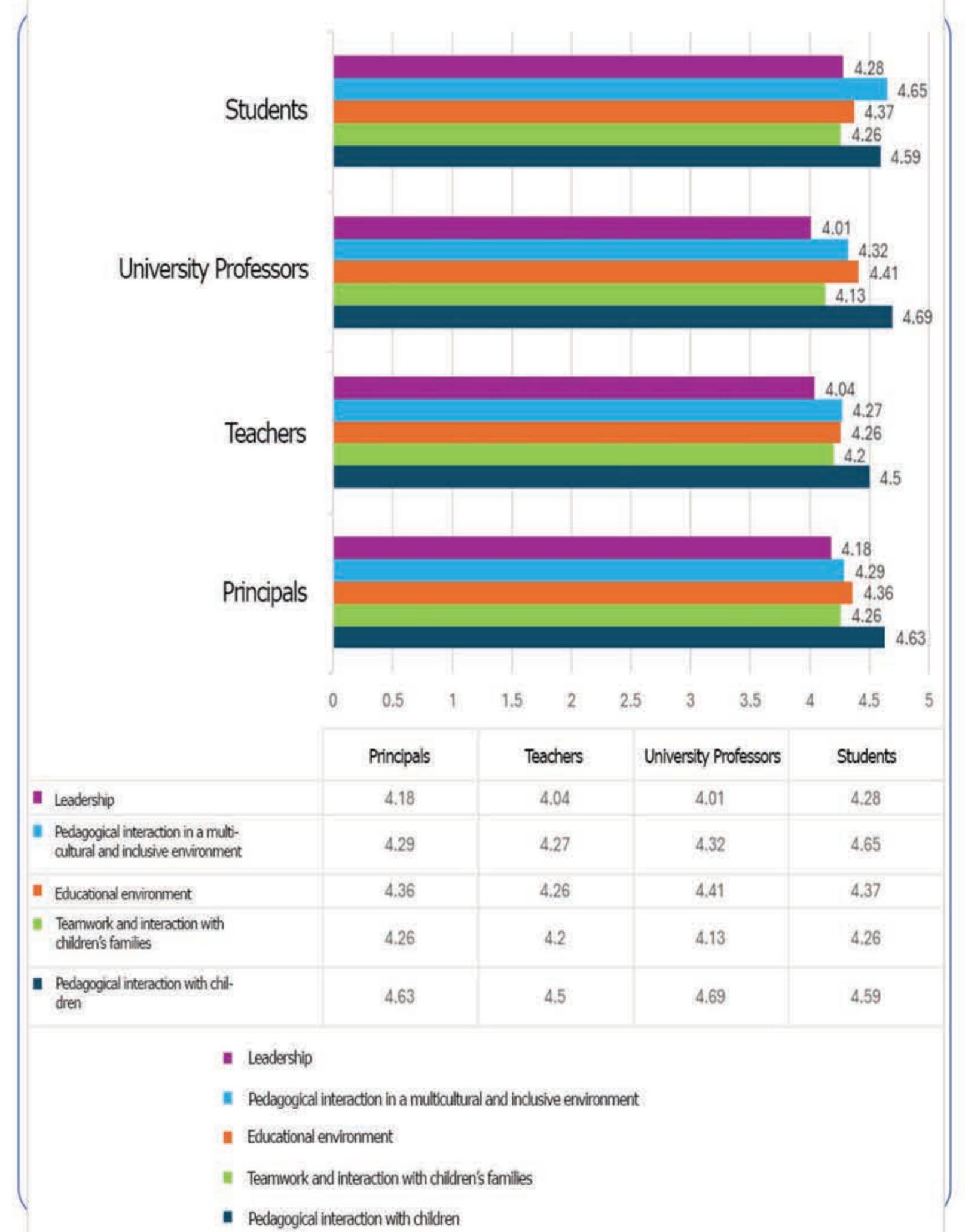
❖ The five primary professional fields of preschool teacher competence — (1) pedagogical interaction with children, (2) teamwork and interaction with children's families, (3) the educational environment, (4) pedagogical interaction in a multicultural and inclusive environment, and (5) leadership — represent significant contemporary dimensions of professional practice and development.

✓ The average ratings provided by the various respondent groups reveal a generally consistent recognition of the importance of these five competence areas, with an overall average rating of 4.34. This indicates strong consensus across diverse stakeholders — including principals, teachers, university lecturers, and students — on the relevance and value of these domains, emphasizing their essential role in the professional development of preschool teachers.

Results

The results, summarized in the Figure, show relatively high scores for each of the components indicated in the proposed framework, which is largely due to the synchronization between the areas of competence taught (by university professors), studied (by students), sought after (by principals as employers), and offered in practice (by preschool teachers). The average ratings provided by the respondent groups for the five substantive areas of competence are as follows: principals — 4.34; teachers — 4.25; university lecturers — 4.31; students — 4.43. The average rating that all groups give is 4.34.

EVALUATION OF THE FIVE FIELDS OF COMPETENCE



✓ The acquisition and continuous enhancement of these competencies should be viewed as a fundamental objective in preparing future preschool teachers. These competencies must be systematically integrated and cultivated within university curricula. The findings from the questionnaire further reinforce the significance and interdependence of these key professional domains, highlighting their pivotal role in fostering effective teaching practices.