

MANAGEMENT OF AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION – THE PRINCIPAL’S PERSPECTIVE

VIOLETA VALJAN VUKIĆ,¹ MAJA GULIN²

¹ University of Zadar, Department of Teachers and Preschool Teachers Education,
Zadar, Croatia

vvukic@unizd.hr

² Kintergarten Šibenska maslina, Šibenik, Croatia

majagulin12@gmail.com

Abstract The theoretical starting point of this paper are the competences and key tasks of the directors of institutions for early and preschool education. The development of many different professional competences is necessary when dealing with the complicated tasks of a principal. This paper presents the results of research conducted on a sample of principals from institutions for early and preschool education, municipal and privately funded, from the Šibenik-Knin and Zadar counties, relating to the assessment of competences and prescribed key tasks in the management of the institutions. Respondents assessed all competences as extremely important for the quality implementation of the process of leading and managing an institution for early and preschool education. The results showed that the respondents assessed most of the key tasks aimed at the organisation of educational work, as well as tasks and activities aimed at employees, parents and the community, as significant in the performance of their work. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to insist on new forms of education for principals of early and preschool educational institutions, where with the help of various examples, indicators and concrete situations from practice, principals will gain the necessary dose of new knowledge and competences for better management.

Keywords:

principal,
management,
lifelong learning,
competences,
educational
institution

1 Introduction

Interest in studying the phenomenon of leadership and management within institutions, companies or corporations in the contemporary world is growing. Almost daily, experts and owners of companies conduct various studies to answer the questions of what quality leadership is and how to realize it. Many of them point out, with good reason, that leadership is an important segment when aiming at gaining advantage over competing companies or institutions. That is surely one of the reasons why world investments today are growing in the development of quality leadership. In the field of early and preschool upbringing and education a relatively small number of studies have been reported in Croatia in reference to leading and managing institutions. The application of new insights into leadership and management methods began primarily in the school system, and, accordingly, there are more articles and research papers studying leadership and management in schools compared to those studying the same in preschools. Leadership is an unavoidable part of everyday human communication, thus the driver of good or bad interpersonal relationships. Starting in the twentieth century, leadership and leading became the topic of studies, and all of these confirmed that the process of leading includes a series of dimensions, and that it is an extremely complex process in which the following components are of great importance: the profile component of the leader, management of human potentials which, among others, include motivation, selection, awarding, interpersonal relationships, introduction of changes and the constructive solution of resistance following change, communication, and continuous improvement to the quality of the process.

The principle of modern, quality management of an institution assumes a principal, who will have a clear personal identity, will know how to design the vision and mission of the institution they run, and who will know how to get the most from their employees, since encouraging teamwork is something that is absolutely taken for granted. The principals of institutions for early and preschool upbringing and education find themselves in a contemporary world of technological change and strategic management, facing growing challenges, while formal education still does not give them sufficient knowledge and competences. In such a context, the role of a preschool institution principal becomes increasingly challenging and becomes an imperative for principals.

In European countries, the process of expert training for principals of educational institutions is conducted in various ways. Ulf (2016, p. 61) discusses an example of mandatory training for principals whose “training should start immediately after a principal has taken on a new function”. Sentočnik (2012, according to Vican et al., 2016) emphasizes that at the initiative of the Ministry of Education in Slovenia a *School for principals* was opened in 1995, the tasks of which were licensing and monitoring principals and holding expert conferences intended for the lifelong education of principals. The school was among the first of its kind in Europe¹.

In a study that was performed on 672 principals of upbringing and educational institutions in the Republic of Croatia, the needs of the continuous professional development of principals were examined. From the sample, 86% of the participants thought that principals needed additional training for managing upbringing and educational institutions, while 46% emphasized the need for training prior to taking on the function of principal. Of the principals, 39% thought that it was sufficient to learn while performing their task (Radeka, 2016, p. 85). The results of the TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) study indicated that only one quarter of principals stated that they had participated in preparation for the function of principal (Rogić & Karamatić Brčić, 2016).

1.2 The Competences Necessary for Principals of Early and Preschool Upbringing and Education

To achieve the successful functioning of an institution for early and preschool education, the principal must have certain competences to perform this demanding professional task, which implies the continuous development of said competences. Numerous authors point out the importance of lifelong learning, indispensable in confronting the growing number of challenges. Lifelong education is defined as “the column of all formal and informal education activities throughout life that develop and enrich knowledge, skills and competences (independence and responsibility) at the personal, citizen, social or professional plan; combines initial education and continuous professional development, as well as all other forms of education aimed at satisfying personal interests” (Radeka, 2016, p. 95).

¹ That school was not among the first of such type in Europe.

Staničić et al. (2016, p. 9) emphasize that the principal of such an institution is responsible for lifelong work and the task results of the institution, as well as the work of every single employee, taking care of the quality standards of each individual activity and group of activities within the basic upbringing and educational processes, and lastly, providing the materials needed for working conditions. In this context, the functions and activities of the principal and the circumstances in which they are realized become more complex, and the level of their professional competences becomes more complex. According to Staničić (2006, p. 153) the competences a principal of an upbringing and educational institution should have can be divided into the following five categories:

- Expert-pedagogical competences, which imply knowledge of upbringing and educational processes.
- Competences in the area of interpersonal relationships, which refer to the desired characteristics of an individual in working with people.
- Organizational and developmental competences, which refer to knowing how the organization and education system functions.
- Administrative competences, which include knowledge of the affairs of the kindergarten as an institution.
- Work-executive competences, which refer to the vision and determination, and the principal's optimistic attitude towards achieving defined goals.

It is, however, important to differentiate the formal and real competences of a person in a determined area of activity. Formal competences are proved with documents, while real competences are also partially proved with documents. It is possible to establish most of these by duly following an individual's course of work and assessing their results and behaviour in work situations (Staničić, 2006, p. 176). Seme Stojnović and Hitrec (2014) indicate the problems related to the non-inclusion of competences necessary for the leadership and management of such an institution during the legal procedures of choosing a principal. Knowledge and skills in the field of leadership and management are not demanded, therefore the question of introducing appropriate selection methods is raised. The same authors state that during the selection process for a principal in Croatia, the person's formal competences are first assessed and "the professional capacity is still not required for the position and role of principal even though professionalism is valued more and more" (Seme Stojnović & Hitrec, 2014, p. 104). In the Strategy of Education, Science

and Technology from 2014, the proposals for licensing and training principals are stated, whereby the following is needed: “defining the role of the principal, issuing documents that regulate their work, developing competency standards for principals, creating legal preconditions for the institutionalization of their education, designing educational programs, accrediting organizations that will implement them, and developing a system for licensing and evaluating the work of principals” (Vican et al., 2016, p. 102).

2 Research methodology

2.1 Research Task and Objective

The objective of the study was to establish how principals of institutions for early and preschool upbringing and education run an institution in terms of the prescribed key tasks and how they assess the value of specific competences. In line with the research objective, the following tasks were defined:

- Determine the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (gender, age, level of education, years of work experience in the profession, and years of work experience in the position of principal), their acquisition of professional knowledge in the field of leadership and management during their studies, and their involvement in additional training in the field of leadership and management and preschool upbringing and education.
- Examine the principals’ opinions on competences important for leadership and management.
- Examine whether the principals participate in all fields of institution leadership and management prescribed in the key tasks of the principal.

2.2 Research Hypotheses

The authors began with the following assumptions:

H1: The participants will positively assess the competences from the field of work of principals.

H2: The participants participate in all fields of institution leadership and management prescribed by the key tasks for principals.

2.3 Research Instrument

A survey questionnaire was constructed for the needs of the study, and it was divided into several units. In the first part of the survey, the participants answered general questions (gender, age, years of service in the profession and the position of principal, level of education). The second part of the questionnaire consisted of questions on acquiring the professional skills of leadership and management during initial education, as well as data on the inclusion of the participants in additional training in the field of leadership and management. Our goal was to establish how many participants were satisfied with the development of their leadership and management skills acquired in additional training during their employment. In the third part of the questionnaire, the participants assessed to what extent single competences were important in a principal's work, whereby a claim was defined for each competence. Likert's scale of five degrees was used for the assessment (1 – I completely disagree, 5 – I completely agree). In addition, the participants estimated how many key tasks there were, also using Likert's scale (1 – it does not refer to me at all, 5 – it refers to me completely).

2.4 Participants and Procedure

The sample included principals ($n = 18$) from preschools, municipal and private kindergarten institutions, in the Šibenik-Knin and Zadar counties. Ten preschool institutions were selected from each county, and the questionnaire was sent to their addresses in electronic form with the request to participate in the study. Five surveys were sent to preschool institutions in Šibenik-Knin county, Tisno (1), Vodice (1), Knin (1), Drniš (1), while seven were sent to Zadar County (7), Pag (1), Biograd (1), Nin (1). Two principals did not take part in the survey, and the final sample consisted of 18 participants. The study was conducted during June and July 2019., and the survey was completely anonymous.

3 Results

3.1 The Structure of Participants with Reference to Their Socio-Demographic Features

The total number of participants ($n = 18$), 94% were women, and 6% were men, shows how the female population dominated in the sample, i.e., institutions for early and preschool upbringing and education in the two counties mentioned were almost all run by women. Numerous authors point out that the position of principal in institutions for early and preschool education in the Republic of Croatia is, as a rule, “reserved” for women. This is confirmed and stated by Seme Stojnović and Hitrec (2014, p. 49), who say that in preschool institutions in the Republic of Croatia, the head positions are taken “in high percentage by females. We encounter a similar situation worldwide: the leading positions are predominantly male, except when it comes to preschool institutions.”

The age structure of the participants was as follows: 5.5% of the participants were between 20 and 30, 33% were 31 to 40, 28% were 41 to 50, and 28% were aged between 51 and 60. Only one participant was over 60 (5.5%). Therefore, the smallest number of participants were aged between 20 and 30, and over 60 (11%), while the largest number (89%) was aged from 31 to 60 years of age.

The structure of the participants related to work experience in preschool institutions is shown in Figure 1. The first two categories from 1 to 5 and from 6 to 10 years of work service in the profession were not present in any of the participants, which is justifiable for the first category, since one of the conditions for selecting a principal is five-years of work experience in preschool institutions. Following this, 39% of the participants had between 11 and 20 years of experience, 33% of them had between 21 and 30 years of experience, while 22% had between 31 and 40 years of work experience. Only one participant (6%) had 40 years of experience in the profession.

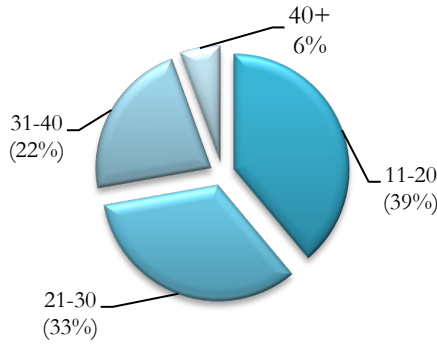


Figure 1: Work experience in the profession
Source: own.

In terms of work experience as principal, 39% of the participants had between 1 and 5 years of experience, and 33% had between 6 and 10 years of experience. Following this, the number was lower; 22% of participants had 11 to 20 years of experience, the same had 21 to 30 years of experience, while one participant (6%) had more than 31 years of experience as principal (*Figure 2*)

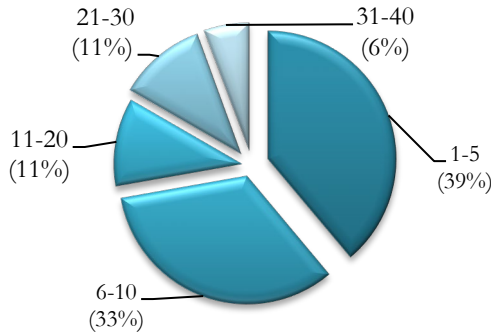


Figure 2: Work experience as principal
Source: own.

In terms of education, 11 participants (61%) were in possession of a two-year degree in preschool upbringing, three participants (17%) had completed a three-year professional preschool upbringing study program, and none of the participants were in possession of a degree from the pre-graduate university program of Early preschool upbringing and education. Four participants (22%) had graduated from graduate studies in Early and Preschool upbringing and education. Therefore, the

number of principals having completed a two-year preschool study program in the Šibenik-Knin and Zadar counties was significantly larger than those that completed other study programs.

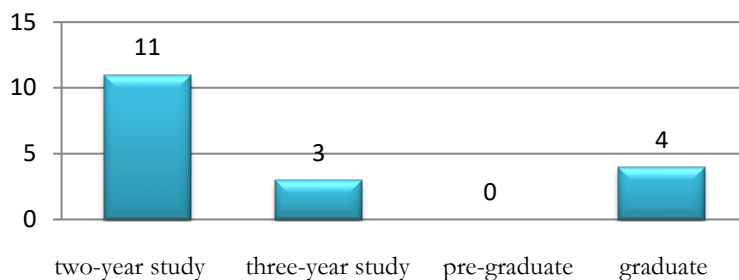


Figure 3: Level of education

Source: own.

3.2 Acquiring Knowledge and Skills in the Leadership and Management Area

The objective of our study was to establish whether the participants had the possibility of acquiring knowledge and skills in the field of leadership and management during their initial education or through additional training.

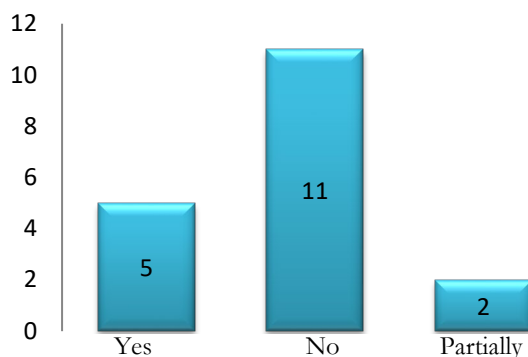


Figure 4: Leadership and management skills during studies

Source: own.

During formal education, 28% of the participants acquired professional competences in the field of leadership and management, and 11% of them only partially. However, 61% of the participants confirmed that they had not had the

opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills in this area during their studies (*Figure 4*) In comparing these data with those shown in the previous chart, it is clear that they refer to the participants who completed a two-year program in preschool education, whose study program did not provide instruction on the development of these competences. Nonetheless, it is clear that the role of principal in the past did not imply such extensive knowledge in the field of leadership and management, as is the case in recent times. However, because of the need for acquiring knowledge and competences in this field, and for better and more successful performance of their function, 72% of the participants had attended additional education in this area, while 28% of them had had no additional education in this area (*Figure 5*).

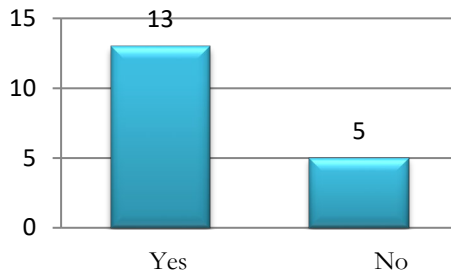


Figure 5: Additional training in leadership and management

Source: own.

Even so, from the data in *Figure 6* one can conclude that it concerns those participants who confirmed that they had acquired the mentioned knowledge during their formal education. The percentage of participants who had completed additional training in the field of leadership and management was significantly larger than those who had not. The results confirm that, as a rule, almost all principals had been insufficiently educated in the field of leadership and management when taking on management duties. They needed new knowledge in this field since they had never had the opportunity to acquire it during their studies.

The course, organized by the Ministry of Science and Education and the Agency for Upbringing and Education, had been attended by 72% of the participants, and the training for post-graduate specialist studies for principals of upbringing and educational institutions had been attended by 6%, while 22% of the participants chose the “other” category but did not state the type of training nor the organizer. Therefore, most of the participants were directed towards obtaining competences in the field of leadership and management in preschool institutions organized and

conducted by competent institutions, while only a small number of participants chose other types of education. The authors examined the extent to which the participants were satisfied with the professional leadership and management skills acquired in additional training. Of the 18 participants, 11% were extremely satisfied, 44% were mostly satisfied, 28% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 17% were extremely dissatisfied.



Figure 6: Training in leadership and management

Source: own.

3.3 Assessment of the Importance of Principal Competences

In this study the authors wanted to establish how principals assessed the importance of single competences for their work. The competences were taken from the Standard for Principals in Upbringing and Educational Institutions, while in 2016, with the cooperation of the National Centre for External Assessment, they were drawn up by an expert group. The participants assessed to what extent the mentioned competences were important, according to their opinions on the work of principals. The answers are shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1: The opinions of principals on the importance of competences needed for their tasks

Principal competences	Disagree	Mostly disagree	Partially agree	Mostly agree	Totally agree	Total	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	M
Planning and programming work	5	11	17	39	28	100	3.72
Work assessment	6	11	17	33	33	100	3.78

Principal competences	Disagree	Mostly disagree	Partially agree	Mostly agree	Totally agree	Total	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	M
Environmental analysis	0	11	5	17	67	100	4.39
Quality insurance	6	0	0	33	61	100	4.44
Organization of teamwork	0	0	0	17	83	100	4.83
Work in institution counselling with educators and parents	0	0	6	22	72	100	4.67
Communication-presentation skills	0	0	5	28	67	100	4.61
Human resource management	0	0	0	33	67	100	4.67
Legal regulation implementation	0	6	0	22	72	100	4.61
Financial management	0	0	6	33	61	100	4.55

the participants' answers for every single competence were analysed. All the participants generally (17%) or completely (87%) agreed that the competences related to the organization of teamwork in an institution for early and preschool education were the most important, which was confirmed by the highest value of the arithmetic mean (4.83). Furthermore, with a similar value of the arithmetic mean (4.67), this was followed by human resource management competences with 67%, with which 33% of the participants fully agreed. Advisory work with educators and parents was assessed as an absolutely significant competence by 72% of the participants, while 22% of them mostly agreed, and only 6% partially agreed with its importance. Legal regulation implementation followed, which had the same arithmetic mean value (4.61) as communication-presentation skills. In 94% of the participants, legal regulations were mostly (22%) or completely (72%) important for the successful performance of a principal's function, but for 6% of the participants these were not of special importance. However, 95% of the participants stated that communication skills were extremely important for the position of preschool principal, while only 5% declared them partly important. In relation to how competences connected to financial affairs (M = 4.55) were important for running an institution, 94% of the participants assessed that they were mostly (33%) or completely (61%) important, while for only one of them (6%) they were partially important. In the last category of the scale, the institution environment (M = 4.39) was assessed by 84% of the participants as mostly (17%) or completely (67%)

important, while some participants partially (5%) or mostly (11%) assessed it as unimportant. Competences of principals in the field of planning and programming within the institution ($M = 3.72$) and the evaluation of educational work had the lowest values of the arithmetic mean ($M = 3.78$). Of the participants, 67% assessed environmental analysis as an important competence, 17% of them partially agreed, and the same number mostly or completely did not agree. The work assessment, which in professional training is often pointed out as an exceptionally important competence for planning further work, was seen as mostly and completely important by 66% of the participants, but for 34% of them it was partially, mostly or completely insignificant. The participants assessed all competences as extremely important for the quality implementation of the process of leading and managing an institution for early and preschool education. The participants ($n = 18$) mostly answered positive and stated that all competences were important for principals. No participant decided to organize teamwork and the management of human resources on a scale (no, mostly not, partially), which distinguished these from other competences, for which the participants gave negative responses. Based on the obtained and analysed results, the first hypothesis, which assumed that the participants would positively assess the importance of the principal's competences, was verified.

3.4 Assessment of Participation in the Realization of a Principal's Key Tasks

Besides competences, the Standards for Principals of Upbringing and Educational Institutions lists several key tasks. The participants were offered twelve options, where they assessed to what measure they participated in the tasks' realization on the Likert scale (1 – it does not refer to me at all, 5 – it refers to me completely). The key tasks were divided into two tables; the first one referred to activities directed towards the organization of upbringing and educational tasks (12 key tasks), and the other referred to activities directed towards employees, parents and the community (8 key tasks).

Table 2: The principal’s key tasks involving work organization

As principal of a preschool institution...	Doesn't apply to me at all	It mostly doesn't apply to me	It partly applies to me	It mostly applies to me	It completely applies to me	Total	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	M
I participate in creating the vision and mission of the institution.	6	0	0	11	83	100	4.83
I participate in creating strategic documents.	0	5	0	28	67	100	4.55
I plan activities and projects in the institution.	0	0	39	39	22	100	3.83
I follow the implementation of planned activities and projects.	0	0	34	33	33	100	4.00
I assess all work in the institution.	0	5	17	17	61	100	4.33
I (self)assess my own work.	0	5	6	28	61	100	4.44
I introduce innovative methods and work techniques.	0	5	28	28	39	100	4.00
I analyse and assess the upbringing and educational process.	0	6	28	22	44	100	4.06
I participate in introducing new programs.	0	5	11	17	67	100	4.44
I manage material and financial affairs.	0	11	5	28	56	100	4.28
I follow and enforce lawfulness in the work of the institution.	0	0	6	11	83	100	4.78
I ensure the conditions for optimal functioning.	0	0	6	11	83	100	4.78

Of the total number of participants, as many as 83% estimated that three key tasks related entirely to them. These were shaping the vision and mission of the institution (M = 4.83), monitoring and implementing the legality of the work (M = 4.78), and ensuring the conditions for optimal functioning (M = 4.78). Of the participants, 67% also assessed the participation tasks of drawing up strategic documents (M = 4.55) and introducing new programs (M = 4.44) as tasks that were completely related to them. The tasks of self-assessment of their own work (M = 4.44) and the assessment of all work in the institution (M = 4.33) were assessed by 61% of the participants as applying to them completely. Among the participants, 56% assessed that the work of managing material and financial affairs in the institution (M = 4.28) related completely to them, but there was still 28% who stated that it mostly applied to them. A somewhat greater dispersion of answers came with the claims related to the

analysis of the upbringing and educational process ($M = 4.06$), where 66% of the participants stated that it applied to them completely or partially, and 34% stated that it was mostly or partially unrelated to them. The tasks of monitoring the implementation of planned activities and projects, as well as the introduction of innovative methods and work techniques, which have the same value of the arithmetic mean ($M = 4.0$), were assessed by most respondents as those that mostly or completely applied to them. Moreover, 66% of the participants agreed that the first task fully applied, while 67% agreed that the second task fully applied. Nonetheless, 34% or 28% respectively assessed these tasks as only partially applying to them. The lowest value of the arithmetic mean ($M = 3.83$) was held by the task of planning activities and projects in the institution, where only 22% of the participants assessed that it applied to them completely, and 39% that it mostly applied to them, while 34% claimed that it only partially applied to them.

The principal's key tasks aimed at employees, parents and the community are shown in *Table 3* and analyzed below.

Table 3: Key tasks of principals directed towards employees, parents, and the community

As principal of a preschool institution...	Doesn't apply to me at all	It mostly doesn't apply to me	It partly applies to me	It mostly applies to me	It completely applies to me	Total	M
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
I plan employment according to the specific needs of the institution.	0	0	17	11	72	100	4.56
I select candidates for employment.	5	11	0	56	28	100	3.89
I follow and analyse the work of employees and manage the process of their advancement.	5	6	17	28	44	100	4.00
I organize and follow the professional development of employees.	0	11	17	17	55	100	4.17
I participate in creating the culture of the institution.	0	0	11	28	61	100	4.50
I organize various forms of cooperation with parents.	0	11	28	39	22	100	3.72
I cooperate with community stakeholders.	5	6	1	22	56	100	4.17
I affirm the identity of the institution in public.	0	5	6	17	72	100	4.56

Of the participants, 83% mostly (11%) or completely (72%) agreed that employment planning according to the specific needs of the institution was the key task of principals of institutions and that it applied to them ($M = 4.56$). An identical value of the arithmetic mean pertained to the statement on the affirmation of the identity of the institution in public, including cooperation with the media, which was confirmed by 89% of participants, however two participants (11%) stated that it did not apply to them or did so only partially. On the tasks of participating in shaping the culture of the institution ($M = 4.50$) and developing a collaborative atmosphere and trust, 89% of the participants declared that these were key tasks that mostly (28%) or completely (61%) applied to them. Only 11% agreed partially. An identical assessment, according to the arithmetic mean value ($M = 4.17$), was given by the participants on the key tasks in realizing cooperation with shareholders in the community and in organizing and following the professional development of employees. Concerning cooperation with the community, 78% of the participants claimed that it applied to them, while 22% believed that it did not apply to them or did so only partially. Moreover, 72% of the participants assessed monitoring and analysing the work of employees and conducting the process of their advancement as tasks that mostly or completely applied to the principal. Concerning the selection of candidates for employment, 85% of the participants assessed it as a key task of the principal, while 16% did not agree ($M = 3.89$). The lowest mean value ($M = 3.72$) referred to the organization of various forms of cooperation with parents, where 61% of the participants assessed this as mostly or completely the task of the principal, and 39% of the participants negated it or confirmed it partially.

It is, therefore, necessary to continue to insist on additional educational programs for principals of educational institutions, where they would have the opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge and develop competences in the field of leadership and management.

4 Conclusion

This study was aimed at examining the leadership and management skills by principals of institutions for early and preschool education. Through an anonymous questionnaire, the opinions from principals of institutions for early and preschool education on the competences important for leadership and management and their participation in the areas of prescribed key tasks were examined. The study was

conducted on a sample of 18 principals of preschool institutions, municipal and privately funded, from the Zadar and Šibenik-Knin counties. The results indicated that the sample was dominated by women. The largest number of participants were between 40 and 60 years of age, with work experience in the profession between eleven and thirteen years, and as principals from one to ten years (72%). In terms of level of education, the sample was dominated by participants who had completed a two-year study program on preschool education and who had not acquired any knowledge in the field of leadership and management during their studies (61%). However, to be more successful in performing the function, 72% of the participants had participated in additional classes organized by the Ministry of Science and Education and the Agency for Education in this field, and many were exceptionally satisfied (55%) with the acquired competences. Even though most of the participants had completed a two-year study program on preschool upbringing, it was encouraging that they were aware that through their lifelong education they had the possibility of obtaining new competences and ensuring quality functioning in the field of leadership and management and were thus actively involved in improving.

In assessing the importance of principal competences, the participants rated human resource management and work with educators and parents as the most important ($M = 4.67$), along with the competences of conducting legal regulations and communication-presentation skills ($M = 4.61$). Numerous authors agree that the role of the principal of such an institution in the field of human resource management is of immense importance because it assumes a series of activities, from finding quality people and caring for their personal and professional development, to providing for their satisfaction within the institution (Špiljak & Modrić, 2009). Therefore, in this study the participants' assessments wherein the management of human resources was emphasized as the most significant competence was not surprising. Last in the assessment of the importance of individual competences was the evaluation of work ($M = 3.78$) and planning and programming ($M = 3.72$). In assessing their participation in the realization of key tasks aimed at the organization of their work, the highest ranking was shaping the vision and mission of the institution ($M = 4.83$), monitoring and enforcing the legality of the work of the institution, and ensuring conditions for optimal functioning ($M = 4.78$). However, the implementation of planned activities and projects ($M = 4.00$) and their planning in the institution ($M = 3.83$) were the lowest ranked tasks of the principal in the area of work organization. In assessing the key tasks of principals, focused on employees, parents and the

community, the largest number of participants pointed out the following key tasks: employment according to specific needs and affirmation of the institution's identity in public ($M = 4.56$), and participation in shaping the culture of the institution ($M = 4.50$).

The study provides concrete answers from practice, but a survey conducted on a larger sample of principals of early and preschool education institutions from other counties in the Republic of Croatia would contribute to making better and more meritorious conclusions on how principals assess the importance of competence and what they do most. In conclusion, principals of early and preschool education institutions in modern society no longer receive adequate educational preparation because they face numerous tasks that the leaders of large corporations also face. It is obvious that the process of running an upbringing and educational institution has significantly changed during the given period, making it necessary to continue to insist on additional educational programs for principals of educational institutions, where they would have the opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge and develop competences in the field of leadership and management.

References

- Radeka, I. (2016). Continuous professional development in an educational institution. In D. Vican, I. Sorić & I. Radeka (Eds.). *Management of an educational institution: Competence profile of the principal*. Zadar: University of Zadar (pp. 79–95).
- Rogić, A., & Karamatić Brčić, M. (2016). Lifelong learning of principals. In D. Vican, I. Sorić & I. Radeka (Eds.). *Management of an educational institution: Competence profile of the principal*. Zadar: University of Zadar (pp. 53–75).
- Seme Stojnović, I., & Hitrec, S. (2014). *Modern leadership in education*. Zagreb: Golden marketing.
- Staničić, S. (2006). *Management in education*. Rijeka: Vlastita naklada.
- Staničić, S., Kovač, V., & Đaković, O. (2016). *Standards for directors of educational institutions*. Zagreb: National Center for External Evaluation of Education.
- Špiljak, B., & Modrić, Ž. (2009). Human resources management. In S. Barabaš Seršić, Ž. Modrić, S. Hitrec, M. Rogić & O. Đaković. (Eds.). *Principal of school-management, leadership*. Zagreb: Agency for Education (pp. 123–141).
- Ulf, L. (2016). Professional norms and direction of pedagogical guidance of school principals. In D. Vican, I. Sorić, & I. Radeka. (Eds.) *Quality of educational institutions*. Zadar: University of Zadar, 59–80.
- Vican, D., Relja, R., & Popović, T. (2016). Leadership role of principals in education. In N. Alfirević, J. Burušić, J. Pavičić & R. Relja (Eds.), *School Efficiency and Educational Management: Towards Research and Public Policy Guidelines in Southeast Europe*. Zadar: University of Zadar, 89–108.