

## **PEDAGOGUE PROFESSIONAL WORKER IN A KINDERGARTEN - CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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(Original scientific paper)

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this paper is to understand the current situation, challenges and barriers related to the professional development of a professional pedagogue in kindergarten. Professional development through early learning and development programs refers to numerous experiences that offer opportunities for education, training and development of pedagogues, who are carriers of innovation and the quality of educational work in kindergartens. This is best noticed through competitions of pedagogues in their implementation of work programs, where he / she realizes them directly, through professional counseling work, with educators, children and their families. This research includes pedagogues who are employed in kindergartens in our country.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogue, professional development, barriers, kindergarten.*

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### **Introduction**

At a European level, there is no fully accepted definition of quality in preschool education. The debate on quality in preschool education, its aspects, the way it is organized, as well as the assessment of quality, is still conducted at the expert level (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2005, 2007; Dahlberg, Moss, 2005).

However, everyone agrees that quality is a complex concept that encompasses structures, processes and outcomes, includes established governance processes, defined stakeholder roles, curricula and programs, skilled and well-supported workforce, interaction between children, learning space and child development, learning and teaching processes, parent and community involvement, child-centered approach, inclusion, etc.

The OECD emphasizes that the benefits of pre-school education depend on its quality, and that expanding quantity without maintaining quality will not lead to benefits, either for children or in society.

### **Professional development of a kindergarten`s pedagogue - Challenges and barriers**

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the quality of preschool education is often associated with the work of a kindergarten`s pedagogue, and thus with their professional development.

The improvement of the qualifications (competences), training and working conditions of a pedagogue in a kindergarten, play a major role in the development of an institution and in children`s development and learning process. Interventions that contribute to improving quality of this area include qualifications, initial education, professional development and working conditions.

Thus, one of the key priorities in the Strategy for Education for 2018-2025 and the Action Plan, in the Republic of North Macedonia, are improving the content, learning conditions and quality in implementation of preschool education and improving the capacity of human resources in preschool institutions.

### **Research methodology**

The subject of this research was an analysis of the needs for professional development of kindergarten teachers, the challenges and barriers they face. This research has a character of empirical research. During

the research, methods of theoretical analysis were used, such as the comparative and descriptive method, and following techniques were applied: content analysis and survey. The research and analysis of the needs and barriers in professional development of pedagogues in kindergartens was done in the period August-September 2020, in kindergartens on the entire territory of the Republic of North Macedonia. The study included 23 pedagogues, which is the total number of employed pedagogues in kindergartens in the Republic of Northern Macedonia. During the research, most of the respondents - pedagogues, had less than 5 years of work experience, a few of them had more than 10 years of work experience, and very few of them had work experience between 5 and 10 years. Most of the surveyed pedagogues were from the provincial cities of the Republic of Macedonia, while a smaller percentage of them were from Skopje.

### Analysis of the results

Chart 1: Participation of pedagogues in professional development activities in the last 12 months.

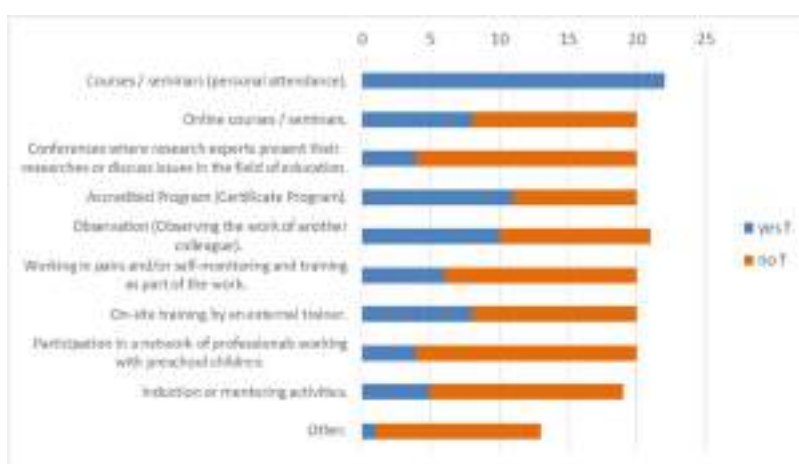
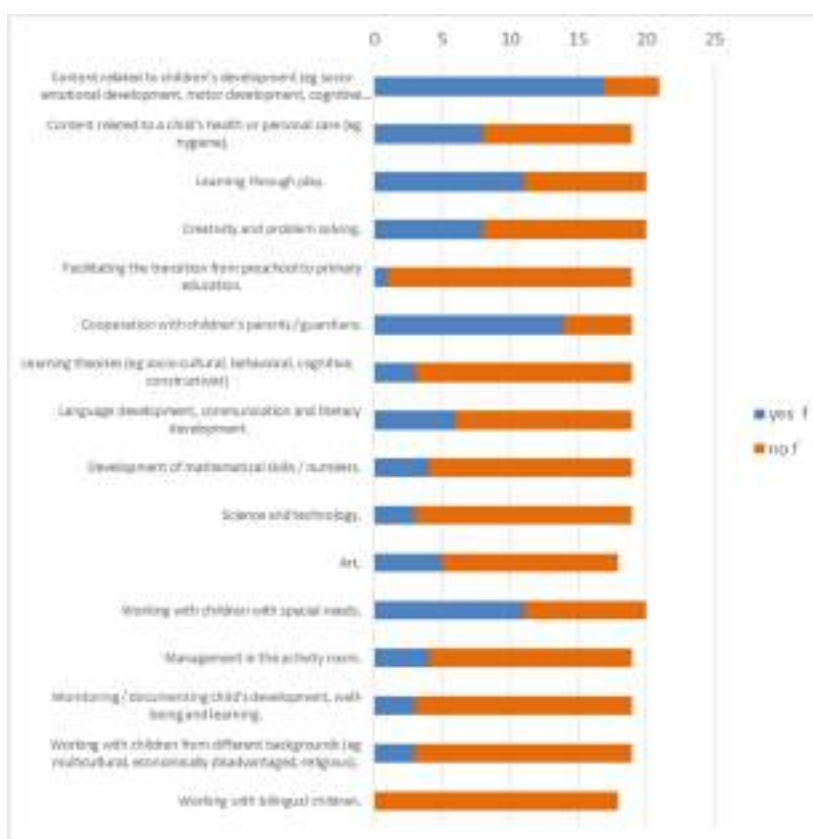


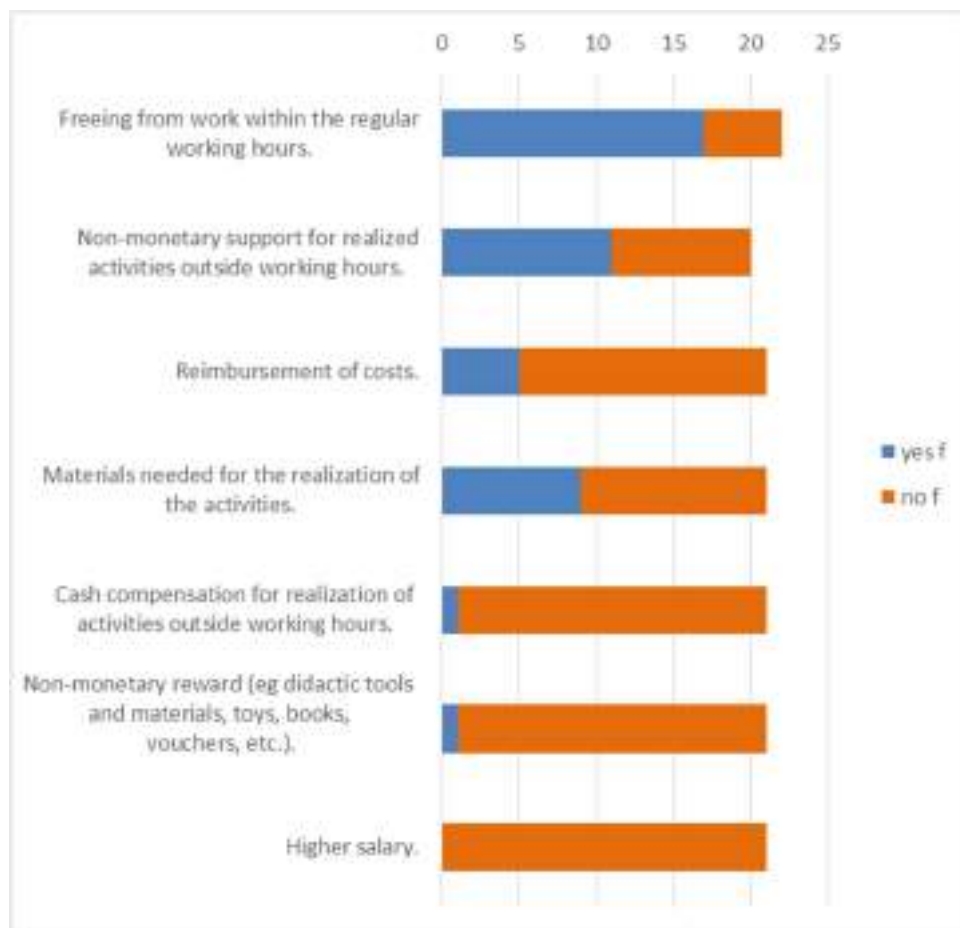
Chart 2: Topics included in the professional development of pedagogues in the last 12 months.



Regarding the question "Which of the following topics mentioned below were included in your professional development activities in the last 12 months?", the obtained data indicate that most of the surveyed pedagogues stated that in the last 12 months they participated in some of the following professional development activities: courses, seminars, professional development programs for obtaining a certificate, observation (monitoring the work of another colleague), online courses/seminars, on-site training by an external observer. A small number of them participated in conferences where research experts present their research or discuss issues from the field of preschool education. An equal number of educators that were surveyed said they had participated in some of the networks of professionals working with preschool children.

Based on the obtained data, it can be noticed that the most common topics for professional development of pedagogues in the last 12 months were the following: *Content related to children's development* (e.g. socio-emotional development, motor development, cognitive development, language, communication and development of literacy, etc.), *Cooperation with children's parents/guardians*, *Learning through play*, *Working with children with special needs*. Topics related to *Monitoring/Documenting child development*; *Well-being and learning*; *Working with children of different backgrounds* (e.g. multicultural, economically disadvantaged and religious) were less represented, and the topic of facilitating the transition from preschool to primary education was least common.

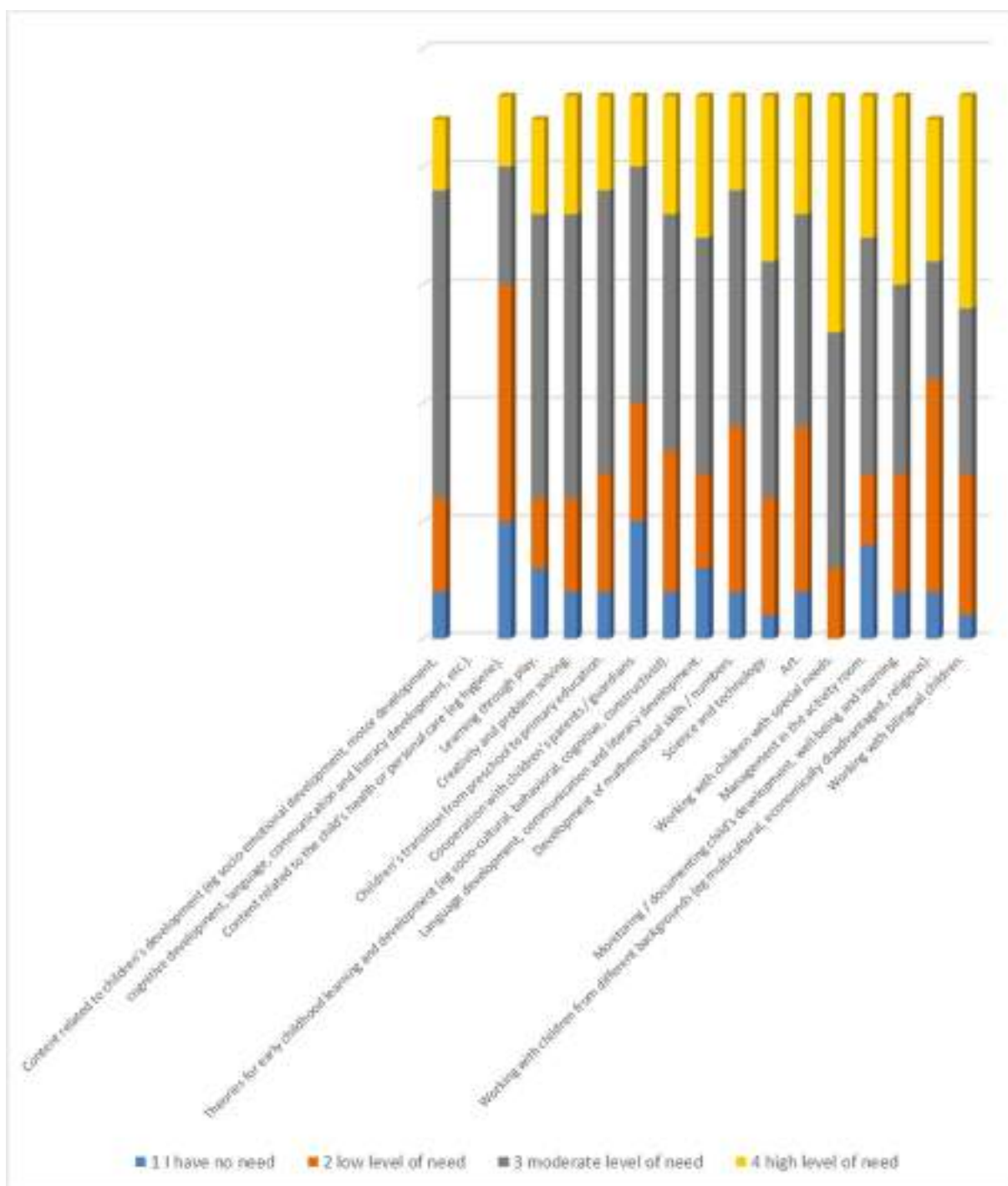
Chart 3: Opinion of the pedagogues related to the professional development benefits.



Regarding the category "Benefits of professional development of the pedagogue", more than 2/3 consider dismissal within the regular working hours as the biggest benefit, less than 1/2 answered: non-monetary support for carrying out activities outside working hours, more than 1/3 answered: materials needed for realization of activities, less than 1/3 answered: reimbursement of expenses, insignificantly a small part of the surveyed pedagogues answered: monetary compensation for realization of activities outside working hours, non-monetary reward (e.g. didactic tools and materials, toys, books, vouchers, etc.).

The following chart provides an overview of the assessment of educators related to contents that currently require professional development.

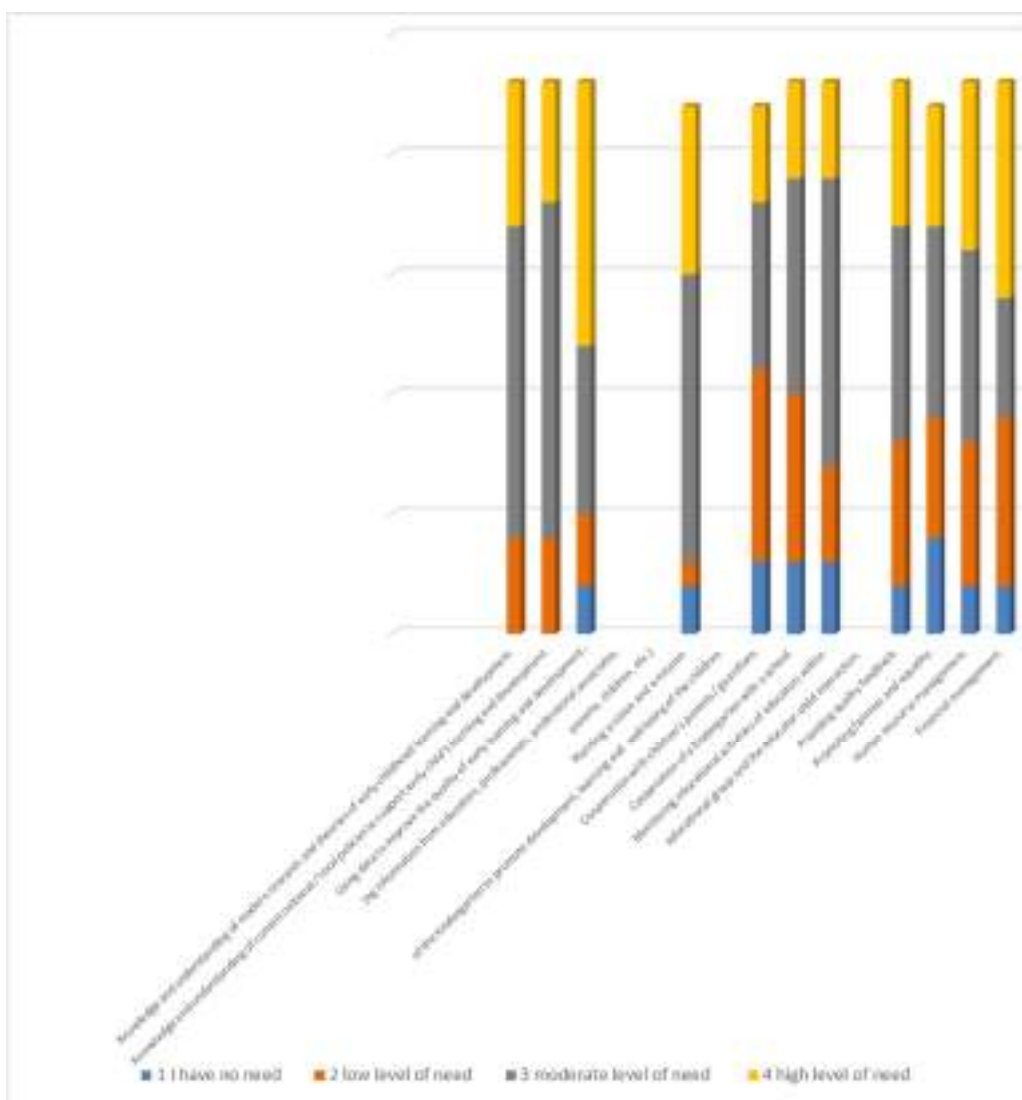
Chart 4: Assessment of current priority areas for professional development of pedagogues



As can be seen, pedagogues expressed high level of training needs for the following areas: *Working with children with special needs; Working with bilingual children; Monitoring/Documenting development of a child; A child's well-being and learning*, and low level of training needs in contents related to *Child's Health or Personal Hygiene* and *Working with Children of Different Origins*.

The following chart shows the obtained data regarding the priority areas for professional development of pedagogues.

Chart 5: Opinion of pedagogues related to the current state of professional development.

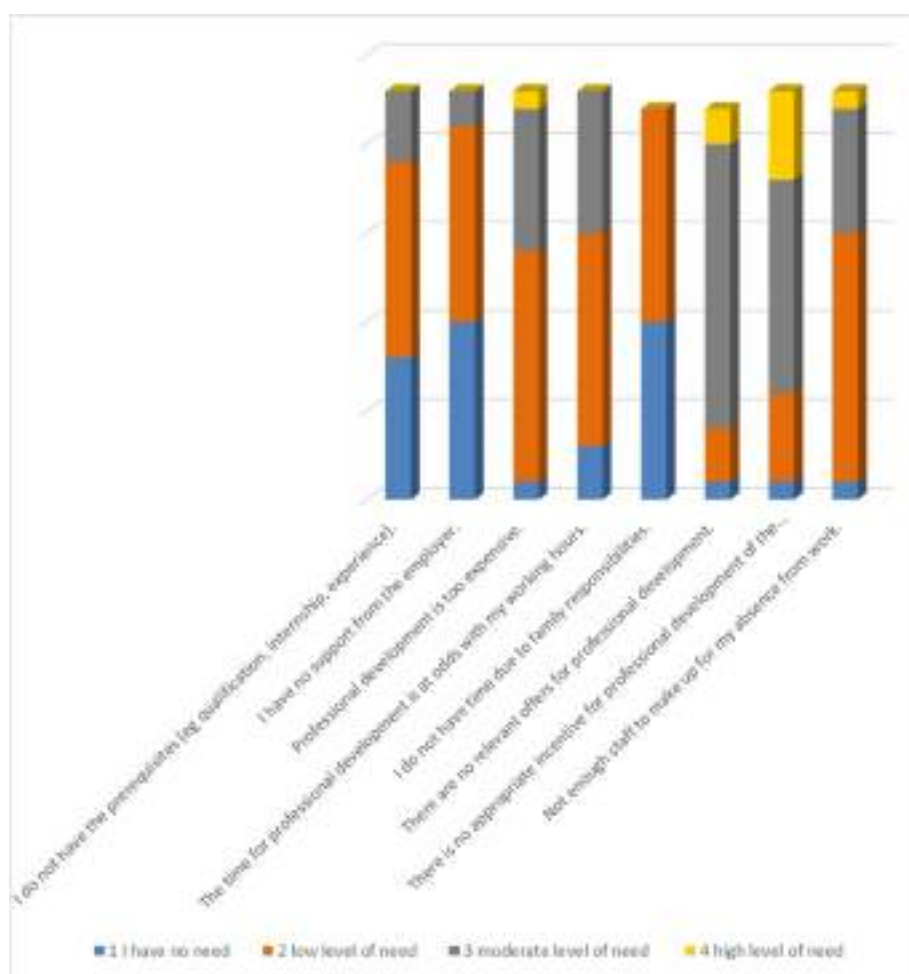


From the chart presentation, it can be noticed that pedagogues have a priority training needs in the field of “Using data to improve the quality of early learning and development of children”, and then is emphasized the need for improvement in the field of “Planning a Vision and Mission of the kindergarten to promote development, children's learning and well-being”. Respondents - pedagogues believe that the least need for professional development have in the areas of: Cooperation with children’s parents/guardians; Providing quality relevant information; Human resource management and Financial Management.

As can be seen from the obtained data, regarding the opinion of pedagogues related to *“Challenges and barriers for professional development”*, less than half of the respondents stated that a barrier is the fact that they do not have support of the employer, the same number of respondents said that a barrier to professional development is a lack of time due to family responsibilities, 1/3 of them consider that they do not have necessary prerequisites (e.g. qualification, internship, work experience), and less than 1/4 of them stated that the time needed for professional development is at odds with their working hours. A very small part of the surveyed pedagogues stated that professional development is too expensive, there are no relevant offers for professional development, there is no adequate incentive for professional development, and that kindergarten does not have enough staff to compensate for his/her absence from work.

Besides the barriers to professional development, pedagogues have certain challenges related to the training needs in the field of “Using data to improve the quality of children’s early learning and development”, and also is emphasized the training need in the field of “Planning of Vision and Mission of the kindergarten to promote development, learning and well-being of children”.

Chart. 6: Assessment of pedagogues related to barriers for professional development



### Concluding remarks

Based on the current practices and experiences related to professional development of the pedagogues in kindergartens in the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as based on the results of our research, it can be concluded that professional workers - pedagogues in kindergartens are often left to fend for themselves regarding their professional development. It is most often realized through trainings/seminars, workshops, it is separate from the practice, and it is not essentially related to changing development goals of preschool institution and improving quality of educational work in kindergarten.

General hypothesis in our research, which says “It is necessary to strengthen the service for professional development of pedagogues in kindergartens by organizing trainings, workshops and processes for quality control of educational work in kindergarten”, is fully confirmed.

In order to promote professional development of pedagogues in kindergartens in the Republic of North Macedonia, we propose:

- Changing and improving the legislation, which is insufficiently precise and insufficiently developed when it comes to various aspects related to professional development and career advancement of pedagogues.

- Raising the awareness of pedagogues about the importance of continuous professional development. In this research, the fact that about ½ of the respondents-pedagogues stated that they do not have time for professional development due to family responsibilities is worrying.

- Professional development at the kindergarten level should be an integral part of the pedagogue's work, and within the 40 working hours should be taken into account the hours that pedagogues have spent in training. It would be good to make a mechanism at the level of a networking system and exchange of experiences between kindergarten teachers throughout the Republic, and in that way professional development to be legally recognized and valorized. A good example of this is the Croatian model.

- Regarding professional development of pedagogues in kindergartens, we propose to improve the cooperation of the Bureau for Development of Education with kindergartens and to establish a quality mechanism for determining the needs of pedagogues for professional development.

Based on the above, we can conclude that in the effort to improve quality of educational work in a kindergarten, the entire system for professional development of a professional pedagogue as a carrier in introducing innovations and improving quality of educational work in a kindergarten, should be in function of practical work that he/she performs in the kindergarten and should be aimed at developing and strengthening his/her competencies.

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