

Teachers' activities that best encourage learning among students of preschool teachers' training college in Kikinda

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Abstract

Due to numerous reforms, modern teaching now asks for the role of the teacher to be redefined as well. One of the teacher's many tasks is to master the competencies which would enable them to encourage and stimulate their learners. In this article, authors report on a research conducted at Preschool Teachers' Training College in Kikinda, which aimed to contribute to a reflexive analysis of the role of the teacher in the context of contemporary teaching process. The goal of the research was to answer the question of which teachers' activities and strategies students at Preschool Teachers' Training College in Kikinda think best encourage the learning process. This question is also the research problem. Purposive and convenience sampling was used, and the sample consisted of students of Preschool Teachers' Training College (N=133). The instrument used in the research was the Excellent Faculty Member questionnaire by Jenrette and Napoli, 1994 (in Suzić, 2005, p. 861). The results obtained, frequency distribution and the mean of respondents' estimates reveal high scores on all the items. The highest rated items indicate that respondents have a high opinion on teachers' mastery of subject matter (M=3.857) and teachers' organization (M=3.857), but also on teachers giving feedback (M=3.805), listening to them carefully (M=3.789), respecting them (M=3.782) and maintaining high professional standards (M=3.767). The lowest rated item is related to teachers setting themselves challenging goals (M=3.436). Conclusions indicate that students find it motivating for learning when teachers exhibit mastery of subject matter, when their work organization is good, when they provide students with feedback, acknowledge and respect them while keeping in mind the students' abilities, skills, and previous knowledge, as well as when they are well prepared for the class and when they innovate the teaching contents. The students emphasized the importance of a positive emotional climate in the classroom to which humour, teacher-student relationship and challenging tasks and goals greatly contribute.⁶

Keywords: teachers' activities; encouraging learning; students.

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1. Introduction

Education, regardless of its level, has gone through numerous reformatinal changes which further bring forth a redefining of the role of the teacher since the modern-day teaching process implies different roles that teachers take on. The teacher, especially at the level of higher education, is expected to be an organizer, a facilitator, a moderator and an innovator. In order to be able to carry out all these functions, the teacher needs to master a specific set of competencies and skills so they would successfully enable the learning process as well as question, change and perfect their behavioural style.

When it comes to the competencies of teachers in elementary and high schools, the document *Guidebook on standard competencies for the profession of teachers and their professional development* (Institute for Improvement of Education, 2011) lists five basic types of competencies: competence for the field of teaching, subject and methodology of teaching, competence for teaching and learning, competence for supporting students' personal development and competence for communication. If we were to add to this list and move on to the next level of education, competencies of teachers in higher education would be the following: didactic-methodical knowledge and research skills and communication competency and the competencies developed by the teachers as a result of new demands set before them as a consequence of technological development and new demands of the students (Waple, 2006, in Turk and Ledić, 2016). Analysing the university teachers' competencies further, Turk and Ledić (2016) list the following skills: planning and conducting classes; applying various methods of study pertaining to learning outcomes; understanding and applying theories on which the process of learning and teaching is based; applying various evaluation and grading procedures pertaining to learning outcomes; creating an environment which will motivate students to learn; applying techniques of active learning in the teaching process; educating students to become socially responsible and active citizens; effective conflict resolution and negotiation skills; knowledge and understanding of ethical standards in teaching and research; presentation skills and application of research results in the teaching process.

Changes in education, caused by different societal changes, demand that teachers constantly question their role in the educational process (Lalić-Vučetić, 2015; Trivunović, 2017; Vučinić and Antonijević, 2020). One of the broadest classifications of the teachers' roles implies the difference between the pedagogical and the educational sphere of teaching. By carrying out their pedagogical role, the teacher influences the overall development of a student's personality, while by carrying out their educational role the teacher helps the students acquire knowledge, skills, and habits (Joksimović and Stojiljković, 2007). Nenad Suzić designed a specific classification of teachers' roles. The main criterion for determining the various roles was the relationship between traditional and modern teaching, as well as the need to explore the didactic role of the teacher in a different approach to teaching and in a teaching process in which students are active participants. In this context, the author lists the following teacher's roles: teacher as a didactician; teacher as a pedagogue; scientist-teacher role; teacher as a diagnostician;

teacher as an instructor of active teaching; teacher as a coordinator; teacher as a creator of interpersonal relationships; teacher as a builder of the emotional climate in the classroom and teacher in goal-oriented active learning (Suzić, 2005). Therefore, the essence of the teacher's role and their significance in the educational process are reflected in the way teachers plan, prepare and carry out teaching activities, in the ways they motivate students to actively participate in the educational process, and in the amount of attention they pay to the development of effective communication and interaction with their students (Vučinić and Antonijević, 2020). In the analysis of the role of a teacher as a motivator for engagement in the educational process, three different orientations have been established in literature: orientation towards studying the connection between the teacher's personal traits and various aspects of the teaching process and their successfulness; orientation towards what the teacher does as a professional in school – carrying out the teacher's roles and mastering competencies needed for a successful fulfilment of numerous and complex roles in school, and orientation towards exploring the teacher factor in efficient teaching – the concept of class management (Lalić-Vučetić, 2015). A much more diversified view and classification of teacher's roles is given by Ivić, Pešikan and Antić (2001) – the teacher's role in a narrower sense (teacher as a lecturer; as an organizer of teaching, partner in pedagogical communication, expert in their field); motivational role (motivating students to work, enticing and maintaining interest, teacher as a model for professional orientation); the role of an evaluator (evaluation of knowledge, behaviour and the personality of students); cognitive-diagnostic role; the role of a regulator of the social relationships in the class as a group; the role of a partner in affective interaction. When analyzing the role of the teacher as a moderator of teaching in higher education, Trivunović (2017) also states that this role has undergone significant changes. Regardless of the fact that the focus of the educational process has recently been primarily on students, the role of the teacher remains very important. By redirecting the focus to the students, the reform has created new challenges for teachers and their attitude towards the teaching process and the students. In this way, the role of the teacher as a student's helper and assistant is the first to be activated, which brings the teacher into a roughly equal relationship with the students. Now their goal is no longer to merely mediate between knowledge and students, but to teach them the skills of setting appropriate goals, structuring time and activities, balancing personal aspirations and objective circumstances, as well as balancing expectations and limitations. Furthermore, Carless stresses that the teacher's role is to design a learning environment which provides students with a multitude of possibilities to make assessments and take action in response to feedback given by the teachers. Effective feedback processes need to involve partnership and shared responsibilities between students and educators underpinned by learner-focused feedback practices (Carless, 2020). On the other hand, providing feedback to students on their individual learning processes and correcting their mistakes in a constructive way

can improve a student's sense of competence (Deci & Rian, 2000, in Vieluf and Gobel, 2019).

If we were to support the new roles of teachers with theoretical perspectives, we would choose the critical-constructivist theory of Wolfgang Klafki's who dismisses the idea of once dominant traditional, frontal teaching in which organization, planning and carrying out of teaching activities are completely under the control of the teacher. According to the theory mentioned, teaching is an interactive process in which students are active participants (Glaserfeld, 1995, in Vučinić and Antonijević, 2020) who also take part in the process of planning and design the tasks together with their teacher, state their ideas, suggestions and conclusions. Building work relationships with teachers as partners in a community will contribute to the student's productive experience (Ali et al., 2018). That is why the teaching process needs to be characterized by democratic atmosphere, which implies effective communication, mutual respect, solidarity in organization, high level of students' motivation, and the development of critical thinking. In such a teaching process, learning is directed towards both teachers and students (Vučinić and Antonijević, 2020). Since student-teacher interaction needs to exist for the teaching process and learning to happen, Hadi, Dazrullisa, Susantini and Kuntjoro (2020) emphasize the role of the teacher as an agent of learning, i.e. as a facilitator, a motivator, a promoter, an instructor of learning and a source of inspiration for students. With the various new changes happening in the field of education, the trends concerning teachers' roles shift towards the method of active learning (Jagtap, 2016). Now the teacher is the facilitator of learning and needs to become the mentor and motivate students through various activities and learning procedures among which, according to Jagtap (2016), the method of active learning stands out. The method of active learning, according to the author mentioned, focuses on offering help in learning and making the process of knowledge acquisition easier, so if a teacher is in the position to create an environment for active learning, he will help the students learn in different ways. Teaching in the 21st century needs to be based on three pedagogical principles: personalization, participation and productivity, and an efficient teacher needs to possess a wide spectre of different models of teaching and learning, strategies and techniques, and must know how to create the right conditions for learning (Ali et al., 2018). However, Mondal and Das (2018) state that before the teacher gets to know their students well, as well as their individual strengths and needs, he can hardly know which methods would positively affect these students. Nevertheless, it is a fact that numerous strategies of active learning exist today, they are all based on the constructivist paradigm, and they all emphasize the importance of cooperative and experiential learning and well as connecting theory and practice (Koludrović, 2013).

When speaking of the curricular approach to higher education which starts from learning outcomes, i.e. defined competencies of graduate students, Kovačević (2001) emphasizes an important question of how students learn and what methods and procedures could guarantee knowledge acquisition in the process of learning. The

teacher has a great responsibility for their students' development and their support is needed during the process of learning and growing-up. Participation offers an adequate model through which this support can be given without the participation being necessarily in contradiction to the teacher's authority, because if authority is built on respect, understanding, sensitivity to students and their demands, partnership and constant encouraging of students' development, participation not only is not in contradiction to this type of authority but it supports and encourages it (Vranješević, 2005). It is clear that the educational effects also depend on the students, their abilities, motivation and other personal characteristics, but the teacher is the one who should transfer knowledge in an adequate way, create a good work climate, motivate and guide the students towards the set, predefined outcomes (Stojiljković et al., 2012). It is of great importance that the teacher works on their own development which, in addition to lifelong learning, also implies the development of the ability to create a harmonious relationship with their students through interaction, to meet their students' various needs and respect the diverse profiles of students.

Within this field of research great attention is directed towards studies which deal with questioning the teachers' activities and strategies which contribute to students' motivation for learning. Besides studying motivation, empathy of teachers has been explored as an important precondition for successful acquisition of knowledge in the process of learning. Accomplishment in learning can only be achieved if motivation and interest arise in a student, which implies that the role of a teacher as a motivator is an important topic that needs to be acknowledged (Hadi et al., 2020). Different processes can be efficient in raising motivation and interest in students in the sense of strengthening the students' predisposition for learning (Vieluf and Gobel, 2019). In this context, empirical research conducted by Lalić-Vučetić (2015) contributed to specifying procedures and activities teachers can use as an important potential in motivating students to learn. The procedures are represented through categories which represent relevant spheres of pedagogical and educational work of teachers. The categories are the following: incentives directed towards the development of students' confidence; teacher's incentives directed towards planning and students' self-evaluation (incentives directed towards teaching techniques for guided learning and students' self-evaluation); teachers' activities and students' behaviour in the teaching process itself (desirable teaching activities focused on developing internal motivation) and activities which will provide the teacher with a necessary self-insight into teaching. The analysis of pedagogical starting points and other relevant sources clearly points to the fact that teachers, most often as external motivators, through good interpersonal relationships with their students, can positively affect the process of motivating students to engage in the teaching process (Trumić, 2021). The results of the research carried out by Trumić (2021) confirm the starting assumption that the experimental programme, i.e. students' and teacher's engagement in the teaching process and their interpersonal relationships will affect the students' motivation, their involvement and the pedagogical climate in

school. The quality of the experimental programme was checked and based on research results it was determined that there is a statistically significant influence of students' and teachers' involvement and the quality of their relationships on the students' motivation, their involvement and the pedagogical climate in school. In addition, research on teachers' empathy conducted by Stojiljković, Stojanović and Dosković (2012) confirmed that there are differences in the levels of empathy in teachers employed in elementary, high, and higher education, as well as that elementary school teachers are more empathetical than the teachers working in high school and in faculties.

Smith (2021) writes that the professional role of a teacher can be explained through the defined standards and qualifications, whereas the very personality of a teacher is somewhat harder to assess since it depends on the teacher's most significant observers – their students. Chavez Rojas, Faure Ñiñoles & Barril Madrid (2021), according to Assunção Flores (2023) stress that the process of building the professional identity of a teacher is based on comparing and contrasting different experiences which culminate in building new identity positions of the teacher. Since there are no specific standards for measuring the quality of a teacher, their role is therefore not easy to concretize. Raufelder and associates (Raufelder, Bukowski, and Mohr, 2013, according to Smith, 2021) have found out that adolescents value the interpersonal dimensions of a teacher higher than the academic ones. Ulvik (2009, according to Smith, 2021) in his research concludes that the students' expectations from a teacher are realistic, given that they expect their teacher to easily communicate with them, understand them, employ various teaching methods and set high demands. Tomines and Mathiesen (2013, according to Smith, 2021) obtained similar results in their studies, and they thus emphasize that a good teacher manages their class well, is clear and well prepared for teaching, is flexible and capable of dealing with spontaneous situations appearing during the process of teaching.

In the end, it is important to differentiate the related notions of quality teacher and quality teaching (Sachs, 2016, according to Steadman & Ellvis, 2021). The quality of a teacher focuses on personality traits and performances of an individual, and the quality of the teaching process is related to the practice of a teacher (Churchward & Willis 2019, according to Steadman & Ellvis, 2021). However, a teacher's efficacy is often used as an indicator of a teacher's quality (Skourdoumbis, 2017, according to Steadman & Ellvis, 2021). There is also the term 'classroom ready teachers' (TEMAG 2014 according to Steadman & Ellvis, 2021) Olsen (2021) has also been working on reaching the answer to the question of what an excellent teacher looks like. In order to answer this question, it is important to first identify the skills, personality traits and behaviours which excellent teachers possess or demonstrate. Zbróg (2014) in that context emphasizes that a teacher is expected to play numerous roles while doing their job in an ever-changing environment, to apply new methodologies and techniques and meet the demands of the world. In this quite complex system, the role of the teacher is considered crucial. The way in which teachers shape their students, not only in the classroom but in the wider school environment as well is also important. In this context, the teacher as an agent of change

performs their many roles, consciously or unconsciously, thus enriching the repertoire through continuous professional development. The conscience of a teacher is important, i.e. the extent to which the teachers understand the roles they are expected to perform and how they understand the significance of the activities related to their professional development (Zbróg, 2014). Thus Lichtenstein, McLaughlin and Knudsen proposed the idea that the expansion of knowledge in a teacher plays the key role in their empowerment (Lichtenstein, McLaughlin and Knudsen, 1992, according to Zbróg, 2014).

Keeping in mind the theoretical and methodological support for the topic we have chosen, the research was conducted in order to try and identify the activities of teachers which the students have perceived as the most important in the process of learning. The contribution of our research can be found in providing a wider picture of the activities of teachers which best encourage our students to learn from the students' perspective. There are different studies which deal with the question of how excellent teachers work, and we wanted to further elaborate on this topic on the level of higher education.

2. Methodology

The main research method was nonexperimental – a survey on a sample. The paper title provides a preliminary definition of the research problem – activities of teachers which best promote learning among students at Preschool Teachers' Training College in Kikinda.

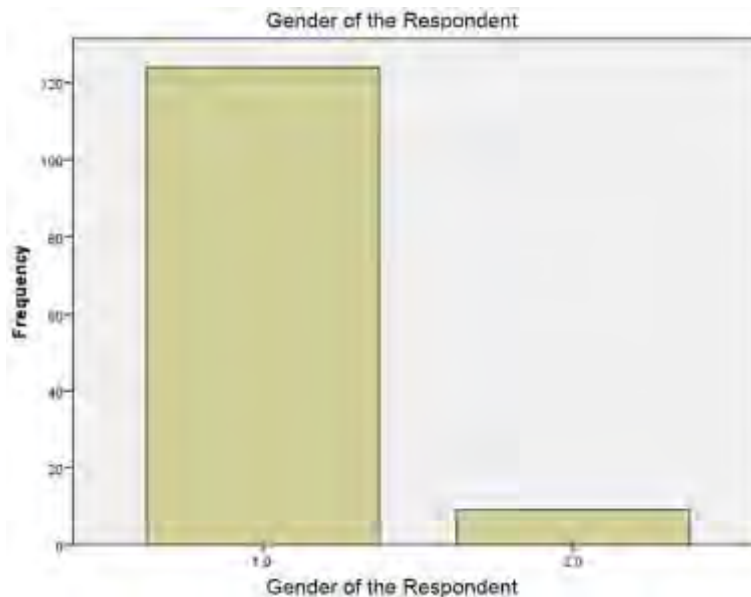
Keeping in mind the theoretical framework on the changed role of the teacher in modern-day education, we decided to conduct this research and answer the question of how the students of Preschool Teachers' Training College in Kikinda perceive their teacher's activities and behaviours which best promote the process of learning and knowledge acquisition. The given question is also the problem of our research.

The main goal of the research was to determine the students' perceptions on teachers' activities which best promote learning.

Research sample

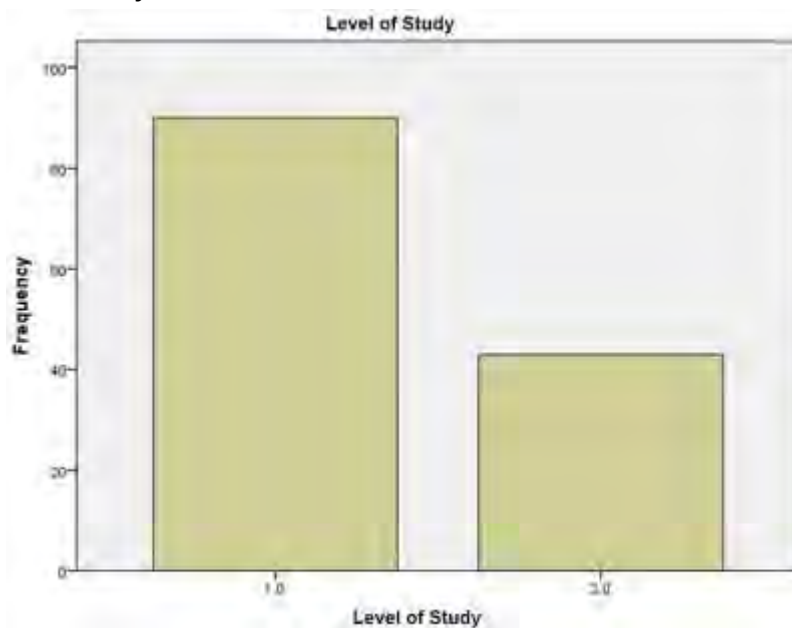
The sample consisted of 133 students at Preschool Teachers' Training College in Kikinda, undergraduates from two departments (Preschool Teacher and Preschool Teacher of Traditional Dance) and students of first and second year of master studies. The sample was purposeful and convenient, which is in accordance with the explorative nature of the research.

The research sample consisted of respondents of both genders – male and female. Of the total number of respondents, 124 (93,20%) reported their gender as female, and 9 (6,80%) as male (Graph 1). The calculated value of Chi square $\chi^2=99,436$ (df=1) with statistical significance of $p=.001$ shows that the sample is not matched by gender (or sex?) of respondents.



Graph 1: Respondents' distribution by gender

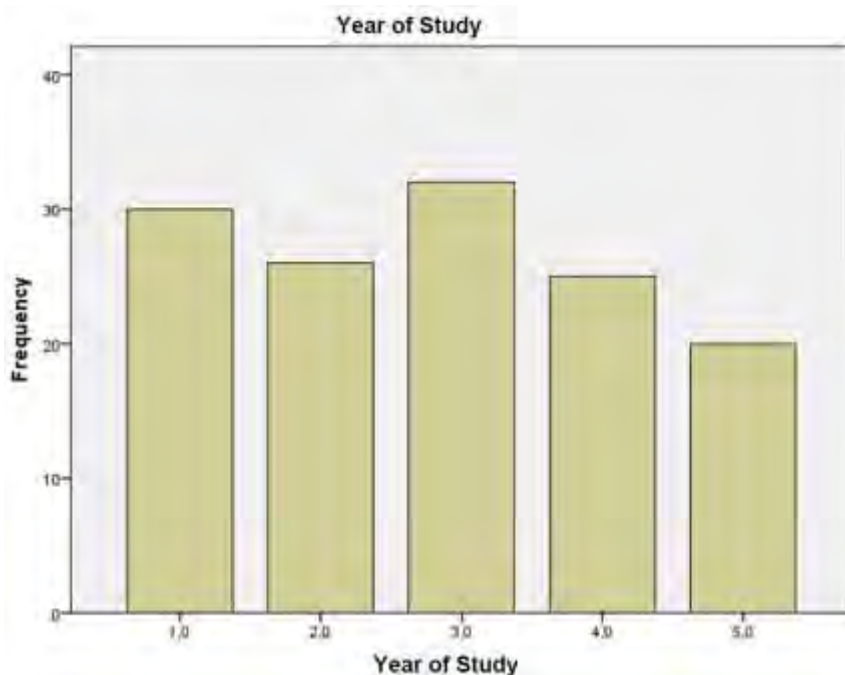
Of the total number of respondents, 90 (67,70%) reported their level of studies as undergraduate students and 43 (32,30%) as master's students (Graph 2). The calculated value of Chi square $\chi^2=16.609$ (df=1) with statistical significance of $p=.001$ shows that the sample is not matched by level of studies.



Graph 2: Respondents' distribution by level of studies

When it comes to the sample structure by year of study, 30 (22,60%) of responded reported they are currently on the first year of undergraduate studies, 26 (19,50%) are currently on the second year of undergraduate studies, 32 (24,10%) are currently on the third year of undergraduate studies, 25 (18,80%) reported they are currently on the first year of master's studies, and 20 (15%) respondents reported they are currently on the second year of master's studies (Graph 3). The calculated value of Chi square $\chi^2=3,278$

($df=4$) with statistical significance of $p=.512$ shows that the sample is matched by year of studies.



Graph 3: Respondents' distribution by year of studies

Instrument

The instrument used in the research was the *Excellent Faculty Member* questionnaire by Jenrette and Napoli, 1994 (in Suzić, 2005, p. 861). The questionnaire consists of 28 items describing teacher's activities that best promote students' learning. The respondents rated the items on the scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is the lowest and 4 is the highest rating (Suzić, 2005, p. 861). The instrument has good internal consistency and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is .955.

Research process and data processing

Research was carried out during February 2022, electronically, via Google questionnaire. Data collected were processed and analysed using IBM SPSS 21 software, and descriptive statistics was used to describe the data.

3. Research results

Table 1 shows frequency distribution (N and %) and the mean (M) for the items in the questionnaire *Excellent Faculty Member* (Jenrette & Napoli, 1994, in Suzić, 2005, p. 861).

Table 1

Students' answers on teachers' activities which best promote learning

Items	Min.	Max.	M	SD	Students' answers				Total
					1	2	3	4	
Excellent teachers...									
...are enthusiastic about their work.	2	4	3.609	.5619	0 (0%)	5 (3.8%)	42 (31.6%)	86 (64.7%)	133 (100%)
...present their ideas clearly.	2	4	3.759	.5098	0 (0%)	5 (3.8%)	22 (16.5%)	106 (79.7%)	133 (100%)
...are well prepared for work.	2	4	3.707	.5043	0 (0%)	3 (2.3%)	33 (24.8%)	97 (72.9%)	133 (100%)
...exhibit mastery of subject matter.	2	4	3.857	.3722	0 (0%)	1 (.8)	17 (12.8%)	115 (86.5%)	133 (100%)
...are responsible towards the students' needs.	2	4	3.759	.5098	0 (0%)	5 (3.8%)	22 (16.5%)	106 (79.7%)	133 (100%)
...pose challenging tasks to students.	2	4	3.511	.6230	0 (0%)	9 (6.8%)	47 (35.3%)	77 (57.9%)	133 (100%)
...set themselves challenging goals.	1	4	3.436	.7319	2 (1.5%)	13 (9.8%)	43 (32.3%)	75 (56.4%)	133 (100%)
...give corrective feedback quickly and directly.	1	4	3.594	.6400	2 (1.5%)	5 (3.8%)	38 (28.6%)	88 (66.2%)	133 (100%)
... evaluate the students' progress fairly.	1	4	3.714	.5583	1 (.8%)	4 (3%)	27 (20.3%)	101 (75.9%)	133 (100%)
...carefully listen to what the students say.	2	4	3.789	.4776	0	0	20 (15%)	109 (82%)	133 (100%)
...see their students as subjects that operate in a broader perspective than the classroom.	1	4	3.541	.6573	1 (.8%)	9 (6.8%)	40 (30.1%)	83 (62.4%)	133 (100%)
...are committed to the teaching profession.	1	4	3.737	.5207	1 (0.8%)	2 (1.5%)	28 (21.1%)	102 (76.7%)	133 (100%)
...use teaching techniques which inspire intellectual courage.	2	4	3.624	.5721	0 (0%)	6 (4.5%)	38 (28.6%)	89 (66.9%)	133 (100%)
...respect different talents.	1	4	3.752	.5422	1 (.8%)	4 (3%)	22 (16.5%)	106 (79.7%)	133 (100%)
...show positive attitudes towards students' learning abilities.	2	4	3.722	.5273	0 (0%)	5 (3.8%)	27 (20.3%)	101 (75.9%)	133 (100%)
...treat their students with respect.	2	4	3.782	.4661	0 (0%)	3 (2.3%)	23 (17.3%)	107 (80.5%)	133 (100%)
...maintain high professional standards.	2	4	3.767	.4749	0 (0%)	3 (2.3%)	25 (18.8%)	105 (78.9%)	133 (100%)
...are available to students.	2	4	3.752	.5135	0 (0%)	5 (3.8%)	23 (17.3%)	105 (78.9%)	133 (100%)

...expose students to diverse scientific perspectives.	1	4	3.617	.6363	1 (.8%)	8 (6%)	32 (24.1%)	92 (69.2%)	133 (100%)
...provide written evaluation criteria at the beginning of semester.	2	4	3.669	.5466	0 (0%)	5 (3.8%)	34 (25.6%)	94 (70.7%)	133 (100%)
...use teaching techniques which encourage independent thinking.	2	4	3.639	.5551	0 (0%)	5 (3.8%)	38 (28.6%)	90 (67.7%)	133 (100%)
...keep up-to-date with theory and practice and innovate the contents of the subjects they teach.	2	4	3.669	.5182	0 (0%)	3 (2.3%)	38 (28.6%)	92 (69.2%)	133 (100%)
...encourage students to be analytical listeners.	2	4	3.684	.5417	0 (0%)	5 (3.8%)	32 (24.1%)	96 (72.2%)	133 (100%)
...introduce students to alternative ways of learning.	2	4	3.624	.5852	0 (0%)	7 (5.3%)	36 (27.1%)	90 (67.7%)	133 (100%)
...possess a sense of humor which strengthens the teacher-student bond.	1	4	3.564	.6438	1 (.8%)	8 (6%)	39 (29.3%)	85 (63.9%)	133 (100%)
...keep accurate records of students' progress.	2	4	3.722	.5128	0 (0%)	4 (3%)	29 (21.8%)	100 (75.2%)	133 (100%)
...provide feedback to their students and others.	2	4	3.805	.4345	0 (0%)	2 (1.5%)	22 (16.5%)	109 (82%)	133 (100%)
...are well organized in their job.	2	4	3.857	.3920	0 (0%)	2 (1.5%)	15 (11.3%)	116 (87.2%)	133 (100%)

Frequency distribution (N and %) and the mean (M) of the respondents' answers shown in Table 1 indicate high scores on all the items. The highest rated items show that the respondents find the teachers' knowledge and organization equally encouraging for learning, which is indicated by the following items: excellent teachers *exhibit mastery of subject matter* ($M=3.857$), which was confirmed by the high percentage (86.5%) of the highest grade given and *are well organized in their job* ($M=3.857$) where 87.2% of respondents gave this item the highest grade.

Students highly rank the *fair* approach of their teachers in evaluating students' progress ($M=3.714$) with 75.9% of the highest grade, when the teachers *are well prepared for work* ($M=3.707$) with 72.9% of the highest grade, and when they *encourage students to be analytical listeners* ($M=3.684$) with 72.2% of the highest grade. The next items are also equally ranked, and they are: *provide written evaluation criteria at the beginning of semester* ($M=3.669$) with 70.7% of the highest grade, and *keep up-to-date with theory and practice and innovate the contents of the subjects they teach* ($M=3.669$) with 69.2% of the highest grade.

The item related to humour, *possess a sense of humor which strengthens the teacher-student bond* ($M=3.564$) was graded by our respondents with 63.9% of the highest grade. It was noticed that the item *see their students as subjects which operate in a wider perspective than the classroom* ($M=3.541$) received 62.4% of the highest grade, and *pose*

challenging goals to their students ($M=3.511$) 57.9%. The lowest ranked item is *set themselves challenging goals* ($M=3.436$) where it was noticed that the respondents graded this item with 56.4% of the highest grade.

4. Discussion

Starting from the research goal of determining how the students of Preschool Teachers' Training College in Kikinda assess the activities of their teachers which best promote learning, the results of the research conducted show that the respondents have a high opinion on teachers' knowledge and organization, because they believe that a teacher's subject matter knowledge and good organization are the aspects which best encourage students to learn. Students find it important that they get feedback from their teachers, but they also think highly of teacher-student relationship based on respect and appreciation. Other teachers' activities that encourage students to learn are providing proper and timely information, up-to-date contents and, therefore, innovation in content. In the teaching process, specific teaching methods are used to create the most favourable conditions for initiating the process of learning (Terhart, 2001).

Teacher's effort to encourage students to state their opinions freely and actively participate in task solving and goal achievement is also highly motivating for students. A high percentage of students emphasized the importance of a fair treatment by the teacher and a relationship in which their abilities are respected, and they are directed towards different ways of learning, as well as the importance of timely information on the progress and grading of each student. Respondents' positive answers confirm that the emotional climate in the classroom which depends on humour possessed and expressed by the teacher affects the motivation for learning and enables easier solving of the tasks given. Numerous authors have dealt with the benefits of using humour in teaching (Berk, 1988; Glemm, 2002, Hill, 1988; Pollio & Humphreys, 1996, according to Garner, 2006). The use of humour in the classroom directly contributes to a favourable emotional climate, opens up perceptive and affective channels for receiving new information, and in this sense, learning through humour is perceptively deeper and experientially stronger (Suzić, 1998). Krnjajić (2006) stresses that the main function of humour in teaching is to intellectually motivate and affectively relax the students. Ziv (1988) offers two examples of experiments with using humour in teaching and learning in higher education. The results of the first experiment, conducted on 161 students, showed significant differences between the two groups in favour of the group which learned with humour. The second experiment was conducted on 132 students in a one semester introductory psychology course and the results showed that the group studying with humor achieved higher scores on the final exam.

The results obtained show that the role of the teacher in modern-day teaching has changed and that it is now more important for the teacher to introduce students to contents in a creative, inspiring and innovative way, to see students as active participants

in the process of teaching and not as mere recipients of information, as well as that these are the key activities of teachers that inspire students to learn.

5. Conclusion

The importance and the role of the teacher in the educational process has been emphasized and valued throughout human history. The teacher was given certain characteristics, competencies, responsibilities and duties, and the modern society now assigns the teacher a new role and demands new knowledge and abilities from them (Đurić, 1996).

Teachers' characteristics which encourage students to become active and learn are: adequate organization of teaching, the way of interpreting contents, motivation for work and transferring of information, as well as finding ways to present the contents to each student in accordance with their abilities, skills and affinities and enable each student to solve the tasks. The teacher is not only a lecturer and an evaluator, but also a planner, an organizer, a moral trainer and, in addition to subject matter and methodical-didactic knowledge, they need to possess positive personal qualities (Nedeljković, 1997). Bratanić (1993) states that developed empathy skills can come into view in teacher-student communication. In order for a teacher to adjust their communication to their students, they need to communicate with them emphatically, i.e. adjust their communication to their students' abilities and levels of understanding.

Author Danilović (2011) states that the society today expects the teacher to possess about 200 positive moral virtues, to perform about 195 roles and functions, possess 50 forms and types of communication, possess knowledge from at least 10 scientific areas and disciplines, and be able to carry out 80 types and forms of learning, i.e. types of teaching, and that these are demands expected or asked from no other profession, even if they are maybe better appreciated and more highly respected in society.

Teachers in a higher education institution need to be both educators and associates, colleagues and mentors to their students. Similar results were obtained by authors Malčić, Tančić and Kostović (2017) in their research with third year students of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. As an example of good practice, we can mention the Republic of Slovenia whose National program of higher education 2011-2020 lists excellence in teaching as one of the goals and demands the institutions to offer programs of continuous pedagogical training and support the teaching staff in developing their competencies. Another example is Great Britain where a College of Education, in cooperation with British universities, has developed "Framework of professional standards of United Kingdom for teaching and support for learning in higher education" which "nurtures creative and innovative approaches to teaching and learning" (Ćirić, 2018).

Krnjajić (2007) believes that the main goal of exploring the teacher's influence on students is to gain deeper understanding of teacher-student interaction. The teacher's

support, their perception of interpersonal connectedness, and favouring cooperative forms of learning are important factors which influence learning and prosocial outcomes. The results of several researches show that a high level of connectedness between high academic achievement, high educational expectations and class climate depends on the teacher's encouragement and support (Wang, Haertel, Walberg, 1990, in Krnjajić, 2007). The teacher's profession is very complex and demanding. A teacher needs to constantly develop in the pedagogical, psychological and professional sense, but also in the field of educational technologies and other general topics. This necessitates lifelong learning and continued professional development (Suzić, 2005) which further influence the teacher's motivation and encouragement offered to students.

Teachers need to accept that the students' demands change very quickly and that these changes ask for new competencies, new approaches to teaching and learning, and encourage open and flexible learning in order to achieve better learning outcomes. All of this leads to the teachers' lifelong education, their adjusting to modern generations and ways of working. The teaching process needs to be based of the latest scientific and professional knowledge, it should encourage critical thinking in students, and the teacher should be open to students' different opinions, i.e. the teacher should be an active participant of a two-way teaching process.

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