

## Development of the preschool teachers' partnership competence

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to study the current level of preschool teachers' partnership competence in the aspect of interacting in the teaching staff. During the research, questionnaires and statistical methods of analysis were conducted. The results of the study show that 82% of the respondents describe the psychological climate in the team as moderately favourable, 6% note its high level, 9% feel low favourableness, and 3% see it as unfavourable. The conducted research revealed a positive moderate correlation between the partnership competence level and the psychological climate level in the team of preschool teachers. Therefore, a positive psychological climate, characterized by mutual understanding, support and openness, contributes to creating a favorable environment for partnership interaction. When teachers feel comfortable and supported in the team, they are more inclined to work together, share experiences and provide mutual support. The area of further research is to identify the relationship between the professional development of teachers and their partnership competence, as well as to study the impact of distance learning on partnership interaction between teachers and ways of its development in the digital environment.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

At the same time, modern transformations in the world pose new questions to researchers that need to be addressed in the context of effective pedagogical trends [1]. Partnership is one of the most widely required soft skill of modern employers. The importance of a partnership approach in the interaction between participants of the educational process is being increasingly recognized. For example, in 2018, a new standard of primary education was approved in Ukraine, which introduced a new approach to learning in junior high school. At the end of 2020, the updated basic component of preschool education was approved in order to preserve the continuity of education, that is, steadiness and common principles of all the educational levels. Crosscutting and most important for both documents is partnership interaction competence. Partnership competence of preschool teachers determines their ability to cooperate, exchange information and experience. Effective partnership work contributes to the harmonious development of preschool children, increases the level of parents' satisfaction with preschool education, and creates a positive climate in the educational institution. Partnership pedagogy becomes one of the key concepts that contributes to effective learning of preschool children. Preschool age is a critical period for the development of social skills. Partner

interaction helps children learn to communicate, develop empathy, enter a wider social environment and feel comfortable. Partnership pedagogy involves the active participation of young children in the process of early education, the joint work of teachers and parents, as well as the promotion of mutual understanding and cooperation between teaching staff. The other aspects of partnership competence of preschool teachers are communication skills, teamwork, pedagogical interaction, reflection and striving for self-improvement, adaptability, benevolence in communication with children, the absence of a superior attitude. This approach is based on mutual trust, respect for the individuality of each participant, and recognition of their contribution to the learning process [2].

Researches on the teachers' partnership competence is generally focused on the interaction between students and teachers of different school age [3], [4]. However, there are not enough studies on the preschool teachers' interaction with young children in the kindergartens, their parents and between the preschool teachers' staff. In the study, the most attention is paid on the last aspect from the listed. Understanding the factors that facilitate or hinder partnership interaction between teachers is important for the development of effective strategies for cooperation and team support. Therefore, the aim of this research is to study the current level of preschool teachers' partnership competence in the aspect of interacting in the teaching staff. The main research objectives arising from the relevance of the issue under research are: i) Determine the level of preschool teachers' partnership competence; ii) Study whether there is a relationship between the level of partnership competence and the psychological climate level in the teaching staff; and iii) Analyse propositions for improving partnership interaction with colleagues among the teaching staff of the preschool education institution.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Partnership pedagogy emphasizes the principle of parity, which is relevant for the cooperation and teamwork of a teacher with persons interested in the quality of education, specialists, and experts [5]. Such cooperation is aimed at achieving partnership agreement for educational purposes, personal progress of each participant and consistency with the idea of the institution and the community. Pedagogical partnerships have the potential to help students recognize and work with their emotions during learning positively [6]. Many teachers and researchers have long advocated learner-centred and learner-driven pedagogy. Especially those who deal with sustainable education [7].

The scope of the parity partnership is to study the academic performance of the pupil or school concerned, as well as the characteristics of childhood (voluntary attention, development of thinking processes, motivation). This study is based on the following sources: [8]-[10]. The fundamental postulates of partnership pedagogy are respect for the individual, goodwill and positive attitude, trust in relationships and relations, dialogue-based interaction, mutual respect, distributed leadership (initiative, right to choose and responsibility for it, horizontal connections), the principle of social partnership (equality of parties, voluntary acceptance of obligations, binding implementation of agreements) [11], [12]. The pedagogical partnership competence includes: the ability to communicate with colleagues, parents, other specialists in order to support students; the ability to actively involve parents in the educational process on the basis of partnership; the ability to work in a team with parents and other specialists to provide additional support to students, including to those with special educational needs [13]. Myllykoski-Laine *et al.* [14] define the concept of 'development of pedagogical partnership competence' as the process of active learning of partnership pedagogy by a teacher based on subjective experience, which allows him/her to perform work functions successfully. The result of this activity is the acquisition of practical skills. Criteria that determine the effectiveness of the idea of developing partnership relations as the most productive system of relations in the context of pedagogical interaction reflective analysis of one's own behaviour in the context of the social behaviour of other subjects [15].

The continuum of competence development consists of four levels: specialist, specialist of the second category, specialist of the first category and specialist of the highest category [16]. Table 1 presents the requirements for the development of pedagogical partnership competence. The analysis of the literature on the issue under research revealed that the emphasis is mainly on the partnership between the teacher and the student, but there is not enough research on the interaction between the staff of the educational institution. The problem of the psychological climate in the team is also important in this context. Salamova and Mirzoeva [17] note that the psychological environment reflects the emotional state of the team. The psychological environment of the school and staff is quite stable, and the teachers' attitudes to each other, including people's moods, inner worlds and surrounding events are relative. Therefore, the psychological environment can be favourable or unfavourable, healthy or unhealthy. A study conducted by researchers [18] found that academic collaboration is not common in educational institutions. The study identified several potential consequences, including technical problems and competition.

Table 1. Continuum of pedagogical partnership competence building in Ukraine

Specialist	Category II	Category I	Advanced practice specialist
Uses various forms, means and strategies of communication with colleagues, parents in order to support students in the educational process. Identifies and takes into account the parents' requests regarding the education of their children and their own participation in the educational process.	Communicates with others, showing empathy and active listening skills. Involves parents in making decisions related to education, upbringing, and development of the child. Actively involves parents in participating in the educational process of the class and extracurricular life.	Uses the skills of positive resolution of conflict situations. Provides advisory and informational support to parents on issues of education and development of their children.	Applies teamwork skills: moderates group discussion, and joint decision-making. Cooperates with parents as members of the team of psychological and pedagogical support of a child with special educational needs.

### 3. METHODS AND MATERIALS

#### 3.1. Research design

The study was organized in three stages from September 2020 to May 2023. The first stage, involved the preparation of a package of methods for studying the psychological climate of the team and the level of teachers' pedagogic partnership competence in preschool educational institutions. The second, stage provided for conducting research, obtaining results, and analysing the obtained data. The third stage, involved the development of recommendations for psychological support of the motivation of labour activity of preschool teachers.

#### 3.2. Sample

The experimental base of the study was preschool education institutions in the cities of Kyiv, Lviv, and Rivne. As of 2019, 137,688 employees of preschool education institutions worked in Ukraine. This was taken into account to calculate the size of a representative sample (confidence probability-95%, confidence interval-5%), which included 346 subjects. Of them, 112 people (32.37%) had a teaching experience of up to 5 years, 84 people (24.28%)-up to 10 years, 82 people-up to 20 years (23.70%), 68 people (19.65%) had more than 30 years of experience. All specialists of the educational institution took part in the experimental study-teachers, music directors, physical education instructors, teacher assistants, principals, psychologists, as they are all involved in the preschool educational process. The experimental data of each teaching team were tested for normality of distribution using the one-sample Lilliefors' test for normality.

#### 3.3. Methods and instruments

The pedagogical partnership competence self-assessment questionnaire [14] was used to diagnose the level of preschool teachers' partnership competence. The questionnaire included two criteria: "interaction with students in the educational process" and "cooperation with parents of students, other participants in the educational process". Each criterion contained a set of questions that were evaluated at three levels: elementary level, sufficient level, and high level. The participant fills out the questionnaire, choosing one of the three answer options that best corresponds to his personal level of each of the listed competencies.

The improving partnership relationship with colleague's questionnaire [19] was used to determine recommendations for improving partnership interaction in the team of preschool education institution, which included six propositions. Respondents had to choose the proposition that, in their opinion, would most contribute to the improvement of partnership interaction with colleagues. Each proposition had its own answer option in the form of the percentage of respondents who chose it. Respondents could choose one or several propositions.

The methodology for assessing the level of the psychological climate in the team [10] was used to study the psychological climate in the preschool education institution. This technique enables quantifying (studying) not only the degree of favourability, but also identifying the properties that unite it (+) and those that separate the team (-). The level of the social and psychological climate in the team is assessed according to polar profiles: 3 2 1 0 -1 -2 -3. The SPSS 17.0 package was used for statistical data processing, and the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to calculate the correlation coefficient between the level of partnership competence and the level of psychological climate. All data is presented as a percentage. Google Forms was used to collect the data.

#### 3.4. Ethical criteria

This study was planned and conducted in full accordance with the norms of professional ethics and law. The respondents' participation in the study was voluntary, the principles of protecting the rights of research participants, ensuring their safety and privacy were observed in the process of data collection. The research was based on the principles of impartiality and objectivity.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the distribution of pedagogical partnership competence among preschool teachers with different pedagogical experience. Analysing the data, we can draw the following conclusions: teachers with up to 5 years of experience are more likely to rate their partnership competence at the elementary level (35.71%) compared to more experienced colleagues. The teachers with more than 30 years of experience are more inclined to rate their competence level as high (33.82%). Teachers with up to 10 years of experience and more than 30 years of experience demonstrate partnership competence mainly at sufficient and high levels compared to other groups of experience. The teachers with the least and longest experience show a greater tendency to rate their partnership competence as elementary and high, respectively.

Table 2. The results of the diagnostics of the level of preschool teachers' partnership competence

Item no.	Criteria and questions for self-assessment	Elementary level (%)	Sufficient level (%)	High level (%)
1	Criterion 1. Interaction with students in the educational process			
1.1	Do you know how to apply the mechanisms of implementing subject-subject relationship between a teacher and a student?	32.37	42.86	24.77
1.2	Do you know how to use the skills of coordination and stimulation of students' educational and cognitive activities, support their desire for self-development, reveal their abilities and cognitive capabilities?	30.64	43.90	25.46
2	Criterion 2. Cooperation with parents of students, other participants in the educational process			
2.1	Are you able to determine and take into account the requests and expectations of parents regarding the education of their children, participation in the educational process?	33.24	45.40	21.36
2.2	Do you know how to involve parents in participating in the educational process, as well as in making decisions related to education, upbringing, and development of their children?	25.43	47.62	26.79
2.3	Are you able to organize cooperation with involved specialists based on the principles of team interaction?	17.34	41.56	41.10
2.4	Are you able to cooperate with the involved specialists when elaborating and implementing an individual development programme, an individual curriculum for persons with special educational needs (if necessary)?	19.65	39.31	41.04

Table 3. Distribution of partnership pedagogy competence levels among preschool teachers with different years of experience

Level/experience	Up to 5 years (%)	Up to 10 years (%)	Up to 20 years (%)	More than 30 years (%)
Elementary level	35.71	32.14	30.49	26.47
Sufficient level	42.86	47.62	43.90	39.71
High level	21.43	20.24	25.61	33.82

These results indicate that teaching experience can influence the level of teachers' partnership competence. Younger teachers may need more development in this area, while experienced teachers may be more confident in their skills. Figure 1 shows the percentage ratio of the level of favourable psychological climate in the team of preschool teachers. We can see that 82% of respondents consider the psychological climate in the team to be moderately favourable, 6% consider it high, 9% consider it low, and 3% consider it unfavourable.

The preschool teachers were distributed according to the levels of assessment of the psychological climate in the team by the respondents. It helped further determine the dependence between the level of partnership competence and the psychological climate in the team as shown in Table 4. The Pearson correlation coefficient was applied to calculate the correlation coefficient between the partnership competence level and the psychological climate level as shown in Table 5. The Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) is 0.408 (approx.). This value ranges from -1 to 1.

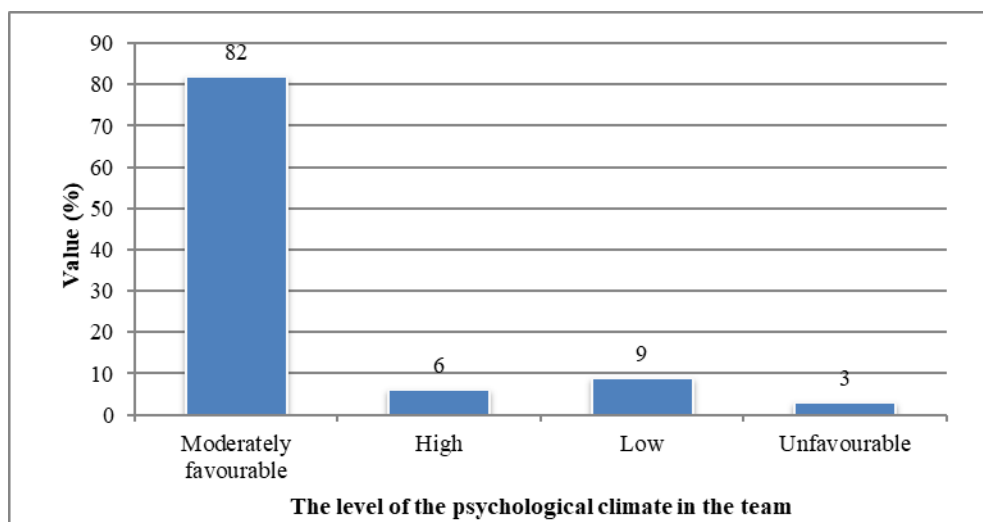


Figure 1. The results for the methodology for assessing the level of the psychological climate in the team [10]

Table 4. Distribution of preschool teachers by levels of assessment of the psychological climate in the team

Level	Moderately favourable	High	Low	Unfavourable
Elementary level	100	2	5	3
Sufficient level	123	12	10	4
High level	61	7	16	3

Table 5. The pearson correlation coefficient between the level of partnership competence and the level of psychological climate

Indicator	Value
Mean value of partnership level	30.35
Mean value of the psychological climate level	1.85
The sum of products of deviations	637.001
Covariance	154.665
Standard deviation of partnership level	27.64
Standard deviation of the psychological climate level	0.96
Pearson's correlation coefficient	0.408

The value of 0.408 shows a positive correlation between the partnership competence level and the psychological climate level in the team of preschool teachers. This means that when the partnership competence level increases, the psychological climate level also increases. The relationship is moderate because the value of the correlation coefficient is far from 0. A value closer to 1 indicates a stronger positive correlation, but 0.408 is considered a moderate correlation. However, correlation does not mean causation. In this case, this does not mean that an increased competence level will automatically improve the psychological climate, although there is a positive correlation between the partnership competence level and the psychological climate level. Other factors and context can also influence the psychological climate in the team of preschool teachers.

A questionnaire based on [19] was used to provide recommendations for strengthening cooperation in the preschool education sector. To the question that referred to partnership interaction with colleagues in the pedagogical team of a preschool education institution, 56.4% of the surveyed teachers answered that the principles of partnership interaction are fully implemented in the cooperation of the pedagogical team of their institutions. At the same time, they noted that “there is a positive microclimate in the team”, “I do not experience difficulties in cooperation with colleagues”, “there can be different working moments, but I always try to adhere to the partnership principles”, “there are no problems in communicating with colleagues”. A total of 43.6% of teachers noted that they try to establish partnership relations with colleagues, but they do not always succeed. They indicated “different outlook”, “choice of different methods of education”, “different cultural level”, “reluctance of colleagues to compromise”, “misunderstanding” among the difficulties. Survey participants were asked to provide their own suggestions for improving partnership interaction with colleagues. The generalized results are presented in Table 6 for convenience.

Table 6. Suggestions for improving partnership interaction with colleagues

Item no.	Suggestions	Respondents (%)
1.	Participation in joint work projects	23.1
2.	Joint entertainment and attendance at cultural events	19.2
3.	Attending trainings	19.2
4.	Learn to find a compromise in solving school problems	15.4
5.	Cooperation on the basis of respect for the individual, mutual assistance and mutual understanding	15.4
6.	Perceive colleagues as partners, not competitors	11.5

In general, the suggestions from the Table 6 indicate the importance of cooperation, mutual assistance and mutual understanding between teachers to create a favourable psychological climate in the team. These approaches can improve the interaction and collaboration of colleagues, which will contribute to effective learning and development of students. The results of the diagnostics of the level of partnership competence among preschool teachers showed that in general, 43.17% of teachers have a sufficient level of this competence. 31.80% have an elementary level, and 25.03% of teachers have a high level of partnership competence.

Handelzalts [20] emphasizes the need for regular communication and interaction with members of the communities of practitioners for collaboration and effective learning. Creating positive relationships with team members and building strong trust between them is important. If the level of trust is sufficient, members will feel safe and it will help them to freely discuss any problems they have in various aspects of their work, from their teaching methodologies to classroom management. Therefore, we determined the psychological climate level in the team, which is generally characterized as moderately favourable (82%). The study revealed a positive moderate correlation between the partnership competence level and the psychological climate level in the team of preschool teachers.

The obtained results are similar to the findings [21], where showed a linear relationship between teachers' commitment to innovation and the socio-psychological climate in the team: the better the level, the greater the teachers' commitment to innovation and stimulation to the successful implementation of innovations in the educational process. Bayrakcı *et al.* [22] determined that there is a high level of relationship between the perception of teachers' psychological climate and their performance. Besides, it was determined that the perceived psychological climate helps to increase the effectiveness of the teacher's work. Aminu and El-Jajah [23] also found a statistically significant positive correlation between the psychological climate in the school and the effectiveness of the teachers' work.

Savas and Toprak [24] evaluated the mediating effect of psychological climate on the relationship between leadership styles and teacher commitment. They found that psychological climate is a partial mediator of this relationship. In other words, principals' leadership abilities affect organizational commitment both directly and through psychological climate. The findings in [25] are important in the context of our study. They note that a favourable climate in a preschool education institution is positively correlated with predicted organizational support, psychological empowerment.

Bolam *et al.* [26] indicate that teachers who had a good working relationship with their colleagues helped their colleagues, share problems in the classroom with them, trust their colleagues, and they could get help from them. As a result of the study, it was found that a large number of teachers feel safe being part of communities of practitioners, they participate in various discussions with their colleagues and can communicate with them about the difficulties they have in their work. Akinyemi *et al.* [27] recommend that teachers spend enough time in meetings, perceive themselves as colleagues, interact as a team and build strong bonds to have good relationships and high trust. However, Katz and Earl [28] argue that collaborative cooperation is not enough to change the status quo in communities of practitioners.

Therefore, a positive psychological climate, characterized by mutual understanding, support and openness, contributes to the creation of a favourable environment for partnership interaction. When teachers feel comfortable and supported in the team, they are more inclined to work together, share experiences and provide mutual support. The study confirmed the existence of a moderate positive relationship between the partnership competence level and the psychological climate level in the team of preschool teachers, which additionally emphasizes the novelty of the obtained results.

#### - Research limitations and recommendations

The main limiting factor of the study is the fact that the diagnostics didn't involve preschool teachers from all over Ukraine. Another limitation is that the experiment was conducted over a short period of time. For further development of the raised issue, we recommend developing a diagnostic methodology for identifying the level of teachers' partnership competence, considering the specifics of partnership interaction in preschool education institutions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The issue of building preschool teachers' partnership competence is relevant in the modern educational context. The introduction of the principles of partnership interaction in the pedagogical process contributes to the improvement of the quality of education and upbringing, the formation of a positive psychological climate in the team, and enhances teachers' motivation for professional growth. The study of partnership competence contributes to the understanding of factors affecting effective cooperation between teachers, contributes to the development of recommendations and programmes aimed at the development of teachers' partnership skills, which in turn will contribute to the improvement of professional activity and the quality of the educational process.

The psychological climate in the teaching staff and the level of partnership between teachers mutually influence each other. A positive psychological climate, characterized by mutual understanding, support and openness, stimulates partnership interaction, promoting joint work, trust and openness between teachers. In turn, strong partnership interaction can contribute to improving the psychological climate in the team through joint support, emotional support, and open communication. The obtained conclusions can be applied to the development of training programmes for preschool teachers and psychologists in order to form a positive psychological climate in the team. Promising directions for further research may be the study of the relationship between the professional development of teachers and their competence in partnership interaction, as well as the study of the impact of distance learning on the partnership interaction between teachers.

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**Alla Goncharenko**     is a Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor, Senior Research Fellow, Department of Preschool and Primary Education, Institute of In-Service Education, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University. She obtained the scientific degree of Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences in 2003, majoring in "Preschool Pedagogy". Participated in the international educational project "Reflection: the values of German and Ukrainian preschool education in a mutual comparison" (Organizers: NGO "KSF Vita e.V" in Dortmund, Germany and the Association of School Directors of the city of Lviv with the support of the program "Strengthening interaction with the civil society of Eastern countries partnerships" of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany). Extensively researched and published many manuals, articles in the fields of preschool education and adult education. Her professional interests also include pedagogical innovations, methodological issues of education and development of preschool children, inclusive education, and the readiness of teachers to work with children with special needs. She can be contacted at email: [goncharenkoa@kubg.edu.ua](mailto:goncharenkoa@kubg.edu.ua).








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**Olena Ivanenko**    is a Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor of the Department of Musicology and Music Education, Faculty of Musical Art and Choreography, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Teaches at the Department of Humanities as an Associate Professor. In 2014, she defended her thesis for the "candidate of pedagogical sciences" degree, majoring in "Theory and Methodology of Music Education". In 2022, the academic title "docent" was awarded. She is a participant in scientific conferences and seminars, the author of numerous scientific publications on the problems of art education in international and leading professional publications of Ukraine. She is the co-author of the educational program and methodical recommendations for children aged 2-7 "Dytyna". The author of seminars on the problems of musical education and creative development of preschool and school-age children for teachers of institutions of specialized art education and extracurricular education in the field of culture. She can be contacted at email: ivanen.ko.i@gmail.com.



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