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Exploring Teachers' Awareness of the Implementation the Teamwork towards Development Communicative Competencies in the Preschool Groups

Teodora VALOVA

Medical University, Pleven, BULGARIA

E-Mail: valova.teodora@gmail.com

Abstract

The aim of this study is to research teachers' awareness of the benefits of using the team work towards development communicative competencies in the preschool groups. A pedagogical qualitative research was conducted through a questionnaire, according some variables such as gender, age, composition of the team, frequency of using teamwork, the use of teamwork in the frame of school schedule, the frequency of working in a team, developing teacher's competencies for teamwork. The target population of the study was composed of 410 teachers from 12 different regions in Bulgaria attending into face-to-face training and seminars at national level in 2014-2016 academic years. The next methods of research are being used: 1) A theoretical analysis of pedagogical, methodological and psychological analysis of the literature on the studied problem. 2) Sociological Methods – Survey research of collecting information about teachers' awareness. 3) Mathematical-statistic methods. 4) Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the results obtained from research, in relation to the teachers' awareness of the implementation the teamwork towards development communicative competencies. In order to collect data a non-standardized anonymous survey were applied to the teachers. A seven-point scale of agreement is being used including a choice from 'agree strongly' to 'disagree strongly'. In order to analyze the collected data, descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage), IBM SPSS 19.0 software were used. According to the findings of teachers' attitude the research found that almost half of the respondents have no experience in using the teamwork. Two-third of respondents does not apply team interaction in the development of communicative skills of 5- to 6-year-old preschoolers. Various general and specialised literary sources on the topic are being studied and analysed. Researching the literature it is understood that there has been very limited interest in researches on the attitudes of teachers' awareness towards development communicative competencies in the preschool groups in the context of teamwork. Therefore, this kind of studies is important in order to understand the thoughts and practices of teachers' community on interaction in the teamwork.

Keywords: Teamwork, Teachers' Awareness, Communicative Competencies, Preschoolers



Introduction

Competence can be defined as ‘a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes and desire which lead to effective, embodied human action in the world in a particular domain’ (Hoskins, Deakin, 2010). The term ‘competence’ is being used for the first time in the professional context in the 1970s to refer to what employees need beyond qualifications to act effectively in a range of work situations (Legendre, 2008).

The definition of competence given in the context of European Reference Framework of key competences for Lifelong learning determines *key competences as knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help learners find personal fulfilment and, later in life, find work and take part in society*. The document describes that key competences emphasise not only knowledge but also skills and attitudes in relation to contexts intended as preparation for lifelong learning (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning).

According to the *Definition and selection of key competencies* given by Thematic Working Group 'Assessment of Key Competences', ‘the assessment of key competences or similar learning outcomes that emphasise not only knowledge but also skills and attitudes in relation to contexts intended as preparation for lifelong learning’. In this point of view the competence is the ability to do something well or effectively but ‘more than just knowledge and skills’ (Education and Training 2020 Work programme, 2012: 4).

In order to better indicate the focus of the literature review, a working definition of competence is necessary. For the purposes of this study we accept the thesis of A. Gilleran and C. Kearney that “being competent therefore means being able to effectively apply a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to successfully react to a situation or solve a problem in the real world” (Gilleran, Kearney, 2014: 5)

Conforming to the TALIS study, teachers’ co-operation implies teachers working together in groups or teams to improve educational processes and outcomes, but such professional collaboration¹ is still relatively rare (OECD, 2009).

Observing the communicative competence is a competence placed number one on the list of key competencies and a result from the acquisition of the mother tongue. We may discuss as an ability to interact, relate, explain and describe the world around us because it underlies all other learning and knowledge acquisition. In addition to the way this competence heightened its level is the interaction between preschoolers and adults.

Based on exploring the existing literature, one can conclude that there has been very limited interest in researches on the attitudes of teachers’ awareness towards development communicative competencies in the preschool groups in the context of teamwork. Therefore, this kind of study is important in order to understand the thoughts and practices of teachers’ community on interaction in the teamwork.

The objective of the study is to identify teachers’ awareness of the benefits of using the team work towards development communicative competencies in the preschool groups.

The object of this study are teachers from 12 different regions in Bulgaria attending into ‘face to face’ learning events in 2014-2016 academic years.



Materials and Methods

The present report shows the results of a survey concerning teachers from 12 different regions in Bulgaria.

The study was carried out using a questionnaire created according to the guidelines from scientific literature (Gillera et al, 2012), and administered by a face-to-face interview. The questionnaire contained a total of 10 items, including multiple-choice questions. The survey is been conducted in the period from October 2014 to December 2016 and in it participated totally 410 teachers.

Data was collected in twelve separate days and, thanks to the availability of Human Resource development center (HRDC) – the coordinating body in Bulgaria of the Erasmus+ Programme, it has been possible to monitor the teachers during the learning events.

The data analysis imposes reconsideration of the teachers' identification and interest of using teamwork towards development communicative competencies in the preschool groups. The results give a short overall analysis of the findings on the inherent interest and encouraging pedagogues to use the interaction of a team work whereby to develop engaging and motivating environment towards development communicative competencies of 5- to 6-year-old preschoolers.

In this study, we focus on subgroups of factors described in the above-mentioned study which are being divided into 2 main fields: (1) what is the level of pedagogical competency to apply teamwork; (2) what are the teachers' needs of professional development with the aim for better understand the different characteristics of the teams and the conditions in which they work.

Each of these main fields is described according to the same schema and focuses on the following factors:

- Institutional factors;
- The organisational climate of the institution;
- Human factors;
- Impact of the school team.

The primary teachers' profile is based on the following control factors:

- gender;
- educational-qualification degree;
- practice teaching;
- professional qualification.

After summarizing, without claims of completeness, we present the processed and analyzed results of the conducted survey. It was attended by 402 women constituting 98% and 2 men (2%) (Figure 1).

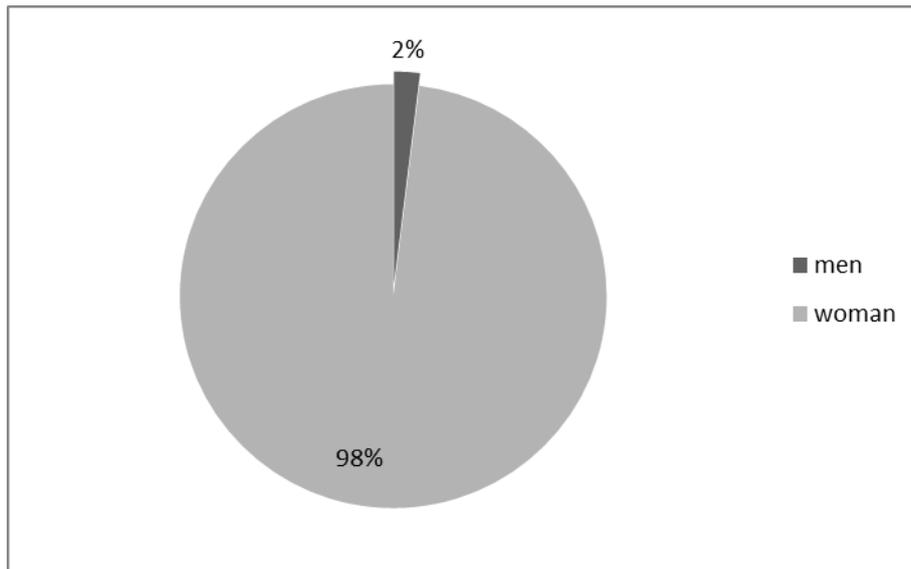


Figure 1. A distribution by gender (in %)

Results and Discussion

More than a quarter of the surveyed teachers – 106, constituting 25.9%, stated that team in the preparatory group is *determined by the pedagogical council*. A large percentage - 33.3%, which are 137 teachers stated that the team is indicated by the head teacher. 23.2% stated that the team construction is depends of *informal interaction*. A low percentage, 2.4% of all respondents indicate that the team is elected by the Head of the educational institution. 5.4% said that there are no pedagogical teams in the kindergarten, and only for 1.5% (23 surveyed teachers) *the common interests* are important for its creation. 44 of all respondents (10.7%) answer that they *cannot decide* (Figure 2).

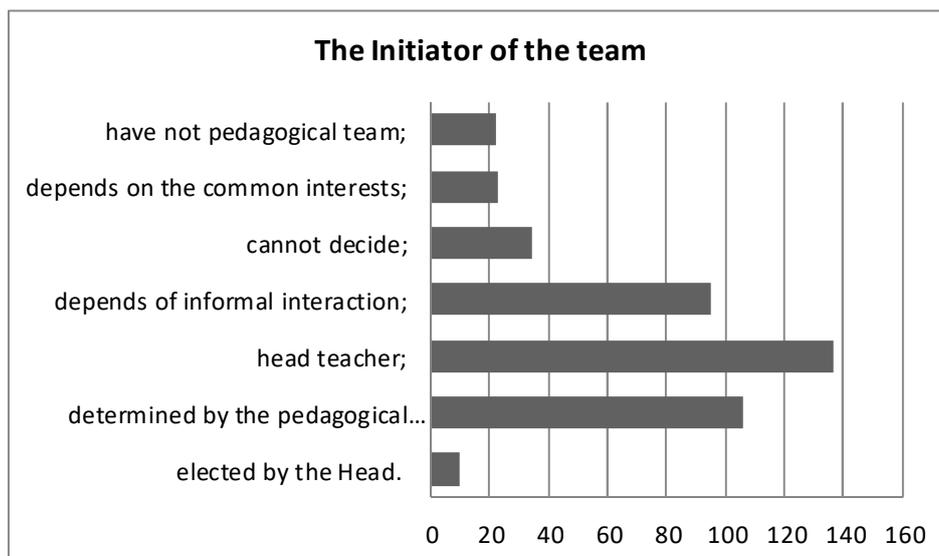


Figure 2. The initiator of the team



The data highlight that the major factors influencing the choice of the way of the team formation are: the pedagogical council and the head teacher. Informal factors are sociocultural and personally determined, as well as situationally predestined. These factors are related with the formal organization of the team, the build trust between the participants, the individual and mutual responsibility of the members, the attitude for their Information sharing attitudes, etc.

Teachers are being defined as the largest category of *teachers* working together in a team and build up the team capacity from 106 of all respondents, being 25.8%. Such a response indicates 99 individuals, constituting 24.1%, which noted that the team includes members of the *auxiliary staff*. One fifth of the surveyed teachers – 91 being 22.3 %, point as a members of a team *teachers' assistants*. Approximately such a percentage – 19.7%, stated that the other members of a team are parents. *Administrative staff* is the response given by 23 individuals (5.6%) and *Head authority* is pointed by 1.5%, which are 6 respondents (Figure 3).

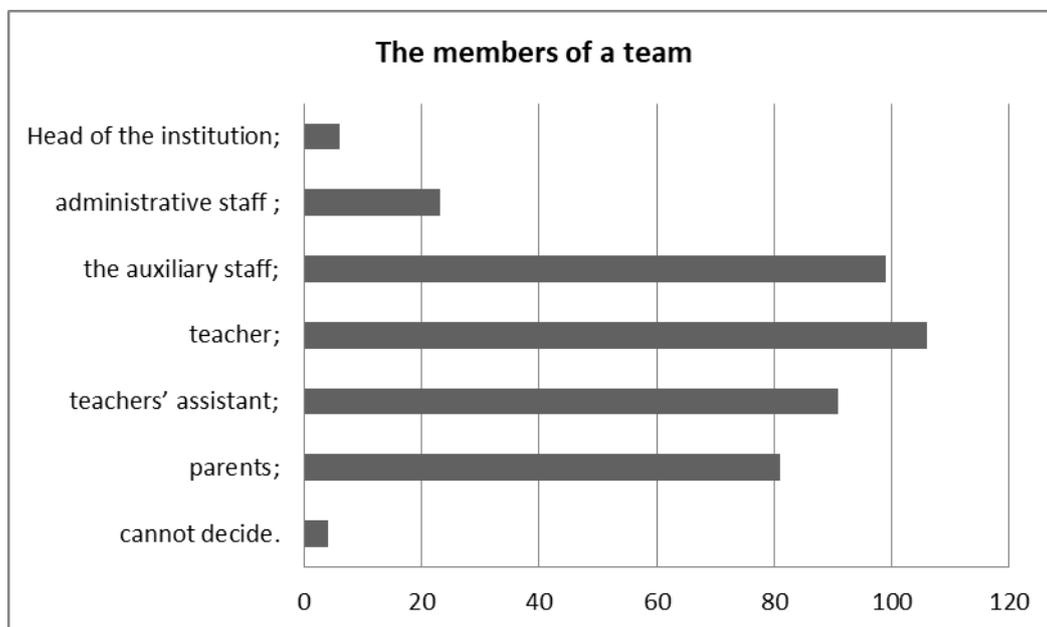


Figure 3. The members of a team

The data collected by the survey divides school team members into several categories. The teachers are being pointed as the largest category of team members. The second largest category of the participations in the school team is from the auxiliary staff.

The frequency of using the teamwork is dynamically expressed of surveyed teachers. *Monthly*, *weekly* and *several times a year* are the most common responses. *Weekly* and *several times a year* are the preferences of 18.6% for the each response (76 surveyed teachers). *Monthly* is the response with the greatest teamwork frequency given by 84 individuals (20.5%). Considerably less – only 13.4% of the respondents state a response – *almost never*. Those who *never* work in a team on a yearly basis are only 9 respondents (2.2%). *Daily* are working on a team only 5 persons (1,2%). In conclusion, teachers who *cannot decide* are about 25.4% – 104 individuals, and if these are added by those working in a



team several times a year (18.6%), the number of occasionally teachers not actively working together in groups or teams rises to 44.0% (Figure 4).

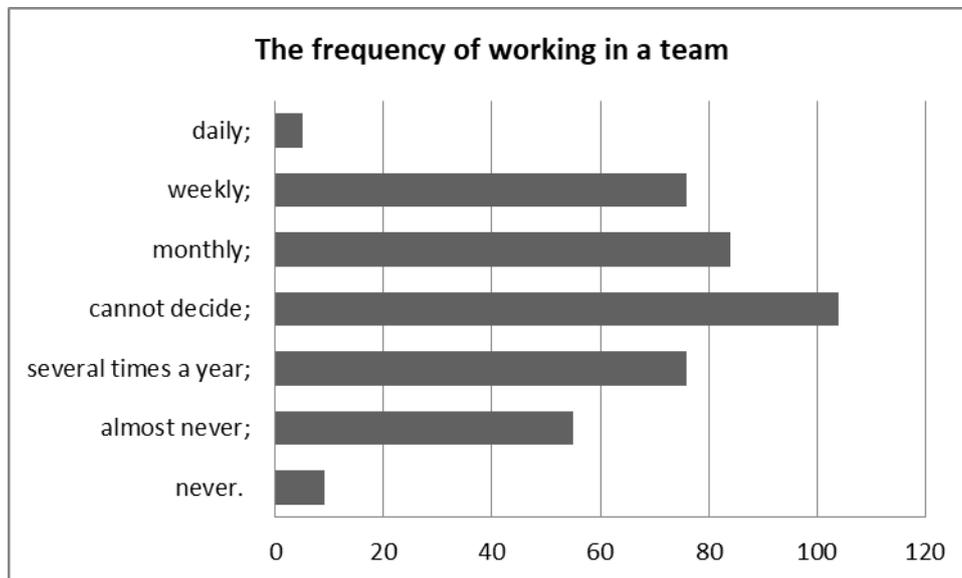


Figure 4. The frequency of working in a team

One of the common explanations of the non actively working together in groups or teams are teachers' needs of more relevant information about how to initiate the team and what the leadership structure is; what size the team is and how long it has been functioning; and last, that the nature of the team's work is a professional development. The data, however, show a much lower intensity of this kind of the organisational climate than expected (Vuorikari, 2012: 6).

Related to the official support in general, an interesting remark can be made about difficulty of involving and some uneasy relationships with authorities.

Only 15 (3.7%) of the respondents circle *agree strongly* about the statement '*The Local Authorities support teamwork in terms of institutional organization*'. *Agree moderately* and *agree slightly* are the answers respectively of 107 surveyed teachers being 26.1% and 134 individuals (32.7%). The preferences *cannot decide*, *disagree slightly*, *disagree moderately* and *Disagree Strongly* are raised to 37.5% given by 154 individuals (Table 1).



Table 1. The Local Authorities support teamwork in terms of institutional organization

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid agree strongly	15	3,7	3,7	3,7
agree moderately	107	26,1	26,1	29,8
agree slightly	134	32,7	32,7	62,5
cannot decide	44	10,7	10,7	73,2
disagree slightly	70	17,1	17,1	90,3
disagree moderately	30	7,3	7,3	97,6
disagree strongly	10	2,4	2,4	100,0
Total	410	100,0	100,0	

Lack of official support was mentioned in relation to a lack of proactive support and recognition from the Local Authority, from the Head or in terms of institutional recognition.

The study shows that the majority of teachers prefer traditional activities in the formation of communicative competence in 5- to 6-year-old preschoolers. About 78.0% indicated that answer. In second place – 90 teachers constituting 22.0% share that they apply the teamwork as a different model of the organization of pedagogical interaction (Figure 5).

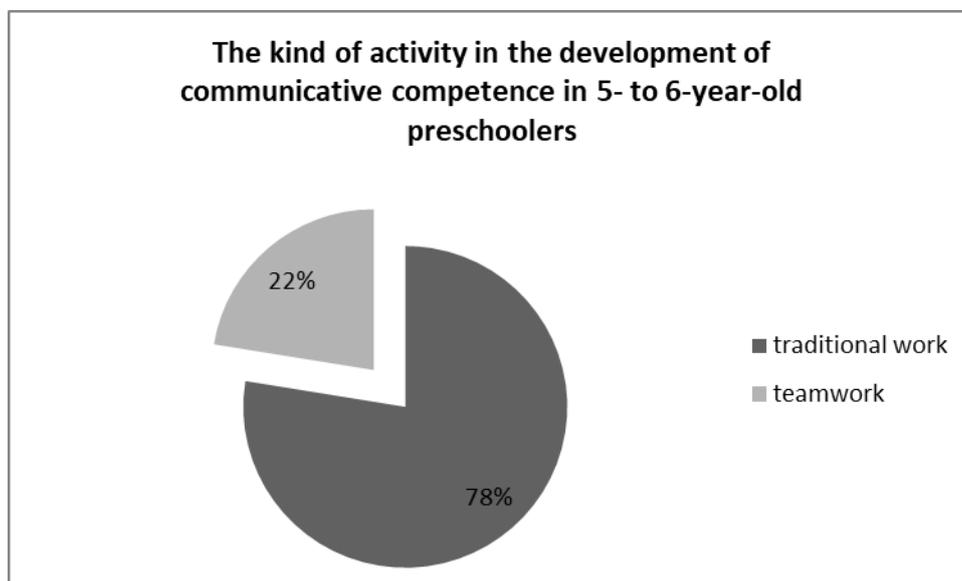


Figure 5. Comparative analysis of the preferred activity in the development of communicative competence in 5- to 6-year-old preschoolers (in %)

Many of the interviewed teachers relate information and professional development with access to different kind of qualification forms and activities. A relatively small proportion of individuals prefer *self-study literary sources (including Internet)* (a total of 92 persons, constituting 22.43%). The chance to participate in *face-to-face training (seminars, workshops)*



at national and European level was greatly appreciated by 106 of the respondents (25.85%). The *webinars* are used as a type of training of 99 surveyed teachers with a share of 24.14%. *Mentoring program* as a kind of support and guidance of the in-school methodological unit was often mentioned as a facilitating factor by 23 individuals constituting 5.6%. Other forms of professional development are elected: 81(19.75%) of the respondents state a response - *teacher-teacher observations* of good pedagogical practices. A relatively small proportion of individuals prefer to take extra consultations from tutors (a total of 4 persons, constituting 1.0%) (Figure 6).

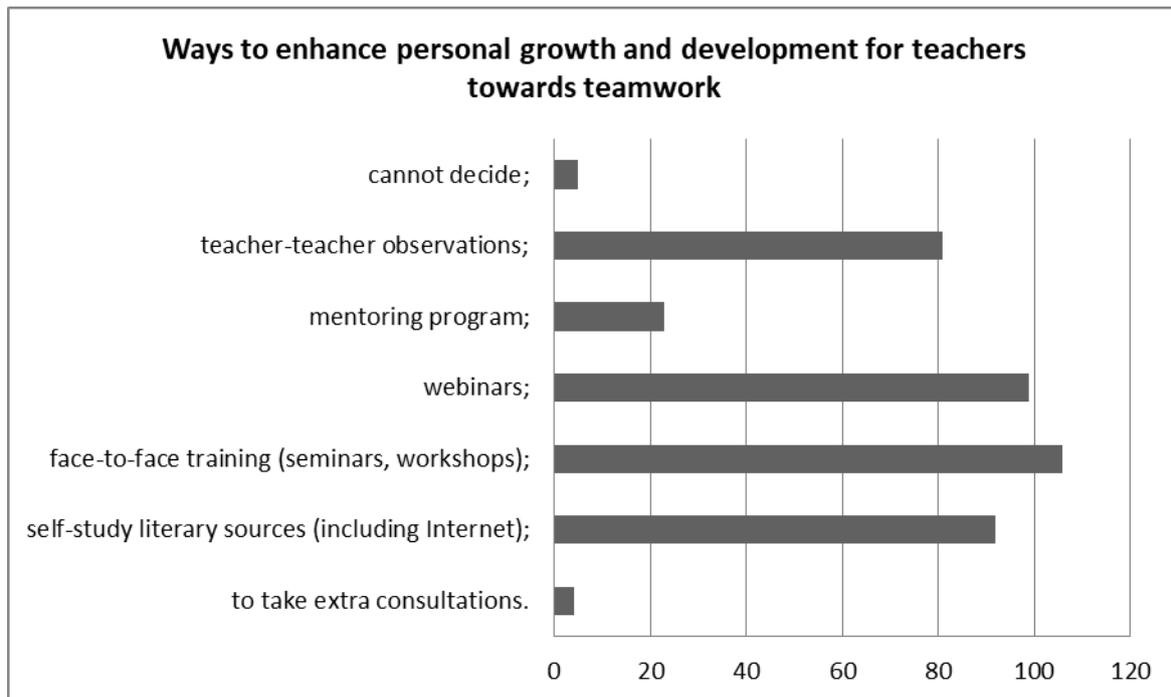


Figure 6. Ways to enhance personal growth and development for teachers towards teamwork

The preparation of proactive teachers which are working together in the school teams is an extremely important part of general pedagogical, psychological and methodological qualification. The analyzed pedagogical training opportunities have a heterogeneous structure, because they are built from different basic skills: cognitive and practical skills. The practical trainings of teachers upgrade the developed cognitive skills. The mentoring program provides teachers with a natural support system where they are able to educate on a veteran teacher's experience and knowledge, seek feedback and guidance, exchange ideas.

The study examined whether teachers feel ready to work in a team. A low percentage of all respondents stated *disagree moderately* (5.4%) and *disagree strongly* (2,2%) about their relevant professional qualifications of teamwork and readiness to co-operate after trainings. Many of the interviewed teachers stated that *agree moderately* – 123, constituting 30.0%. Almost identical results give the respondents stated *agree slightly* – 114 surveyed teachers (27.8%). Those who express opinion *cannot decide* are 76 individuals (18.53%) Strongly agree are 27 surveyed teachers (6.6%) (Table 3).



Table 3. Readiness for working in a team

Scale		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree strongly	27	6,6	6,6	6,6
	agree moderately	123	30,0	30,0	36,6
	agree slightly	114	27,8	27,8	64,4
	cannot decide	76	18,5	18,5	82,9
	disagree slightly	39	9,5	9,5	92,4
	disagree moderately	22	5,4	5,4	97,8
	disagree strongly	9	2,2	2,2	100,0
	Total	410	100,0	100,0	

The results clearly show that almost two-thirds of all respondents defining positively their skills of teamwork as a pedagogical competence. Training needs are being mentioned, in general, and, in particular, with teaching opportunities for professional development.

Many of the interviewed teachers consider that curriculum content of *Bulgarian language and literature* give opportunities for using teamwork in practice. The majority of respondents put in first place - *agree slightly*. About 41.9% indicated that answer. As a second preference – 123 teachers constituting 30.0% share that they *cannot decide*. Almost identical results give the respondents who indicate *agree strongly* (11.7%) and *agree moderately* (10.5%). As the chart shows, the last three places in teachers' preferences on the topic related to *disagree slightly disagree moderately* and *disagree strongly*. Such is the opinion of 24 persons in total with a share of 5.9%. The results are visible in Table 4.

Table 4. Opportunities for using teamwork in the situation of Bulgarian language and literature

Scale		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree strongly	48	11,7	11,7	11,7
	agree moderately	43	10,5	10,5	22,2
	agree slightly	172	41,9	41,9	64,1
	cannot decide	123	30,0	30,0	94,1
	disagree slightly	12	2,9	2,9	97,0
	disagree moderately	8	2,0	2,0	99,0
	disagree strongly	4	1,0	1,0	100,0
	Total	410	100,0	100,0	

The teamwork is being included in the annual school plan or otherwise made part of the curriculum. Teachers also appreciated that they were able to co-operate during teaching hours. The results in figure 7 show that almost identical results give the respondents about non-planned teaching situations (84 persons, 22.5%) and games and other preschool daily activities (83 persons, 22.2%) as a kind of teaching shedule. We see a similar trend in the answers in the next case: 22.4% stated that they find the situations out-of-preschool activities as more flexible and varied forms for working in a team. Those who cannot decide are 45 teachers, consisting 11.0%. A relatively small proportion of individuals (a total of 9 persons,



constituting 2.2%), consider that teamwork can be used in all range of teaching and non-teaching situations. We see a similar trend in the answers in case of planned teaching situation – only 2 persons circle this answer (Figure 7).

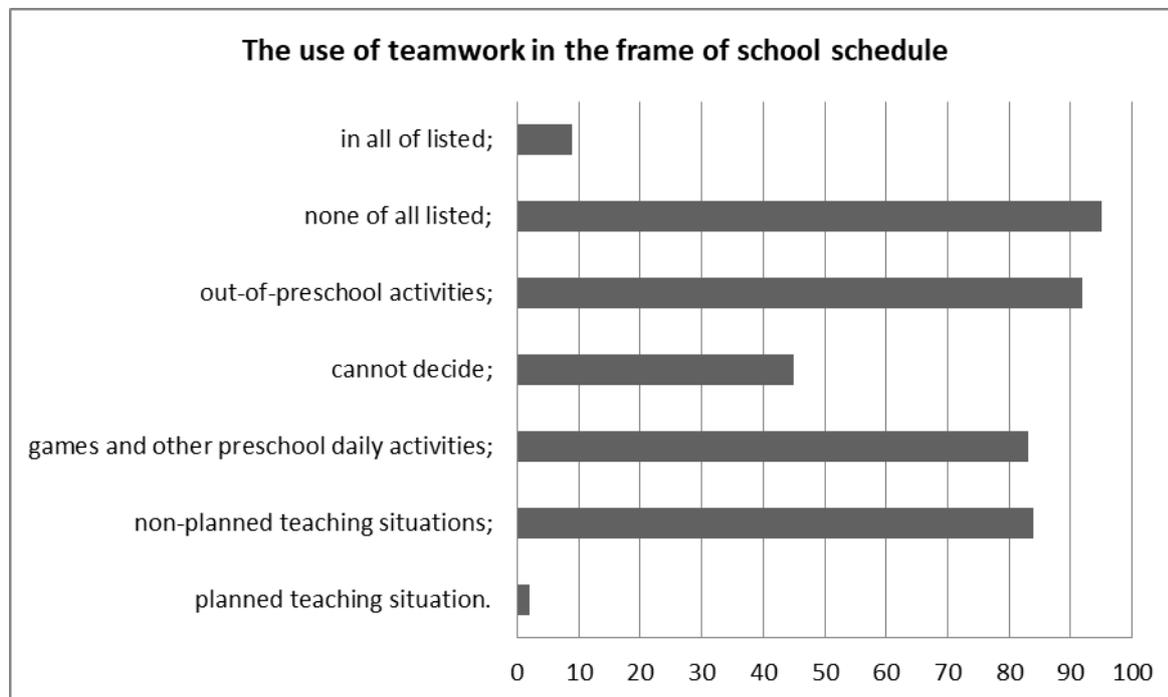


Figure 7. The use of teamwork in the frame of school schedule

Only 13.17% and 22.92% of the teachers, respectively 54 and 94 persons, express *agree moderately* and *agree slightly* with the statement: *Teamwork has a positive impact towards development communicative competencies in 5- to 6-year-old preschoolers*. 63 persons (15.36%) circle *cannot decide*. A quarter of all respondents (104 individuals, 25.36%) indicate *disagree slightly*. As a third preference for the impact of teamwork towards development communicative competencies in 5- to 6-year-old preschoolers is the statement *disagree moderately*. This answer is given by 74 surveyed teachers constituting 18,1%. In contrast to other five answers at the both ends of the scale are being presented these respondents who are *disagree strongly* and *agree strongly*, respectively – 1.2% and 3.9% (Table 5).

Table 5. The impact on the development of communication skills of teamwork

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
agree strongly	16	3,9	3,9	11,7
agree moderately	54	13,2	13,2	17,1
agree slightly	94	22,9	22,9	40,0
cannot decide	63	15,4	15,4	55,4
disagree slightly	104	25,4	25,4	80,8
disagree moderately	74	18,0	18,0	98,8
disagree strongly	5	1,2	1,2	100,0
Total	410	100,0	100,0	



Conclusion

The Results and their analysis provide grounds for the following conclusions:

1. There is insufficient awareness of the teachers about the characteristics of teamwork: Leadership structure and the initiators of teams; the timespan and size of the team, etc.
2. The results and their analysis highlight the willingness of the respondents to participate in different qualification forms related to raising the competencies for work in pedagogical teams.
3. Teachers' attitudes towards development communicative competencies in 5- to 6-year-old preschoolers in the context of teamwork are being raised as a result of the qualification.
4. The curriculum content of *Bulgarian language and literature* give opportunities for using teamwork in practice.

In conclusion, the survey of the implementation of teamwork towards development communicative competencies in the preschool groups provoked different perspectives on the studied issues. Their understanding, interpretation and development is extremely important for the theory and practice of pre-school language preparation. It is important to clarify that we consider teams as part of a pedagogical innovation process that takes place in the preschool environment. Pedagogical innovation is comprised of many interactions among different factors of varying levels and is a complex and gradual process. Finally, this research is important to show that the major role in the process of enriching teacher's teamwork experience is carried out by co-operation with colleagues of the same institution, sharing existing practices, participating in offline and online forms of continuous professional development.



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