TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Vol. 28, 2022

A new decade for social changes

www.techniumscience.com

ISSN 2668-7798

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 28, 263-272, February, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

Educational Partnership in Ensuring a Digital Diet during the Time of Home Education

Tünde Barabási

Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj Napoca
tunde.barabasi@gmail.com, tunde.barabasi@ubbcluj.ro

Gabriella Mária Stark

Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj Napoca
gabriela.stark@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract. The epidemiological situation has brought about changes in various segments of preschool education, especially during the closure of kindergartens. Early childhood teachers had to re-evaluate their educational approach and practices, including on one hand the activities they were to offer children studying online and on the other hand finding a way to cooperate with parents in order to create the necessary conditions for the activities to be carried out. The purpose of the present study is to shed light on the concepts of educational partnership and digital diet, as well as reflect on the results of a survey research which presents the indicators and areas of partnership between early childhood teachers and parents striving to ensure preschoolers' digital diet in the online educational and learning environment. Data was gathered from Hungarian early childhood teachers in Romania (N=403) and preschoolers' parents (N=323). Results show an intensified educational partnership between early childhood teachers and parents during the home education period. When it comes to the digital diet we can speak of a more intense cooperation in defining time limits and a more relaxed approach to determining the content. Results also show that parents' involvement can be increased with the help of the right strategies on the part of early childhood teachers. On the whole, online education had a positive effect on the educational cooperation, both in theory and practice, though there are some areas that need further optimization.

Keywords. educational partnership, teacher-parent cooperation, digital diet, online education, preschool education

1. Introduction and theoretical background

The theoretical introduction of the present study discusses the concepts of educational partnership, cooperation (a) and digital diet -the latter being brought into focus as a result of home education- investigating the compatibility of digital tools and the development of preschoolers (b).

(a) Emphasizing the necessity of a cooperation between educational settings is like carrying coals to Newcastle as it is well known that a partnership between the school and the family has a positive effect on students' educational outcomes, on their approach to the educational institution and the educational activity, as well as on their behaviour and social

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 28, 263-272, February, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

attitude [1]. The educational partnership is even more justified and necessary in early childhood education as "in the case of preschoolers the key to solving problems is more often in the hands of the parents compared to later stages in life. This does not entail that early childhood teachers are merely passive observers of the results of the education within the family, however it highlights the importance of the cooperation between parents and early childhood teachers [2]. During the home education period, participants in early childhood education experienced interdependence very strongly as the educational-developmental solutions made available online or as home assignments could be successfully carried out only when parents were willing to cooperate and help. The converse also holds. A helpful attitude on the parents' side proved to be insufficient without early childhood teachers' attempt to make good use of the opportunities offered by this specific educational environment, and "remotely" facilitate preschoolers' development. Thus, both early childhood teachers and parents may have experienced what Albert-László Barabási formulated as follows: "...one should always pay heed to the networks they are part of... The map of this network might reveal the possible paths to achieving goals" [3]. During home education it was the partnership between early childhood teachers and parents that facilitated achieving the educational goal of preschoolers' personality development.

(b) Adapting ICT tools for education is not a new phenomenon, however in early childhood education it was not too common. Experts raised awareness already in 2003 (IBM Conference, Brussels) to the fact that it would be essential for teachers to revive early childhood education by introducing ICT tools. Given the appropriate pedagogical digital competence, ICT tools can be used in the development of preschoolers as well. The secret lies in the proportions! The *digital diet* approach [4] addresses the issue of the right proportion. As long as this approach is implemented in the activities designed for preschoolers, it can be claimed that digital tools can serve development, nonetheless content and time limit should be determined wisely. Yoo-Young points out that experts on children's digital media consumption agree that in this context, in the case of preschoolers the most important component is digital content [5]. Provided the digital content corresponds to the age group and it serves educational and entertainment purposes, its use will not have a negative impact on personality development. The researcher also draws attention to the fact that the content should harmonize with the time factor since anything that exceeds the appropriate amount might overwhelm the child. In the light of these, the question arises how much time should be spent online. According to the Step by Step Center for Education and Professional Development (2020, in [6]) children aged between 2 and 5 should not spend more than an hour in front of a screen. This should be done under the supervision of a parent, with whom they can discuss what they had seen. It is also recommended that parents encourage the participation of children in the online activities propsed by the early childhood teachers and that such activities should not exceed 2-3 times a week. It is important to point out that during the home learning period, screen time does not consist only of the time spent with the teachers but also completing the tasks set by the teacher (or in some cases parents allow children to use the device for other purposes, thus most probably exceeding the optimal time limit prescribed by the digital diet) [6].

2. Research methodology

The current research focuses on the characteristics of the educational partnership between parents and early childhood teachers in Hungarian kindergartens in Romania, more specifically on the collaborative efforts to ensure a healthy digital diet. We hypothesized that being compelled to adapt to online education during the pandemic period has generally led to a

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 28, 263-272, February, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

closer cooperation between parents and early childhood teachers in developing the digital diet as well.

Our research sample consists partly of Hungarian early childhood teachers in Romania. A total of 423 early childhood teachers were involved in the study through convenience sampling (18.2% of the study population made up of 2324 individuals). The average age of the sample is 40.3 and nearly half (44.9%) of the individuals involved have more than 20 years of work experience. The other subsample includes parents of Hungarian preschoolers in Romania (N=303), the average age being 34.59. 60% of the parent subsample comes from urban area and 82.5% are raising one preschooler. Regarding educational attainment, nearly half of the parents (46.9%) have a university degree. Concerning the distribution of gender in the sample, the early childhood teacher subsample is made up entirely of females while in the case of parents males make up 5.94% of the subsample.

The correlation analysis was based on a questionnaire survey. Both subsamples completed a questionnaire, which apart from the demographic data, contained questions investigating the complex nature of home education, educational partnership as well as the problem of preschoolers' online education. Research data was collected between June and July 2021.

3. Educational partnership and elements of digital diet during home education

During the online education period, early childhood teachers re-evaluated the significance of cooperation with parents. On a 5-point Likert scale this scored a 3.8 average. Parents also rated the teacher-parent partnership as being more significant (3.6).

Table 1. Significance of Teacher - Parent Partnership (5-point scale)

	Own stand	Assessing the other party's stand
Early childhood teacher	3.8	3.6
Parent	3.7	3.6

Parents had a very similar opinion to teachers as their average score for the cooperation with the teachers during the online education period is 3.7. They are also aware of the fact that a well-established connection between the family and the educational institution is of crucial importance to the teacher (3.6). Results show that both parties are aware of the significance of cooperation. The question is to what degree this standpoint got implemented.

With a 4.5 average score, early childhood teachers consider that the cooperation with parents is an essential prerequisite for the efficiency of online activities. The 3.7 average relating to the rate of implementation can also be considered a high score (though the difference is statistically significant t=13.68672; p< .00001) thus teachers consider that there is a need for a more efficient cooperation and a more adequate attitude than what can be experienced at present.

Table 2. Attitude during Online Education (5-point scale)

Statement	Average
Cooperation is an essential prerequisite for online education	4.5
Teachers' overall attitude during the online education period	4.2
Parents' overall attitude during the online education period	3.7

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 28, 263-272, February, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

Felsman's empirical study yielded similar results. He found that according to more than half of the early childhood teachers, parents were rather supportive or entirely supportive during the online education period [7].

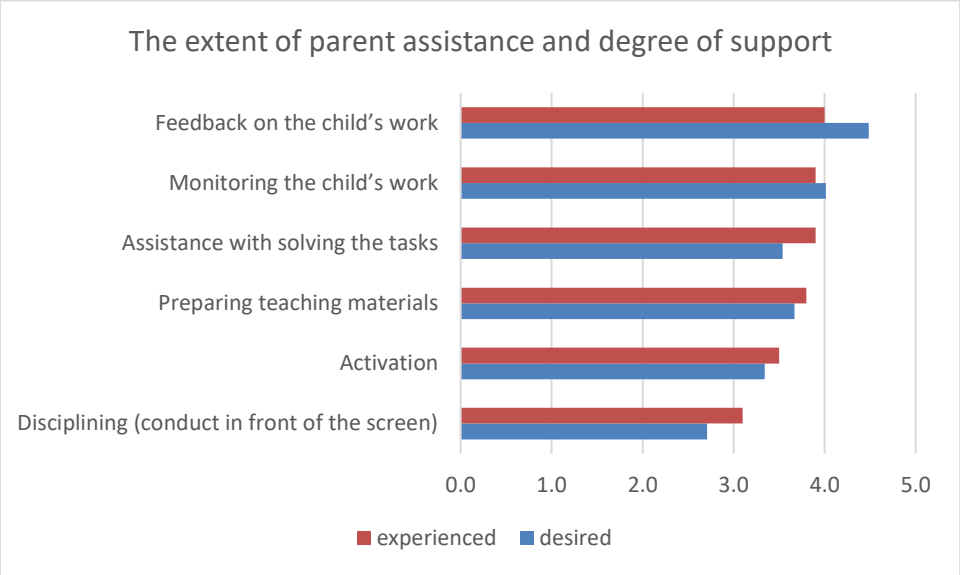

Fig.1. Aspects of parent assistance: requirement and experience (5-point scale)

On several points the teachers' wish was met with a suitable attitude on the parents side however there were some points on which teachers would have liked more cooperation (e.g. feedback on the child's work: $t= 7.05573$, $p < .00001$) and some points on which parents were more helpful than needed (e.g. solving tasks: $t= 4.24786$, $p < .05$; disciplining: $t= -4.3077$, $p < .00001$). In these cases, teachers would have welcomed more independence for the children and more room for self-regulatory processes.

In his empirical research, Villányi found that 49% of parents and teachers were satisfied with the communication between parents and the educational institution in the period under scrutiny [8]. Our results show that teachers tried to encourage parents' involvement in various ways. Most often they used indirect motivation as more than 2/3 of the teachers tried to win parents over with the help of engaging activities. Parents witnessed their child enjoying these activities thus they found it worth joining the online sessions.

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 28, 263-272, February, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

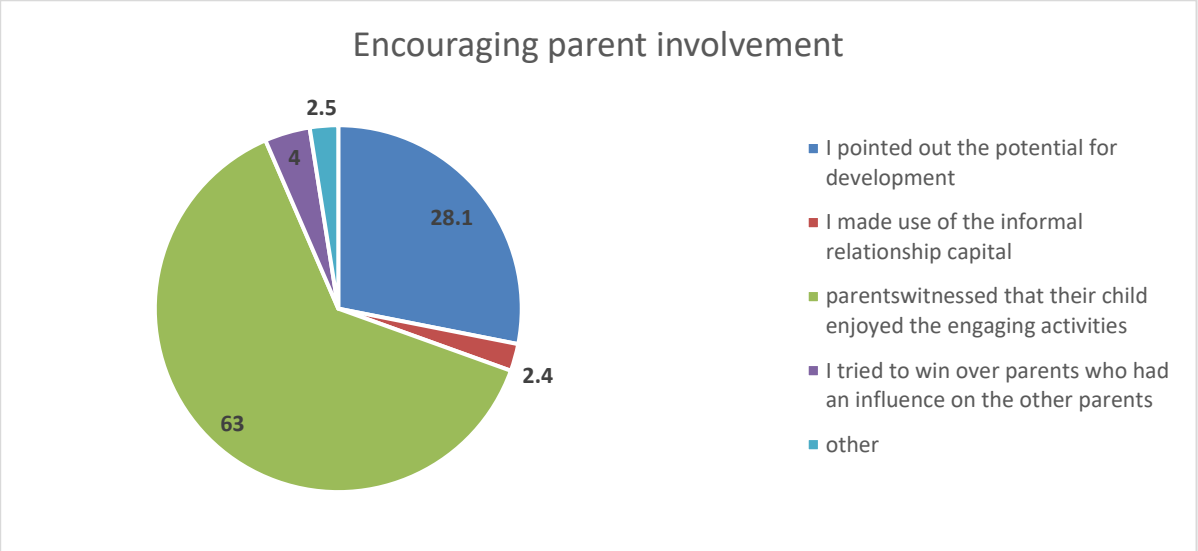

Fig.2. Encouraging parents to make use of online education (5-point scale)

Parents reported similar motivating factors. 41.9% claimed that it was the engaging activities that made them receptive to participate in the online development of their child, while 41.5% stated that it was the opportunities offered by online education that made them receptive to this. 30% reported that teachers did not motivate parents sufficiently, they took their parental awareness for granted.

Investigating the various conditions for cooperation, we found that most of the families had the necessary technical equipment (3.7). Parents' technical expertise was more modest, nonetheless on the whole, it could be deemed acceptable (3.2). The diagram below shows that the majority of teachers found it important to provide an orientation for the parents regarding the features of online education, discussing some of the important aspects of the digital diet, such as recommended screen time or dangers to be avoided (3.5). Cooperation was facilitated by the fact that parents also adopted a mostly positive attitude (3.5) however, as the average score shows, there were parents who did not cooperate efficiently. Teachers' responses show that they played a crucial role as initiators, pointing out the type of cooperation/ assistance needed in different areas (I provided orientation on the assistance needed -3.5), however parents approached teachers less often (parents asked for advice on the use of digital tools -2.6; on activities related to the child -3.0 $t=9.80188$; $p< .00001$). These results show that it is the teacher who plays a leading role in establishing a partnership.

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 28, 263-272, February, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

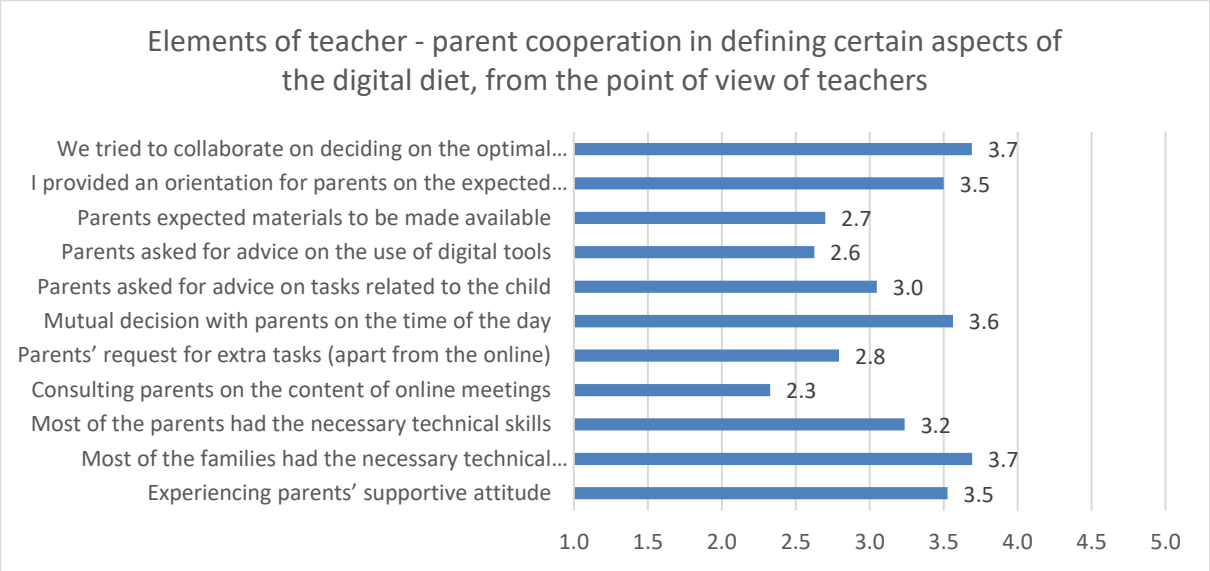

Fig.3. Aspects of the cooperation between teachers and parents (5-point scale)

Findings on the digital diet dimension of the cooperation were rather interesting. Teachers find it extremely important to clarify the two subcomponents of the digital diet (agreeing on the content and time limit -3.7), which shows that they are aware of this important aspect. Figure 3 above paints a different picture when it comes to the implementation of these ideas. The joint decision on the part of the day is significantly higher than agreeing on the content: t=5.70314, p< .00001. It seems that teachers consider that deciding the content of the meetings is part of their own professional competence and they do not feel the need to discuss this issue with the parents. On the other hand, parents eagerly seek advice (with a 3 average score) on their child's home education, which also emphasizes a closer cooperation in the period under scrutiny.

Table 3. Teachers' Attitudes in Developing the Digital Diet (Principal component analysis, Varimax, KMO=0.819; CM=70,64%)

	1. Technical	2. Advisor	3. Partner	4. Guiding
Parents' adequate technical equipment	.894	.135	.133	.083
Parents' sufficient technical expertise	.866	.126	.161	.055
Parents seeking advice on the use of digital tools	.118	.808	.277	.224
Parents seeking advice on activities	.248	.760	.240	.224
Parents' supportive attitude to online meetings	.494	.516	.132	.083
Parents' expectations of teaching materials	-.379	.471	.406	.192

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 28, 263-272, February, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

Parents' request for extra activities	.109	.271	.758	.102
Mutual agreement on content	.164	.321	.715	.076
Mutual agreement on time	.254	-.003	.592	.479
Orientation for parents on expected assistance	.054	.208	.103	.852
Pointing out online time limits and dangers	.027	.194	.142	.830

Results of factor analysis show that teachers adopt four types of attitudes when it comes to the implementation of online education and the digital diet. The *technical* group places importance on parents' technical equipment and technical expertise, which are determining factors of home education implementation. The second group, that of *advisors*, finds it important to provide useful advice to parents on the use of digital tools and activities to be carried out at home. This group experienced parents' supportive attitude in the implementation of online meetings. Teachers in the *partner* group made mutual decisions with the parents on the time limits and content of online meetings. This group experienced parents'request for extra activities. According to the teachers, it was this attitude that was most beneficial to developing the digital diet in cooperation with the parents. The *guiding* group did not give particular importance to partnership. They focused on giving guidance on issues such as requested assistance or the dangers of spending time online.

Table 4. Actors of Decisions Related to Online Education (%)

Decisions related to online meetings, from the parents' perspective	Frequency
Parents and teachers decided together	37%
The teacher made the decision taking into account parents' observations	40%
Techers decided on their own	23%

When it came to decision making during the home education period, about one third of the parents experienced a genuine cooperation. 40% could give voice to their opinions, which were taken into account by the teacher. One fourth of the parents however did not experience any openness to cooperation on the teacher's side.

Screen time is one of the pillars of digital diet. Online activities during home education formed an integral part of this.

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 28, 263-272, February, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

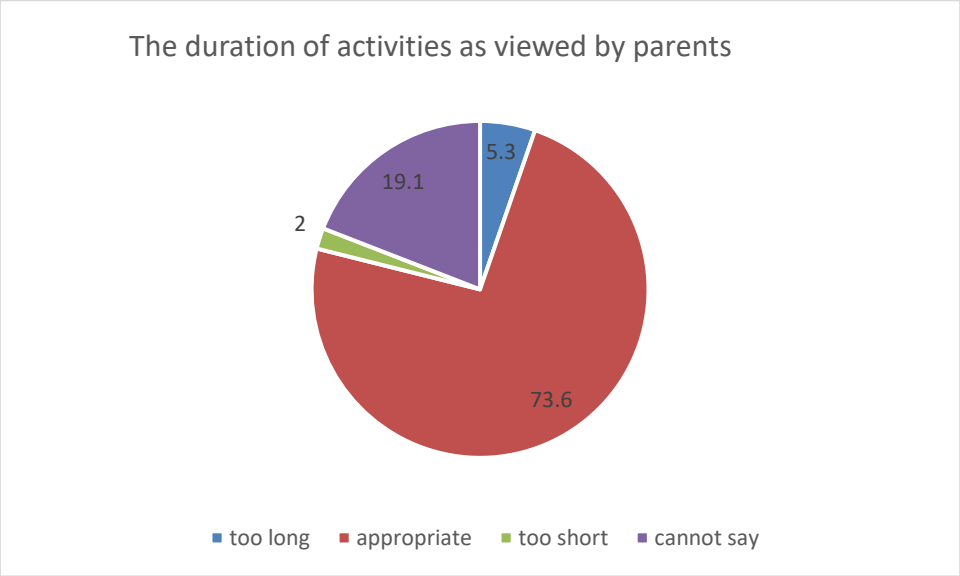

Fig.4. Parents' opinion on the duration of online activities (%)

One third of the parents considered that the duration of activities was appropriate for the children. A very similar percentage showed satisfaction with the amount of tasks sent by the teachers. Fig 4 also shows that some parents did not know how to answer this question. These parents cannot have acted as partners in working out this aspect of the digital diet.
Factor analysis carried out on the answers provided to question related to benefiting from the experiences gained during the online activities yielded several groups of teachers focusing on: the efficiency of didactic activities, the curriculum, digital knowledge, or on partnership.

Table 5. Benefiting from Online Experiences (Teachers)
(Principal component analysis, Varimax, KMO=0.913; CM=82.53%)

Benefiting from Online Experiences	**Factors**			
	1.Efficiency of didactic activities	2. Curriculum	3. Partner	4. Digital
Cooperation between colleagues	.676	.162	.447	.228
Feedback	.749	.284	.272	.205
Systemisation, keeping record of children's work	.847	.264	.234	.146
Planning, keeping record of activities	574	.575	.305	.135
Integrated approach	.254	.778	.257	.317

Technium Social Sciences Journal
Vol. 28, 263-272, February, 2022
ISSN: 2668-7798
www.techniumscience.com

Competency-based approach	.299	.821	.230	.253
Consultation with parents in matters of education	.419	.317	.747	.174
The nature of communication with parents	.335	.256	.821	.220
New digital skills	.103	.401	.112	.787
Digital contents	.253	.121	.214	.848

Our investigation focused on teachers adopting a parent-as-partner approach. Teachers acted as partners (see table 3) in providing content and time frames. When it comes to the question of benefiting from online experiences those teachers can be considered partners who consider that the features of efficient partnership could be adapted and made use of in offline educational activities: on the one hand the collective reflection on matters of education experienced during this period gave rise to a need to further build on this, on the other hand it is also worth pursuing the communication with parents, which was taken to a new level during the online education period.

Results also outline parents' view on the issue of cooperation. About one third (64%) of the subsample pointed out that teachers provided ideas for the child's development, which is one of the most important aspects of cooperation.

4. Conclusions

Results show an intensified educational partnership between early childhood teachers and parents during the home education period. We have also found that when it comes to digital diet we can speak of a more intense cooperation in defining time limits and a more relaxed approach to determining the content. Results show that parents' involvement can be increased with the help of the right strategies. On the whole, online education had a positive effect on the collaborative approach, both in theory and practice, though there are some areas that need further optimization in terms of mutual assistance. In case educational institution are closed again in the future, discussing online contents will also be important (especially along the lines of contents which are used outside the classroom), as well as raising awareness to the fact that online activities form an incremental part of screen time. This needs to be taken into consideration when designing further activities for the children in order to ensure a healthy digital diet.

References

[1] SAPUNGAN, M. G. – SAPUNGAN, M. R. (2014): "Parental Involvement in Child's Education: Importance, Barriers and Benefits". In *Asian Journal of Management Sciences & Education,* Vol. 3(2) April 2014. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283539737_Parental_Involvement_in_Child%27s_Education_Importance_Barriers_and_Benefits

[2] KASIK L. (szerk.) (2017): *Társasproblémákésmegoldásuk 3–7 évesekkörében*[*Social Problems and Solutions Among 3-7 Years Old*].MOZAIK Kiadó, Szeged, URL: http://real.mtak.hu/84741/1/O%CC%81voda%CC%81sok_sege%CC%81danyag_KO%CC%88TET_Kasik%20et%20al..pdf

[3] BARABÁSI A-L. (2018): A képlet. A sikeregyetemestörvényei. [The Formula. Universal Laws of Success]. LibriKönyvkiadóKft, Budapest.
[4] KENNEDY, J., HUPERT, N. (2021): *"*Using Digital Media to Support Early Learning". URL: https://www.edutopia.org/article/using-digital-media-support-early-learning
[5] YOO-YOUNG, K. (2020): *"*Your Child's Digital Diet – Three Key Points*",* *https*://www.parentune.com/parent-blog/your-childs-digital-diet-three-key-points/4528
[6] BARABÁSI T. (2021): "The Situation of Online Preschool "Learning" from Early Childhood Teachers' Perspective." *ActaDidacticaNapocensia*, 14(2), 216-230. URL: http://padi.psiedu.ubbcluj.ro/adn/article_14_2_16.pdf
[7] FELSMANN J. (2020):Óvodapedagógusok tapasztalatai a járványhelyzetben megvalósított „táv-óvodáról" [Early Childhood Teachers' Experiences with "Distance-Kindergarten" During the Epidemiological Situation]. OTDK dolgozat [NSSAC paper]. ELTE TÓK, Budapest.
[8] VILLÁNYI Gy. (2021): A Covid19 járvány okozta életmódbeli változások hatásai az óvodahasználókra – Óvodapedagógusok és szülők tapasztalatainak áttekintése ["The Effects of Lifestyle Changes Brought About by the COVID-19 Pandemic - Overview of Early Childhood Teachers' and Parents' Experiences"]. *Gyermeknevelés Tudományos Folyóirat* 9. évf., 2. szám 378–398. URL: http://ojs.elte.hu/gyermekneveles/article/view/2574/2303